



GlobalPDX Podcast

Season 2 Episode 7 Transcript

With Rachel Anderholder

Andrea Johnson

Hello, and welcome to the [GlobalPDX](#) podcast. Spring is still blooming in our beloved State even if it's a little bit delayed, and we're cognizant of the many crises that impact us all. We hope that this podcast provides content, connection, and support to Oregon's Hub of Global Changemakers.

My name is Andrea Johnson, I'm the Chair of the GlobalPDX Advisory Board, and Executive Director at Green Empowerment. In today's *Speaking Change* podcast I am joined by Rachel Anderholder. Rachel is the Executive Director of [Carpe Mundi](#). She has been involved with her organization (off and on) since its inception in 2012 and became the Executive Director in 2018. Rachel is passionate about all things education, and specifically experiential education: making learning relevant and meaningful for students, which we're going to hear about more today. Rachel has lived in, and traveled to, over 20 countries and 40 states. She holds a B.A. in Communications in Spanish from Whitworth University in Spokane Washington, and an MA in International Development and Service from Concordia University in Portland.

Rachel, welcome to today's podcast.

Rachel Anderholder

Hi! Nice to be here, thanks for having me.

Andrea

To get us started maybe you can just tell us a little bit about Carpe Mundi, the organization, what types of programs you have...?

Rachel

Yeah absolutely. So Carpe Mundi is a nonprofit organization and we work specifically with college students from the greater Portland area that come from low-income households, and the majority of our students are also first-generation college students. And as a part of our program we provide a year-long mentorship program that includes either 2 or 3 months of an experiential education study abroad program. And we



recognize that cost is a huge barrier that keeps low-income students from being able to study abroad. So our program has a scholarship program, and we also recognize that there are a lot of other things in our students' lives that make a study abroad semester challenging. And so that's why we provide this mentorship both before and after travel experience. I always tell students: I want to make sure that when you get on that plane you can be present and not be worrying as much about everything that's going on at home, and also supporting students after the program. Because I also tell students, "Sometimes coming home is even harder than leaving". And working to help them make the most of their experiences and reflect upon that when they get back. So it's not just like: this dream of one time I was in Ecuador, and it has nothing to do with my life anymore!

So yeah that's a little bit about what we do, the last thing I'll say (really quick) is that all of our students while they're studying abroad, they still earn 24 credits from Portland State University. So it is this experiential education model, they are getting to travel and learn Hands-On while they're abroad and they still earn college credit for that experience. So I like to think that it's the best of both worlds there.

Andrea

I imagine that a lot of what you just said resonates with a lot of our audience who have lived or worked abroad. And coming home can be harder, and imagining having that support at home and processing our experiences and being able to incorporate that into our lives and our futures is something that a lot of us have to do on our own. That's really exciting to hear that that's part of how you approach the program.

Rachel

Yeah, definitely. I think there's always (for me at least) when I come home and actually there's this inspiration to say like, "I want to keep eating healthy the way that I was abroad or I want to maintain active lifestyle that I got to have while I was abroad", and the farther you get away from the experience the harder and harder it gets to maintain that. So being able to actively recognize those things and try and set intentions and then have a community of support to say, "I want to try these things too, let's do them together". It's still a challenge, but I think it helps.

Andrea

Yeah, that's really cool. So when we do these podcasts we also like to learn about how our speakers kind of got involved in this work, and you know I kind of set in your intro you're very passionate about this. Maybe you could tell us some of your background and how this ended up being where you're putting your passion.



Rachel

Oh wow, yeah that's a great question. So I would have to say... it's kind of funny, I studied abroad in college. I went to Spain my senior year of college and I had been going through the motions, and I was getting ready to graduate and I didn't know what my next step was going to be. And so while I was in Spain I realized that maybe teaching is what I wanted to do. But I was a senior in college and it was too late to make any moves towards that. And so after college I was still interested in teaching but I didn't want to go get a masters in teaching and so I moved to Costa Rica for a year to teach English, and just kind of try it out and see if I liked it. And it turned out that I didn't really like it and I didn't want to be a teacher but I became really passionate about education in general and the quality of education and wanting to think not just about getting kids into school and through school, but what is that experience like for them? And how can learning be meaningful and relevant and exciting to their lives? And moving away from kind of this rote model of sitting at a desk and listening only to the teacher talk. From there I decided to get a masters (I pursued my Master's in International Development and Service as you mentioned) and as a part of my master's program I had an internship each semester that I was in grad school and while I was in Portland my first internship was with Carpe Mundi! And that was in 2012 (the fall of 2012). And so it's been almost 10 years that I've been working with Carpe Mundi in some way, shape, or form (as a volunteer as an intern and now as the Executive Director).

