EXPLORING STUDENT LEARNING ON A SHORT-TERM, FACULTY-LED STUDY ABROAD COURSE THROUGH A STUDENT DEVELOPMENT LENS

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Dissertation Prepared for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

December 2015

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Garcia, Hope F. *Exploring student learning on a short-term, faculty-led study abroad course through a student development lens*. Doctor of Philosophy (Higher Education), December 2015, 225 pp., 4 figures, references, 315 titles.

Embarking on a study abroad experience is thought to be a transformational experience for students, and previous researchers have tended to find that the potential benefits of study abroad experiences, including greater conceptual and behavioral intercultural competence, are greater with longer periods abroad.

The purpose of this study was to create an intentional learning experience for students who embarked on a short-term study abroad in rural areas of China and to apply faculty intervention of a student development approach to student learning to create a high-impact learning environment for students centered on a service-learning project.

This qualitative study gathered primary data from students and instructors during the course through a collection of observation and field notes, student journals, pre- and post-construct tests, and final presentation. Follow-up interviews were conducted 10 months after course completion. Six students participated in this course and study who were from a variety of disciplines and classifications. Five students were female; one was male. Four students were undergraduates; two were graduate students. Student ethnicities included three Caucasians and African American, along with two international students from Mexico and Iran.

Key outcomes of this study were that when short-term study abroad faculty members applied creative interventions, students were transformed with regard to their beliefs, perspectives, and behaviors and that when they guided students through a process of reflection and analysis, students exhibited exponential personal development. In addition, the ability to challenge or support students in reaching higher levels of personal development is a privilege

that faculty must earn over time and through an authentic demonstration of care for students' wellbeing. Short-term study abroad faculty members can use the results of this study to maximize the developmental impact of such programs on student participants.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to share my gratitude to my chair, Dr. Amy Fann, and my committee members Dr. V. Barbara Bush, and Dr. Rick Nader. The perspectives of these researchers have truly enhanced the depth and quality of my own research. I owe sincere thanks to my supervisor, Dr. Elizabeth With, whom I consider my mentor and friend. I appreciate the support that has always been extended by my co-workers and fellow doctoral cohort for always being available for idea churning, leading advice, editorial favors, and an on-call cheerleading squad.

For those I call friends and sisters, I thank for being my shoulder and my leaning post. For my family, who has been there for me every step of the way, I thank for being the foundational shoulders upon which I am able to stand. I can only hope that my work and life can stand as an everlasting testament to the perseverance, resilience, and work ethic of my grandparents, Domingo and Esperanza Garcia and Alvino and Frances Lopez, who proudly worked hard to contribute to their communities and families with no more than an 8th grade education. To my parents, Arnold and Carmen Garcia, who have always pushed me to do my best and encouraged me to stand back up after a trial - thank you for your absolute, unconditional, and enduring love and for being my inspiration to achieve without limits.

And finally, to the many students who have allowed me to be a part of their lives - thank you for granting me the privilege of getting to know you and to challenge and support you. I am immensely grateful to the students who took this course and endured three weeks abroad, away from home, in continuously challenging circumstances. Your willingness to be vulnerable, exist outside your comfort zones, and accepting challenges head on is inspiring and beautiful.

I have truly been blessed by the Lord, Almighty. Thank you for my amazing adventure, life.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO STUDY

Given the attention and popularity that study abroad programs have on college campuses today, it is difficult to imagine that they have not historically been an option for American college students until the 1920's (Institute for Global Studies, 2013), and not available at mass levels until after the 1950's (Dwyer, 2004b). Despite the length of time American college students have been studying abroad, it has only been within the last few decades that a heavy push for study abroad research has been made. This is consistent with increasing college enrollments, study abroad participation, and American relations with international partners who have direct impacts on business developments and economic climate (Altbach, Reisberg & Rubmley, 2010; Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Lucas, 1994). The realization that our nation's educated citizens must remain competitive and well versed in international issues in order to lead our nation to the forefront of an evolving and interdependent world has appeared in mission statements across most major universities (Campbell, 2010; Dewey, 2008; Altbach, Reisberg & Rubmley, 2010). If higher education is expected to assist in creating active participants of a global society, much more work is left to be done in order to better understand how our students learn abroad, what outcomes they can expect, and how to effectively shape future study abroad design and curriculum (Fried, 2012).

