

Roundtable -

Access to Education Abroad for All: Serving Students with Anxiety, Autism & More



2021 International Education & Exchange Summit
Catalyst for Inclusion, Access, and Progress

Agenda

Introductions Who are we? Who are you? What will you learn today?

Autism and Anxiety Diagnostic criteria; what you might observe

Pre-departure Strategies for program marketing and student outreach

On-site support Strategies to help students succeed

Expanding Access Disclosure and student support on-campus



Presenters

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(MA in Asian Studies)

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(Licensed Clinical Mental Health Counselor)

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(MA in International Education)

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(MA in Education)



Introduce yourselves

In the Chat...

- Institution/Organization
- Your role
- Why you are interested in this topic



Whitman College



Type: Private Liberal Arts

Degrees: Bachelor of Arts

Enrollment: 1540 undergraduates

Study Abroad Programming: 80 semester & year-long options via providers and overseas universities

Study Abroad Enrollment: 200 per year (pre-COVID)

Location: Walla Walla, Washington

Landmark College



Type: Private, serves students who learn differently including students with a learning disability (such as dyslexia), ADHD or autism spectrum disorder (ASD)

Degrees: Associate and Bachelors

Enrollment: 400 undergraduates

Study Abroad Programming: 5-6 Faculty-led programs

Study Abroad Enrollment: 60 per year (pre-COVID)

Location: Putney, Vermont

Topic Introduction

Why we chose this topic

Are ASD and Anxiety the same? Why are we putting them together?



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A note on language

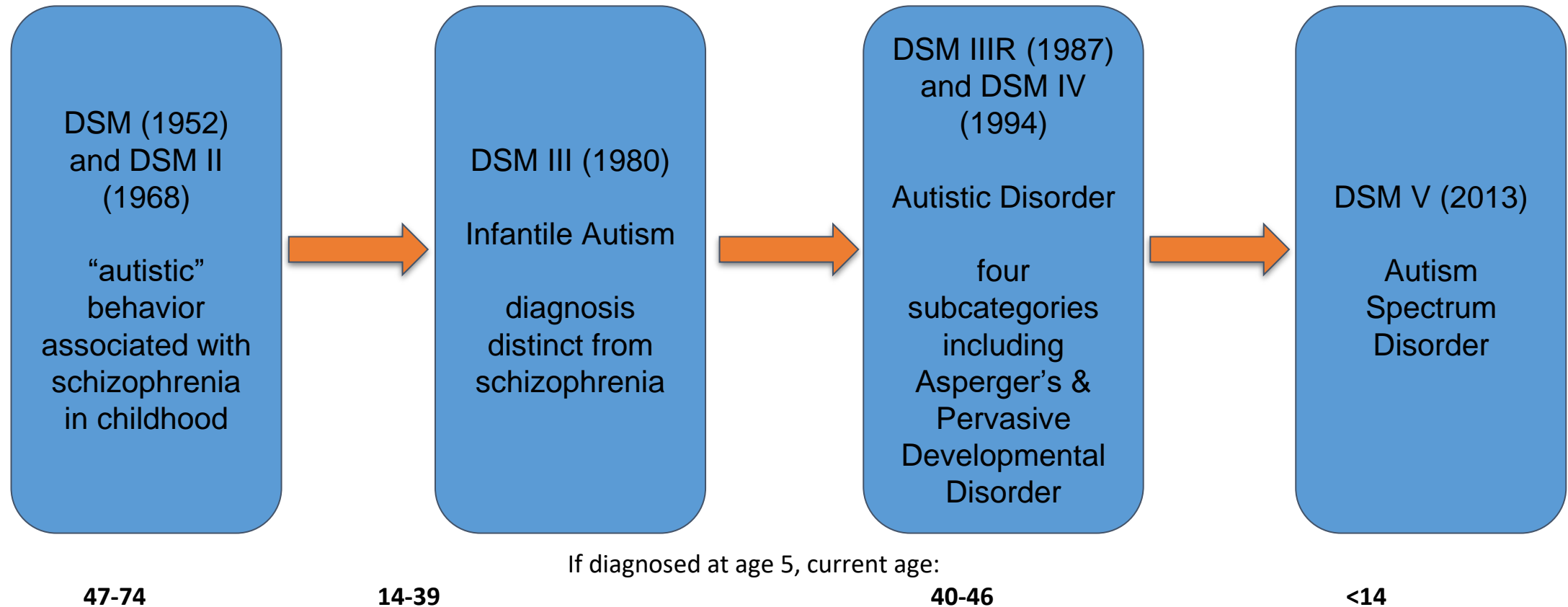
We will be using primarily **identity-first language** in this presentation. An example would be “autistic student” rather than “student with autism.”