It's just a really amazing to watch the program grow and to have a relationship with so many students and one year I was even able to travel with the students that I was mentoring and that was just one of the most incredible experiences to get to be there every step of the way, and see all of the change that can come for students when they are in a new environment and getting to try new things and getting to have some ownership over their life. I think that having the opportunity to try these new things can open up so many doors.

Andrea

I know when we spoke before the recording you said that you have been connected with *each of the Cohorts* of students that have come through because of your kind of long-term engagements. Maybe you could talk about about that cohort Model A little bit and how you've been able to see that the students come through the programs



Rachel

Yeah I think the cohort model is another really unique aspect of the program that can be really valuable for students because *they know* what they're going through, and what their peers are going through, better than anybody else. And so having another group of students who are from all over the Portland area and they come from a variety of backgrounds in different households, and different cultures. But they all are there because they want to study abroad, they want to push their comfort zone. They want to do something completely new, and it's amazing how that can really unite people, and help them prepare and feel comfortable for the journey that they're about to take on.

And you know there's been instances where a student is may be nervous or thinking about dropping out, and is kind of afraid to tell their mentor or doesn't know what to say, and they share it with another student and then that student can sometimes come to us or you know even just themselves really encourage the student to stick with this, and stick with the program in a way that without the support of cohort of peers or maybe sometimes that "peer pressure" it would be a lot easier to walk away and say I don't know if this is the right time for me. And so I think that that cohort model just creates so much opportunity for learning and encouragement. And I've watched students form a lot of really amazing friendships over the years, and people that are still in touch with each other in years after traveling, and I think now a lot of listeners can probably relate to that. Sometimes the people that you meet in Journeys abroad can really make such an impact on your life and turn into lasting friendships, even though you spent less time with them than maybe some friends that you've known for a lot longer.

Andrea

So Rachel, you've mentioned "experiential education" a few times now, so maybe you could define what that is for you (or generally define it for us).

Rachel

Yeah, definitely. So when I talk to students about it, you know I think a lot of the times when we hear the word "education" we think desk, tests, teacher, you know this the more formal education setting where one person is kind of the holder of knowledge and imparting it to others. I think of *experiential education* as Hands-On learning. So while our students are abroad they are **not going to class**. They are learning by being in the community, they do a lot of volunteer projects, they do some Adventure travel (hiking), they live with Homestay families, they're learning the language and getting to have this wide variety of experiences. They're moving location every week to two weeks so it's not like they're going to Guatemala and spending 2 months in Antigua, and that's all they're getting



to experience. They're moving around the country, they're sometimes going to multiple countries even, and yeah I really think of it as learning-by-doing. It sounds cheesy maybe but it really is learning with the world as your classroom rather than being in the four walls of a set class room. And we do have a clip that I wanted to share of one of our students, at her name is Angie, and I think she does a really great job of showcasing the value of *experiential education*. And I think some people think, "Oh you're taking students to a farm in Guatemala" (which is what Angie is going to talk about here in a second), and "sure they're learning about farming practices". But I think there's so much more that can come from experiential education that is really hard to capture if you're sitting in a classroom environment.

So Angie is actually in this recording talking to one of her mentors from her experience on a farm in this clip. So she kind of intros it as she's talking to him about the start of her experience, but really goes into what the experience ended up meaning for her. I'm going to hand it over to hear Angie:

Angie

So when we had the meeting, when you were talking about how you started being an entrepreneur in general. That's what sparked something in me. Because that is what I wanted to do. The fact that I can see someone with so much drive, no matter how difficult and how different it is, they still kept going.