Individual institutions are not only fulfilling their own goals of cultivating graduates who are prepared for a global community, they are also following suit with particular goals of U.S. federal and local governance as mentioned repeatedly by our own U.S. Presidents (U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, 2012) and state leaders. As Mowry and Sampat (2005) point out, universities have an important role in competitive innovation by empowering

graduates to embark upon technological discoveries that can help lead markets both regionally and nationally. Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (1997) identify universities as a critical component of a triple helix of economic systems along with government and industry. Therefore, a country's government can identify progressive, national priorities, but without the support and collaboration from educational institutions, the teaching and training that can create innovation will be an important missed step upon which industry must rely to contribute to their leadership and workforce.

In 1996, the U.S. Department of Education was charged with oversight of the U.S. Network for Education Information (USNEI), which was created to serve as a central point for information on international education for use by other government agencies, private sector entities involved in international education, and students. The creation of USNEI helped to satisfy agreements within the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region signed one year later (U.S. Network of Education Information, 2013). Herein, these actions record the United States' efforts to place importance on the gathering and sharing of our nation's information regarding international education. Information sharing makes it easier to locate relevant resources that could lend to best practices, inform interested parties on how to create more robust programs, or reveal any gaps in what is known about international education on a national basis.

Not only have government leaders encouraged an increase in study abroad offerings, federal dollars have also been provided for this cause through scholarships such as the Gilman, Fulbright, Boren, and Freeman Scholarship Awards. The most recent push came from President Obama and the Department of State regarding increased travel to China, an emerging global leader with economic power (U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, 2012). The

importance of outcomes stressed in each of these programs is to provide students with the opportunity to learn more about other world cultures, how their own countries and individual actions play a role in the global setting, and how to utilize knowledge gained to apply to future career and community leadership roles (Fischer, 2011; U.S. Campus Report, 2013).

The focus on potential gains of studying abroad seems clear from the vantage point of the United States' role in global competition; however, positive outcomes for the individual student and groups have also proven themselves of particular interest to researchers, as many curious researchers have come up empty handed when searching for strong empirical evidence on the benefits of study abroad trips (Vande Berg, Paige, & Lou, 2012). Fortunately, the mere hope of returning home with countless positive expected outcomes, or what students often refer to as "life changing" or "transformational experiences," is what entices a student and supporting family to embark on a study abroad trip, according to Vande Berg, Paige, and Lou (2012). Too often, students are not able to adequately articulate what "transformational" means to them or how to explain their transition, nor have researchers figured out just quite how to measure transformation on a large, standardized scale (Savicki, 2008).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore student learning and experience during a short-term, faculty-led study abroad course through a student development lens. A short-term study abroad course is typically one which lasts eight weeks or less. Utilizing both personal inventories and faculty mentoring as a means to challenge, support, and develop students, the study explored each student's intellectual development, personal growth, and grasp of the course's expected learning outcomes during and after the completion of the course.

A longitudinal, 50-year alumni study showed that a student who studies abroad can expect to make significant gains in four key areas: academic attainment, career impact, cultural development, and personal growth (Dwyer, 2004b). Although Dwyer's study is just one of few studies that attempt to provide general study abroad outcomes for all term lengths, more are certainly needed. In addition, a large number of studies contributing to the knowledge of study abroad programs examine short- or medium-term programs, and those that are faculty-led or have a significant program role conducted by the home campus (Vande Berg, Paige, & Lou, 2012). Therefore, much work is yet to be done in order to understand the meaning and transformative effects that different types of study abroad programs can have on students.

Trends in Study Abroad

Participants

The Institute of International Education publishes an informational annual report funded by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs at the U.S. Department of State, which includes information on international students in the U.S., students studying abroad, and faculty teaching abroad (Institute of International Education, 2014b). The National Association of Foreign Student Advisors (NAFSA) was founded in 1948 for those who assisted foreign students studying in the United States, but evolved into an NAFSA: Association of International Educators in 1990. NAFSA keeps and makes publicly available annual data on both foreign students coming to American universities and American students studying abroad (NAFSA, 2014a).

