

SE03EP10

The City is Your Classroom

Dr. Alicia Gaines

H: Welcome to Noles Abroad, a podcast by Florida State University International Programs! I'm Hannah

Z: And I'm Zoe! And we are your hosts. On this podcast we'll talk about study abroad from the perspective of the students, faculty, staff, and alumni who make it an experience worth sharing. We'll also bring you travel tips and fun facts from around the globe.

Z: On today's episode, we talk to Dr. Alisha Gaines, Associate Professor of English at FSU. Dr. Gaines has taught Intro to Shakespeare and London and the African Diaspora in London, England. We hear about how Dr. Gaines learns alongside her students while abroad, a bit about Black British history, and some great advice for students and faculty considering going abroad. Let's jump into our conversation now

Z: Hi Dr. Gaines how are you doing today?

G(Gaines): I'm fine, how are you Zoë?

Z: Doing well! First off can you just introduce yourself to our listeners?

G: Yes, my name is Dr. Alicia Gaines I am the Associate Professor of English at Florida State University.

H: Can you tell us about your experience with study abroad and what made you want to teach abroad?

G: Sure, so I wanted to teach study abroad because as an undergraduate myself, I studied abroad and it completely changed my life. And I wouldn't have had kind of access the experience without some really good mentors and professors. And also I wanted to make sure that at least students of color here at FSU knew that they could take classes with professors of color, even abroad. So, it was really important for me to bring that experience to our students.

Z: Wonderful and can you talk about the classes that you've taught abroad in London?

G: Sure, so I taught abroad in London twice. Both in the summer of 2017 and the summer of 2019. The first time I taught was Introduction to Shakespeare, which was fantastic, and then most recently I taught London and the African Diaspora.

H: And can you talk about what experiences and resources are available in London to help your students engage in the subject matter of the classes you teach?

G: Of course. Yes. So that's the thing about studying abroad, London is the resource. So you know Tallahassee, it's lovely, it got nothing on London. So when the whole city can be your classroom, as long as you have a sense of like adventure and want to get out and learn then you have access to everything. So, for learning the African diaspora for instance, even though we have a beautiful city center I never taught in the study center. It was always, we were always out about on field trips or doing walking tours. For instance, we did a Black Soho walking tour and where the study center is located in London is actually, historically kind of a black immigrant neighborhood. Now that's kind of all been erased but with this

walking tour we got to see all of that history and the history right around the city center that also fed what we were reading in the course as well. So, when you have the opportunity to visit the Museum of the Docklands or slavery exhibits and things like that that take you completely out of the classroom it's just such a rich and vibrant experience.

H: That also enriches, I'm sure, for the student's experiences living in those places. To really, truly understand what those locations are. Like what they have historically been and what they are now, to really understand that transition and just the history of where they are living and learning and just really feel like they are part of the city and can understand that history, so that's really cool.

G: Right.

Z: Speaking of excursions, have you had any other like I guess just I'm curious as to other excursions or like I know we had spoken before and you talked about the going to the museum about the Windrush generation, can you talk a little bit about that?

G: Oh yeah! So, when I taught London and the African Diaspora it was the sort of anniversary of the Windrush generation, which is that first wave of immigrants from the Caribbean coming into London. And so there was this wonderful exhibit at the Black Cultural Archives in Brixton so we were able to you know get on the train go down to Brixton. We toured the Black Cultural Archives, we saw the Windrush exhibit and then we went to the market right outside there and had lunch and we like shopped a little bit. I mean it was all about you know Black Britain and Black London and just helped us understand even more so the novel that we were reading, which was the Lonely Londoners. So, it was just a different way to think about that novel, think about that text, think about Black history in London which was so formative to London even though we don't really talk about it as much as we should.

Z: Yeah absolutely I think that's a really good point that we should be talking about it more and I think that that's cool that you're able to go on that walking tour and learn more about the history of London because I don't think our students realize the history there surrounding the study center and just yah, I think that's cool that you're able to sort of expand our students minds in that way and take them on different things and different areas and learn about the history and everything.

G: Yeah what's cool about it is I'm expanding my mind too! Like that's the great thing about study abroad is as much quote unquote expertise I might have, there's so much I don't know and I'm learning along with students at the same time so it makes it fun for me as well. And also I can get the feedback from students of what they want to learn and what they want to experience. So for example for Introduction to Shakespeare I didn't plan to Stratford upon Avon trip, I just didn't I couldn't fit it into the schedule and I couldn't make it work, but I had a small enough class that they came to me and were like "can we do this?" And the folks at the at the city center were so great about figuring it out and they're just like, "yeah if you have the time go do it." And so we spent a whole day at Stratford upon Avon, kind of impromptu off the cuff but it was so fun.

Z: That's cool. Sometimes I think it's those little like unexpected experiences that really makes study abroad unique.

G: Absolutely, yeah.

Z: So moving on to the next question how does the coursework that you teach abroad influence your students and how do you think that that helps them and helps inform their perspective when they return to the United States?