Why?

- Identity-first language is strongly preferred in the disability and neurodiverse community
- It centers disability/neurodiversity as a core piece of someone’s identity and lived experiences

NB: An individual may prefer other language to describe themselves. You should make every effort to note the language a student uses and reflect that back in speaking with them.

Autism in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)



Diagnostic Criteria: Autism Spectrum Disorder

A: Persistent Deficits in Social Communication and Social Interaction

- Difficulty with back-and-forth conversation
- Doesn't share emotions or affect
- Lack of eye contact or body language, lack of facial expressions
- Struggles to adapt to different social situations
- Difficulty understanding, developing, or maintaining relationships

Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/hcp-dsm.html>

Diagnostic Criteria: Autism Spectrum Disorder (cont.)

B: Restricted, Repetitive Patterns of Behavior, Interests, or Activities

- Overly sensitive to (or interested in) sensory stimulation, e.g. sounds, temperatures, lights, textures
- Adheres rigidly to routines; difficulty with change or transitions
- Intensely focused or perseverative interests
- Repetitive motions or speech

Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/hcp-dsm.html>

Anxiety Disorders in the DSM-V

- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- Panic Disorder
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Social Phobia / Social Anxiety Disorder

source: <https://www.verywellmind.com/dsm-5-criteria-for-generalized-anxiety-disorder-1393147>

Diagnostic Criteria: Generalized Anxiety Disorder

- The presence of excessive anxiety and worry about a variety of topics, events, or activities. (Usually occurs for at least six months)
- The worry is difficult to control, and can shift from one topic to another
- At least three of the following physical symptoms: restlessness, tiring easily, impaired concentration, irritability, muscle aches or soreness, difficulty sleeping

source: <https://www.verywellmind.com/dsm-5-criteria-for-generalized-anxiety-disorder-1393147>



Questions about diagnoses?

Pre-Departure

- Program Marketing and Outreach
- Working with students



Know your programs!

	Supportive	Challenging
Change/transitions	Very few (or no) transitions; regular day-to-day routine	Program moves around a lot; variable schedule
Sensory input	Ability to minimize exposure to loud/chaotic environments (bright lights, temperature extremes, loud noises)	Navigation in crowded cities, loud/busy program center, extreme heat or cold
Housing	Comfortable, low-sensory environments	Crowded, rowdy housing arrangements
Independence	Opportunities for exploration with plenty of support and guidance available	High degree of independence

Program description and promotion

Considerations

Consider the following to determine if this course is right for your learning style.

Free time/Independence: LOW

The program itinerary is highly structured and students will have some, but not many, opportunities to explore on their own.

Physical Demands: HIGH

This program includes physical work on a ship and a farm, and may include hiking, kayaking, and other activities. Students concerned about physical limitations are encouraged to talk with the study abroad office and program leaders early.

Transitions: HIGH

This program moves around a lot: a week on campus followed by several short stays in different locations in St. Croix.

Stimuli: HIGH

This program includes lots of contact with nature: varying weather conditions, a boat at sea, and various animals, large and small.

St. Croix, USVI
Internatural Communication

Considerations

Consider the following to determine if this course is right for your learning style.

Free time/Independence: Flexible

The program itinerary is structured with class time in the mornings and excursions in the afternoons. Program leaders provide plenty of support and optional activities during free time. Students who want independence will have plenty of opportunity to explore.

Physical Demands: LOW

The program includes travel on public transportation as well as walking in monuments and museums.

Transitions: LOW

The Berlin group stays in the same housing for three weeks; the schedule of classes and excursions is consistent throughout the program.

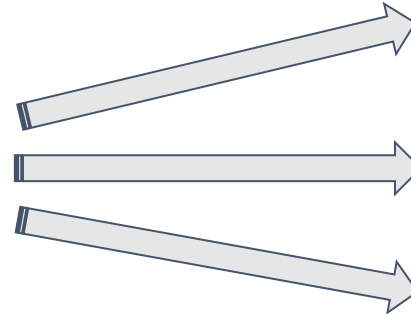
Stimuli: LOW

While this program does visit a variety of locations including markets, museums/monuments and historic sites that are both indoor and outdoor, we make an effort to minimize high-sensory experiences, and spend plenty of time preparing students when they are included.