Study abroad is a common component of university course options, with over 80% of American universities offering opportunities (Whalen, 2008). Those that do offer study abroad

contribute to the growing number of students who take advantage of the chance to widen their world view. The Open Doors 2013 "Fast Facts" sheet reports that study abroad participation has more than tripled over the last twenty years (Institute of International Education, 2013a). NAFSA's statistics on the 2011-2012 academic school year show that of the 20,978,421 students enrolled in degree-granting institutions, 283,321, or 1.35%, studied abroad (NAFSA, 2013). The same report just five years prior showed that in the academic year 2004-2005, of the 17,257,290 students enrolled in degree-granting institutions, 205,983, or 1.19%, studied abroad, demonstrating that as enrollment in higher education increases, so too, does study abroad participation (NAFSA, 2006).

Of those who study abroad, Caucasian students still represent the majority of students represented at 76.4% of the population. This percentage is followed by Asian/Pacific Islanders (7.7%), Hispanic/Latino (7.6%), African American/Black (5.3%), and finally multiracial students (2.5%) and American Indian/Alaska Native (.5%) (NAFSA, 2014b). Undergraduates constitute the majority of students who study abroad, representing 86% of the total, followed by graduate level with 13% and doctoral level at 1% (Institute of International Education, 2013b). Women make up 64.8% of students studying abroad, while men make up 35.2%, as reported for the 2011-2012 academic year. Compared to data from the 2001-2002 academic year, women made up 64.9%, and men made up 35.1%, showing no real change over time in gender difference (Institute of International Education, 2013c).

Destinations

Just as it was popular for early university administrators and faculty to travel back to Europe to model our first colonial colleges after Oxford and Cambridge in England and the many research institutions in Germany, early sojourners followed suit by studying abroad, most

frequently in Western Europe (Altbach, Berdahl, & Gumport, 2005; Beck, 1996; Clark, 1993; Comp, 2010; Diehl, 1976). Despite the public distaste of American students studying abroad by early leaders such as Thomas Jefferson and George Washington, who believed that patriotism and loyal citizenship could not be cultivated while still learning to mimic the traits of European ancestry, European countries remain the most popular destination of choice for students choosing a host country (Hoffa, 2007). According to data from the Open Doors Report of 2013, the United Kingdom leads as the top destination for American students hosting 12.2% of sojourners, closely followed by Italy (10.5%), Spain (9.3%), France (6.1%), and Germany (3.3%). Only China enters the popular, top-ranking European mix as the fifth most popular destination accounting for 5.3% of all travelers (Institute of Intentional Education, 2013a). In fact, European travelers made up 53.5% of all American students studying abroad in academic year 2011-2012, with the United Kingdom, Italy and Spain hosting 32% alone (Institute of Intentional Education, 2013b; NAFSA, 2014b).

Types of Study Abroad Programs

There are three common models of study abroad programs: direct enrollment, hybrid programs, and island programs. In a direct enrollment study abroad, U.S. students take courses abroad by directly enrolling in a host institution's system and earn transferable credit from a foreign university. A hybrid program is one in which students can be both concurrently enrolled in courses at a foreign institution as well as ones taught by a faculty member from the home institution. Finally, island programs create an environment where U.S. students may travel, live, and learn among their own peers of the home institution as well as be taught by a faculty member of the home institution (Kehl & Morris, 2008).

Duration

There are three categories for the duration study abroad programs: Long-term (one academic or calendar year), mid-length (one to two quarter terms or one long semester), and short-term (summer, eight weeks, or less). While a longer duration was popular in the early days of study abroad, shorter-term experiences have become a more popular choice over time, nearly eliminating a long-term study as a commonly chosen option (McKeown, 2009). In the academic year 2011-2012, 59% of students chose a short-term option, 38% chose a mid-length option, and only 3% chose to study abroad for a long-term option (Institute of International Education, 2013b).