G: Oh that's a really good question. Yeah I think particularly, with my London and the African Diaspora course, and I'm also plotting a sort of Black British Media course too, thinking about blackness more diasporically and getting outside of the United States because even the UK understanding of blackness is different than how we talk about it here. And so I can insist that blackness is not a monolith, and I can say that over and over and over again, but actually experiencing it, the different types of music, the different types of food, all of that can just sort of expand our understanding of what it means to be a black person in the diaspora, what it means to consume black cultural production, black media. It's such, it's much more dynamic and expansive than the kind of reductive ways that we think about it. And so even it informs my own teaching and even my own research, going abroad. When I came back and I was like, "whoa I want to start looking at how I do my research outside of just this US context and thinking more transnationally and thinking more about the transatlantic." So, it informs my students and informs my work as well.

H: Can you talk a little bit more about that? About how teaching in London has influenced your own work as both a researcher and a writer and a professor?

G: Yeah, absolutely. So I'm working on this new book called *Playing a Slave: Race and Performance in the Transatlantic Imaginary* and while I was in London, it might have been during the walking tour actually or maybe the Museum of Docklands I may be mixing up my field trips, but I found out that Liverpool was the largest slave port, that most slave ships were built in Liverpool and I was like, "what?" So I took my own little weekend excursion up to Liverpool to visit the that slavery museum there and it, I mean I'm going to write a whole chapter about kind of museum representations of slavery because of that excursion to Liverpool I would not have known that, that would have informed my work if I hadn't been teaching study abroad that summer.

H: That's so incredible. We hear from students all the time how much study abroad changes their lives and what they go on to do in their careers, but it's so cool to hear that from a professor. Like as a someone who went to college and went to grad school I just assumed that my professors know everything about everything and it's just so cool to hear that you are open to learning new things and that it led to this whole new subject matter that you're exploring and continuing to expand on. And that's just so cool that study abroad can be amazing for staff as well and for faculty members.

G: Oh yeah, absolutely! I mean plot twist - professors don't know everything about everything. We know we know usually know everything about –

H: Don't tell the secret!

G: - a very, very nuanced topic. Like I can tell you everything about this one thing. But yeah when you're kind of open to experiencing the city with students and are kind of motivated by their energy then it's so enriching and so wonderful and well I'll teach for International Programs as long as they'll have me.

Z: So that kind of leads into our final questions but we want to know it's sort of a two part question - the first is that what is your advice for faculty members who are considering teaching abroad? And then the second part is what is your advice for students who are considering studying abroad?

G: So for fellow faculty members considering teaching abroad, first of all teach abroad. That's number one, do it. Like it's an amazing experience. And two, reimagine what your pedagogy can look like. We kind of resist the urge to duplicate your classes that you would do in Tallahassee and be open to, just as we ask students to be open to new experiences, be open to new experiences and new ways to teach. Sometimes, there was a moment in the summer because I was having so much fun with my students, I was like, "are y'all learning anything?" And they were like, "yes, this is amazing!" I was like, "okay, I'm just making sure that we're still learning!" But yeah, it's when it's just go out into the city and go to these museums and go to these markets and have these guest lectures and concerts and plays I mean just soak up all the culture you can. And I would say that to students as well, soak up all the culture you can. We there, yes you can sit in the study center and watch Harry Potter and that's awesome but if you can just if you have the opportunity and you have you know the means, and there's so many ways in which you can do London cheaply, do it. See the show, get on that train, go see everything, experience everything and take risks and take chances. You'll only, you won't regret it. You won't regret it.

H: That is wonderful advice and I hope that students and faculty members alike take that advice because the more fun faculty we have exploring and teaching abroad, just the better informed and more perspective our students will gain. So it's a it's a wonderful community that International Programs has built abroad and that our faculty from Tallahassee are able to be a part of. It's just so great. So thank you so much Dr. Gaines for your time this morning and for talking about your research and your courses and your teaching and it's been really great speaking with you.

G: Yah thanks so much for having me Hannah and good talk to you Zoë!

Z: Thanks!

G: Thanks again.

Z: Before we disembark, we want to give you a quick travel tip: do your research! Research is a great way to learn more about your host country before you get there, and it can add context to what you learn when you're abroad. Googling little things like the weather, fashion, common phrases, and what to do is a great start, but it can also be beneficial to go deeper into your research before you go to learn about the country's history, customs, perceptions, and traditions.

H: I studied abroad in London and I did not know about many of the things Dr. Gaines discussed, like the Windrush Generation and the history of the area around the study center. Knowing about these things could have enriched my experience around the city, in museums, and during interactions with locals. We encourage you to do research on the places you'll be visiting and their histories before you leave. You might even impress your friends and professors with what you already know! And if you want to learn more about the topics Dr. Gaines mentioned, we'll leave some links in the show notes.

Z: Thank you to Dr. Gaines for talking with us today, and to each of you for listening.

H: This podcast is a production of FSU International Programs. The music for this podcast was composed by John Bartmann. Our logo was designed by Vanessa Guirey, who also does our sound engineering. Editing, transcription, and research is done by us, Hannah Meister and Zoë Crook.

Show Notes:

- <https://historicengland.org.uk/research/inclusive-heritage/the-slave-trade-and-abolition/sites-of-memory/slave-traders-and-plantation-wealth/liverpool-and-the-north-west/>
- <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-43782241#:~:text=People%20arriving%20in%20the%20UK,post%2Dwar%20UK%20labour%20shortages.>
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