Berlin, Germany
Cities at War

Pre-Departure: What we may see

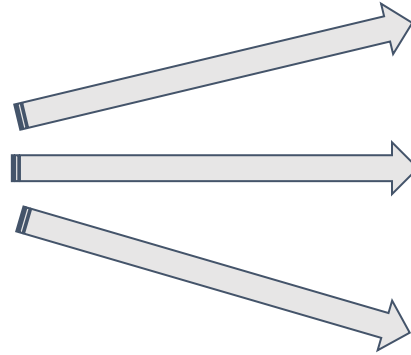
Overwhelmed with choices



- Avoid loud, crowded info events
- Provide individualized support
- Specific outreach to student groups

Pre-Departure: What we may see (part one)

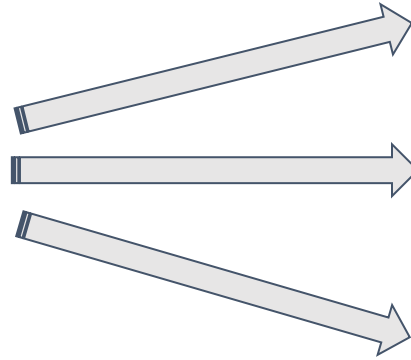
Repeated questions or focus on details



- Provide as much info as possible ahead of time
- Answer questions; be patient
- Useful fodder for discussion about support

Pre-Departure: What we may see (part two)

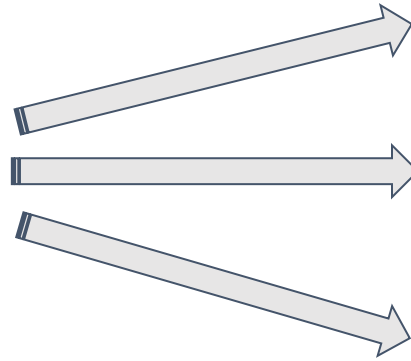
Interviews: low affect, brief responses



- Be clear about expectations / purpose
- Be patient; prompt for more information
- Offer choices and ask for elaboration

Pre-Departure: What we may see (part three)

Reticence in pre-departure activities



- Explain events in advance
- Offer the opportunity to observe
- Find moments for one-on-one support

Access to Education Abroad for All?





Questions about pre-departure?

On-site

- Working proactively to anticipate challenges
- Helping students make the most of their experiences

-Academics-
-Social-



Program Elements that may be challenging



High-sensory program activities and busy,
long days

Tips:

Preview, preview, preview!

Plan a strategy for coping

Be deliberate in incorporating down time

Program Elements that may be challenging -1

Academic demands

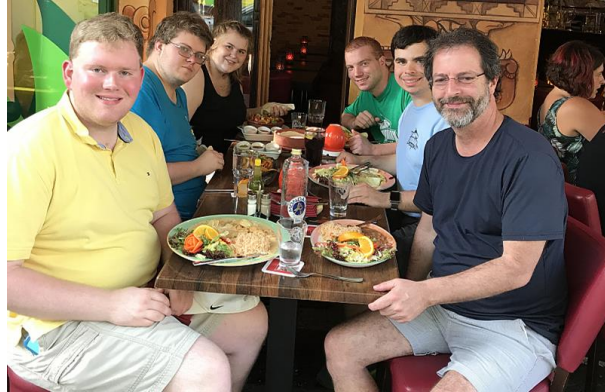
Tips:

Ensure academic support is available

Use principles of Universal Design for Learning



Program Elements that may be challenging-2



Cultural differences, including food

Tips:

Discuss difference and what to expect

Provide opportunities for self-catering

Encourage students to try new things

Include plenty of choice



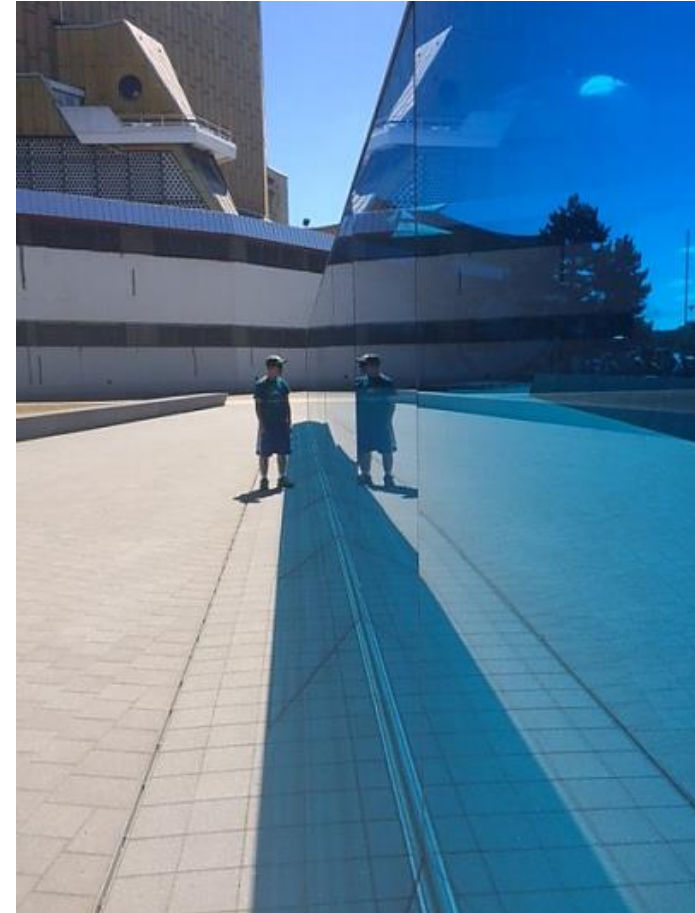
Program Elements that may be challenging-3

Social issues with peers

Tips:

Encourage communication

Mix and match groups





Questions about on-site support?