One of those little things when I got back home really stood out to me was when you had mentioned us walking up to your farm every day. The very first day you brought it up you said, "It's going to get easier" when we walk up your farm. It never got easier! But we got it done! We got it done at the end of the day. I can kind of see where like: Yes things are always going to be hard, and you might not want to do it but at the end point it was beautiful to see your farm, and to see what you had to show us. There was so much more that we had to learn at the other side. That's what I took from that walk every morning, and that's why I chose organics as what I wanted to talk about today. Because I wasn't just only learning about permaculture, Agriculture and farming. I was also learning what it is to be a leader, and what it is to be an entrepreneur. After that conversation we had, I had a new perspective on everything. And I didn't have a passion yet before the trip and my passion is for me... I'm not much of a "farming girl" but my passion now is being my own entrepreneur. I want to have my own business, and I want to work hard to be able to help others as well. It was a good feeling to know that I have a little spark in me that is motivated to learn more to be an entrepreneur.



Andrea

That's really great to hear from one of the students especially because we can kind of talk about these things philosophically, but hearing actually from somebody who's had the experiences is really important to understand. It makes me wonder... you've talked to us about *access* and how this program is meant to be accessible. So what does "access" mean and why is it so important for a student like Angie to get this access, how do you get that access through your program?

Rachel

Yeah that's a great question. You know I think a lot of times study abroad or International experiences are really still seen as "extras". And that there are a lot of needs that students have, and I think some people still think it's Superfluous (and it's not necessary). And I think everybody that wants to have this type of experience should have access to it. And that as education is evolving and a bachelor's degree is in some ways (for better or worse) becoming kind of a new high school diploma. That if high-income students are able to access these types of experiences that enrich their worldview, give them new experiences to add to their resume, help them have a greater understanding of who they are and who they want to be, that everybody should be able to have those types of experiences. And there's all sorts of different ways that you can look at it, but if you want to look at it from an economic standpoint of leveling the playing field: if students from high-earning families are able to access these things, it gives them a leg up over students that can't. So we work specifically with students generally in their first or second year of college, and I definitely worked with students in the past two or maybe concerned that they're going to drop out. They graduated high school, they made it to college, and now they're here and sometimes they don't know why. And they have kind of been told that this is the next step in this is what they need to do but they don't feel connected to their education, they don't know what they want to do.

I love how Angie talks about, "You know I didn't necessarily know what I wanted to do before this trip, but it sparked some passion in me, and not necessarily to be a farmer." That's okay! But you never know what you're going to discover when you get out of your world and experience a different one. And that's one of the reasons that I'm so passionate about access.

And for me personally you know travel has instilled this concept of wonder and curiosity about the world and it has inspired me to change, and to want more for my life and you really want to live my life with intention. And I think that that is really what I hope for all of our students is that they can see something different, and see a different way to interact with others and see a different side of the world and whether it's finding a new



passion, or finding a sense of gratitude, or just a sense of wonder for all that the world can have to offer and a desire to keep exploring and keep learning. I think everybody should be able to have that and I think of it as kind of moving from this concept of *surviving*, of “okay I'm working a couple of jobs, I'm working my way through school, I'm putting one foot in front of the other”, and opening up a door to the concept of *thriving* and that you can have more and you deserve more out of life.

Andrea

That's really beautiful.

Rachel

Thanks for letting me get up on my soapbox about that!

Andrea

No, that's what this is about!

So when you're talking about access I imagine there's some real barriers for creating that access. So what are some of the barriers that your organization faces in giving more opportunities to students?

Rachel

Yeah, absolutely. So I think the first barrier that folks generally think of is cost, right? And that includes our student population as well, I think a lot of our students have maybe never thought about studying abroad before because they automatically say like, “Oh that's that's not for me” or, “I'll never be able to afford it or my family will never be able to afford it”. And honestly, historically about 70% of our students are BIPOC students and I think that there's also a really big thought of like: study abroad is for rich white kids. And just trying to break that down, that barrier, and the first the first layer (I would say) is cost.