Expanding Access

Shifting Demographics: Whitman College

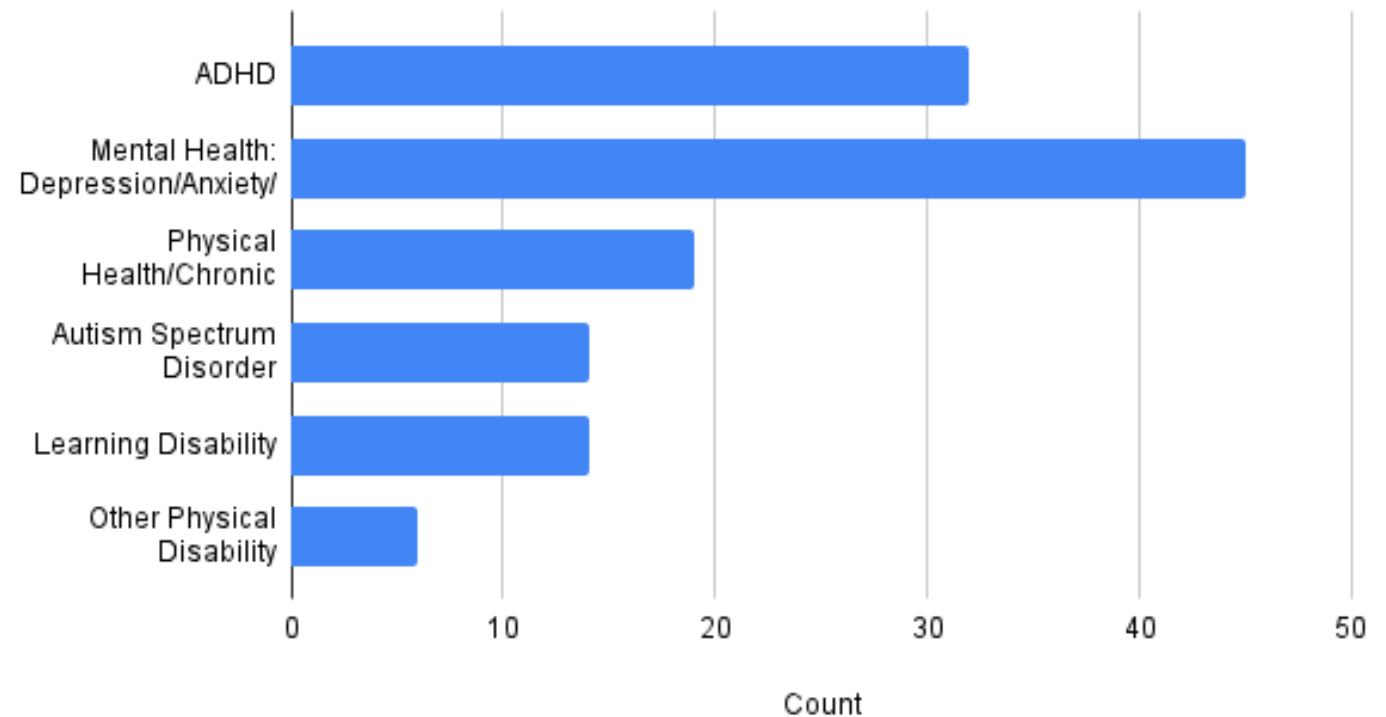
Disability Support Services

Fall 2015: 7.5% of students

Fall 2021: 16% of students

Marked increases in diagnoses of Generalized Anxiety Disorder, sometimes in combination with other mental health diagnoses, as well as ASD

FA21 Incoming Class (Disclosed Diagnoses)



Expanding Access

Why have overall numbers changed at Whitman?

- Greater understanding and early intervention for many students
- Improved and expanded services and treatments
- National diagnostic trends
 - <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/21/education/learning/mental-health-counseling-on-campus.html>
- Responding to students' lived experiences in assessing eligibility for accommodations

Thinking Beyond Diagnoses

While diagnoses are important they don't represent the entire picture.

Reasons why we should be responsive to student needs and recognize/rethink barriers in processes, curriculum, etc:

- Financial barriers (a full report can be a prohibitive expense)
- Cultural and/or familial barriers
- Other marginalized identities
- Limited diagnostic categories or diagnostic impressions
- Access or location barriers
- Self-ableism

Disclosure vs. Needs

Questions that prompt only a diagnostic disclosure may be a pitfall for both the student and the EA office. Why is it important to be more holistic (yet still highly specific!) with your questions?

- Asking diagnosis-specific questions may exclude certain students
- Some disabilities present differently in different situations, so it is important to get the complete picture
- A student may focus on one diagnosis and not speak to other barriers or needs
- A student may not feel comfortable disclosing to an EA adviser and leave out critical information because they don't have an inclusive space to speak to their access needs

Other ways to model inclusion

Avoid euphemistic language, such as “special needs”

- This terminology both serves to alienate disabled students and may dissuade pre-diagnosed or undiagnosed students from describing their needs

Use specific examples in question prompts

- This will help you get the most complete information and demonstrate to students that you’ve considered the whole person in creating your materials

Connect with students about your own access needs when travelling, only if you feel comfortable doing so

- For example, I take a daily controlled medication and have to plan ahead when I travel, and also have dietary restrictions. Your sharing may help a student open up about their needs and concerns.

Multiple Marginalized Identities

More holistic questions will also help OCS staff support multiple aspects of a student's identity or be better placed to advise a student.

Disability and Neurodivergence can be present alongside other identities such as race and ethnicity, gender/sexuality, socioeconomic status, religious practice, as well as multiple disabilities or chronic health needs.

Depending on the nature of an off-campus experience, the most salient identity may shift based on context, so addressing all will give the student the necessary skill set to navigate those intersecting needs.

Partnering with DSS Offices

How can Education Abroad/Off-Campus Study offices and Disability/Access Centers work together to support students?

- Collaboration on Program reviews and descriptions
 - Identify potential barriers and opportunities in your Program offerings
- Release of Information
 - A ROI signed by the student can allow identified staff members to work together with permission from the student
- General Advice
 - While a DSS Counselor may not be able to disclose a student's disability, they can prompt particular questions or offer general information about how they might counsel a student with an equivalent diagnosis



Questions about expanding access?

Discussion Topics

- 1. Case study.** Your institution administers a semester-long program on public health in China. What aspects of the program can be tweaked to accommodate neurodiverse students or students with anxiety? What are some activities/settings that might create challenges? What aspects might be challenging that cannot be changed?
- 1. Case study.** You are a study abroad adviser and you meet with a student who is socially awkward, not making eye contact and providing very brief answers to your questions. You are having a difficult time eliciting responses from the student to help determine what type of program would be suitable. The student has not disclosed any medical needs or learning accommodation. How would you proceed? What, if anything, should be communicated to EA sponsors of programs the student is considering?
- 1. Training.** On your campuses/program sites, what training or discussions should happen in order for faculty and staff to feel confident working with neurodiverse students or students with anxiety?



Thanks very much for joining us
and for your work toward more inclusive
Education Abroad!



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