So providing a scholarship to students and working to make the program as affordable as possible and really minimizing out-of-pocket costs and also being able to be a lot more flexible with timelines and payment plans and we have a gear Library so that hopefully students don't have to go buy a \$300 backpack if they don't have something that they can use or borrow. So I think cost is the first, but unfortunately I think that's where a lot of people stop. And there is kind of the thought of like, “well we have the scholarship like why is nobody applying for it?” And so we worked really hard to actively recruit students, we do about 40 presentations a year and not expecting students to come to us. We go out and work to find them and then that's also where the mentorship in the cohort model comes in. So it varies from student-to-student what those needs might look like. I



think some students come in and they've got their scholarship and they're like, "Great I'm going to go", like cruising. Other students need some academic support to make sure that they're as they're transitioning into college that they're managing their workload, they're keeping their GPA at a spot where they're still going to be able to travel. For some students that's having conversations with their family and there's a lot of hesitation (totally understandably so) sometimes from families of *fear of the unknown*. And if your family has never been abroad before it's really hard to feel confident that your child is going to be safe in another country. And so helping families feel more comfortable with what's going on, you know just because the program is mostly paid for, that also doesn't mean that Financial concerns are totally off the table. The majority of our students work and they might be helping their family pay rent, or they might live on their own. So how do you come up with a budget to say, "Not only is my trip paid for, but how am I going to cover my rent while I'm gone? Or am I going to make sure that my family has what they need while I'm gone? Or who's going to watch my siblings while I'm gone, if I'm an older sibling that helps take care of the kiddos?"

So there is a whole litany of potential challenges that can arise for students and I think that's really where the mentorship model comes in to say, "Where are you at, and what do you need and how can we help fill in those gaps?" And then I think the cohort model is really amazing too, because students need support from their peers and they invest in each other in a way that... if it's getting closer to departure time and somebody starts to have cold feet and they may be thinking like, "I don't actually think that this is going to be doable for me," then they have a cohort of peers who are also, you know potentially having some of the same challenges with their family. Or having some of the same challenges of school. And they can encourage and support each other and and also sometimes kind of come to the mentors and say, "hey this person is really struggling I think you need to talk to them." And so it's really amazing to build a community of students that come from all different backgrounds and have different experiences but they're all willing to step out of their comfort zone and try this new thing and support each other along the process.

So yeah I think that there needs to be a shift in the conversation around access to (certainly scholarships are important) but that's just one piece of the puzzle, and recognizing these people are whole humans that have a whole host of other things happening in their life beyond the study abroad experience.



Andrea

That's great, and it really sounds like you guys are not just in the recruiting process, you're being very intentional about meeting students where they are, but actually through the decision even to go before they actually even enroll in the program

Rachel

Yeah it definitely and we've had some students but you know they'll come to orientation (we always do a two-day orientation in August) the students don't depart until February. So we're starting to introduce them to their cohort months and months before they travel. And sometimes there will be students who are like, "I'm still not sure..." and they come to meeting after meeting and it's meeting them where they're at, and saying like, "it's okay, and what questions do you have, and how can we make you feel as comfortable as possible?" Until we buy that plane ticket if you're not ready to "commit-commit" that's okay too! And most students do, and then every year some some you know things come up and life happens.

Andrea

Is the way your organization approaches this and what you do, is it really different and what else makes it may be different in terms of this excess piece?

Rachel

Yeah and so as far as we know, and if I'm wrong I would love to be introduced to what other organizations are out there, but as far as we know we are the only organization that is doing this specifically with college students. There's some really amazing organizations out there that do kind of a similar model with high school students (Summer Search is one of those programs that does really fantastic work) but I think for college students there's kind of this expectation that they should be able to figure it out on their own or that it is kind of "extra". And so as far as we know we are the only program that works with college students to provide this year-long mentorship program in addition to the scholarship, and in addition to this experiential education model.

So I tell students that there are a lot of ways to study abroad out there, and that all of them are amazing, and how ever a student wants to get out there: great! But there are a lot of programs where... including the one that I did when I studied abroad, I went all the way to Spain and I sat in a classroom in Spain, and that's what I did. So yeah it's a really unique combination of scholarship/mentorship/cohorts/experiential learning that come together to create a really different type of experience.



Andrea

I will admit that the reason why we asked you for this interview is that somebody had asked me if I knew of any organizations that offered study abroad for low-income students. I was like, "I happen to know one!" Let us learn more about them. And for me being able to provide your organization as an example to our kind of Oregon Global Community I think is also really exciting. Because people want to see that we're approaching things differently and creating more opportunities and it's awesome to have that organization based here.

So how can people get involved with Carpe Mundi?

Rachel

That's a great question! As a non-profit you know we're always kind of doing a little bit of fundraising to make our program continue to make our program affordable and accessible for students. You happen to be chatting with us during our spring campaign, so the month of May is our Carpe Mundi spring campaign and right now we're celebrating that we had 15 students traveling this past spring after coming out of COVID. It's been really amazing to get back in it, so we had 11 students that went to Ecuador this year. We had 2 that went to Senegal, and 2 that went to Costa Rica. And we are raising funds to keep things moving and to have another cohort for next year so if anybody is listening and it feels compelled to contribute to the journey of a student and you can learn more and make a donation at CarpeMundi.Org/donate or you can text Mundispring to 44321. So that's one way to get involved.

Another is that we have an annual storytelling event, we haven't had it for a few years because of COVID (obviously). That clip that you heard from Angie was actually from a podcast that we produced instead in 2020. But this summer we're really looking forward to hosting at our storytelling event again it's similar to a mod style storytelling about and all of our students get up and share their their learning, or one of their biggest takeaways, or you know some of those Hilarious Moments, some of those challenging moments from their study abroad semester. And that's going to be in early August (we don't have the dates that quite yet but definitely something that I can share with the GlobalPDX community). And we'd love to have folks come out and hear from our students, and give them a standing ovation and it's also a great way to learn more and connect with the organization as well.

And then we're also working really hard to engage with our alumni students more so we now have had 133 students go through the program and we're always looking for professional development opportunities to share with our students. So in June for example we have somebody coming to talk about graduate school, and what to expect, and how to succeed in graduate school. We've had somebody from the Peace Corps, and talk about



Peace Corps service. So if there are folks out there in the community that want to share their experience with a group of students and young adults who are interested in international affairs, that would be another great way to get involved with the organization too.

Andrea

That opens up the opportunity for me to give a shameless plug for the GlobalPDX Conference that we are going to have in October. That might be an opportunity to get some of your students engaged as well. In the past Conferences we have had students participate all of the way up to CEOs, and it's great to create that opportunity for those groups to mingle together. You know for me somebody's been in the space for a while connecting with younger people like the passion and motivation that they're bringing. So: Shameless plug for the GlobalPDX conference.

Rachel

Yeah, absolutely!

Andrea

So you just mentioned, and I think this might be an interesting way to end it: your organization is based on international travel. And obviously we have been shut down across the globe in terms of those programs for the last few years. So what keeps you so motivated and passionate and inspired and being able to keep this organization going, and now that you've got students back in the field like, you kind of did it! You survived the last two years. So it keeps you what keeps you going?

Rachel

Yeah that's a great question. I think what keeps me going is the students themselves and you know that storytelling night event for example, or just getting to hear their Reflections and the changes that they want to make for themselves, for their community, and in their personal life. In 2017 I was able to actually travel with a group of students (so I was their Mentor for the year and I was able to go abroad with them and back to Central America, a place that I spent a lot of time in and is very near and dear to my heart). To get to experience with them the Wonder and the car and the chance to learn but also the chance to relax and have fun and kind of be taken care of (in a way of having you know 3 meals provided for you everyday). Just a chance to experience the world in a whole new way and to see if the relationships that form from that, and the learning that can happen from that. And I think that one thing that always inspires me is that: you never



know what that learning is going to be, and it's very different from student-to-student. And even though they're having the same (or a very similar) experience, every student is impacted by a different Moment by a different person that they met and has a different take away and I really love that that learning can be so individualized and so personally impactful. We like to say, "opportunity begets the opportunity" and you open this one door and you never know what's going to come out on the other side. We get to provide one opportunity and know full well that the students will have so many other things that they get to access on the other side.

Andrea

I think that's a lovely message for all of us in the world honestly (students and moms and professionals alike). Thank you so much, Rachel, for joining me today.

Rachel

Thank you so much for having me, it's been really wonderful to talk about this and thanks for letting us share some student stories as well!

Andrea

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