When it comes to demonstrating which study abroad duration leads to the best, longest-lasting outcomes, there is a matter of discrepancy. The most popular belief is that the longer a student's time abroad is, the more benefits will be reaped, and that a shorter duration of the same trip would not yield the same results. For instance, Gillan (1996) found that students who spend at least a year abroad have the highest global-mindedness scores, which is a relatively small scale study compared to the work of Dwyer (2004a), who used 50 years of longitudinal data on study abroad alumni from the Institute for the International Education of Students (IES). Results gathered from 25% respondents of their total 14,800 alumni with current addresses showed that those who had studied abroad for a long term, rather than a mid-length or short-term course, were (a) more likely to enroll in foreign universities courses while studying abroad; (b) showed increased linguistic ability; (c) expanded to college majors with additional majors or certifications; (d) later acquired graduate and doctoral degrees; (e) cultivated lifelong friendship with host nationals; (f) learned more about other cultures; (g) learned more about their own culture; and (h) sought out greater diversity in general friendships. In terms of career impact,

long-term sojourners were (a) more likely to engage in international work or volunteerism; (b) speak a second language in the workplace; (c) work for a multi-national organization or work overseas; and (d) change career plans. On a personal level, these students gained (a) increased self-confidence; (b) tolerance of ambiguity; (c) maturation; (d) refined their political and social views; and (e) continued participation in community organizations.

Findings on the part of Dwyer and the Institute for the International Education of Students (2004a) reveal striking results for participants of any study abroad term length, although these conclusions lean toward the belief that long-term study abroad is by far the best option for students. Historical data also show the quickly decreasing numbers of students studying abroad for long-term options since the 1950s, with 72% in the 1950s and 1960s, 49% in the 1970s, 33% in the 1980s, and only 20% in the 1990s, before making an even sharper decline for the 2011-2012 academic year to only 3% (Dwyer, 2007; Institute of International Education, 2013b). These data lead international educators to question whether it is possible to design short-term study abroad courses with benefits just as strong as long-term courses, given the trend of duration choice among American students (Savicki, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

Increased attention toward the creation of global citizens who understand the world and its cultural differences has been the focus for both our nation and its universities for the better part of the last century (Strategic Taskforce on Education Abroad, 2003; Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program, 2005). As the push for more students to study abroad increases, the resources to make this a reality are scarce at many levels, from federal funding, to personal finances, to social support networks. While the common belief is

that a longer-term abroad experience can yield greater desirable outcomes, it is more financially feasible for the students, faculty and universities to choose shorter-term options over longer-term options. Thus, there is a pressing necessity to continue conducting research to assist educators in effectively creating a short-term study abroad options with lasting, sustainable effects (McKeown, 2009).

Those who specialize in international education have grown concerned that we have haphazardly sent students to foreign countries under the assumption that they would somehow grow into the mature, culturally aware citizens we hope for them to become without any intentional design, which has led to varying outcomes that attempt to challenge that assumption (Vande Berg, Paige & Lou, 2012; Savicki, 2008). If we begin to view study abroad opportunities as living-learning laboratories of experiential learning, then faculty-led study abroad courses can serve as the perfect place to blend the academic world with that of student development. Viewing students as simply a group of learners who will follow an assumed pre-determined path because the syllabus outlines it as such is no longer an option. International educators must instead view learners as individuals, utilizing developmental models and growth inventories as guideposts to understanding how to reach new heights in learning abroad (Fried & Associates, 2012; Stuart; 2012).

In this study, personal inventories and student development models were applied to students taking a short-term, faculty-led study abroad course to China titled Global Leadership through Service, offered at the University of North Texas. More specifically, intellectual development, the reflective process of experiential learning, service-learning, and an inventory revealing personal strengths were utilized in the process of observing and documenting students' personal growth and learning during the five-week course. During the course, special attention

was paid to how students come to understand themselves as individuals, and conversely, how they come to navigate the world around them through personal interactions with class peers, foreign partners, and increasing their understanding of the broad cultural differences which occur naturally within international relations.

Significance of Study

This study took a unique approach at assessing international education within a study abroad setting by applying a student development framework to student learning and personal development. King (1993) regarded a traditional teaching style as a classroom with a "sage on the stage," or a professor who merely lectured to an idle audience, and compared it to a classroom with more active student participation and hands-on learning. In this classroom, the professor took on a very different role, what she called the "guide on the side." The design of a faculty-led, island program allowed faculty to have daily interactions with students during the entirety of the course, which provided the opportunity to focus on students and created a rich setting for qualitative observations. Journal keeping was a significant portion of the program design, which was structured in such a way that allowed students to give reflective personal accounts of (a) what they learned about themselves and others by means of their personal inventories outcomes; (b) what they learned about the class material; and (c) general observations or stories of interactions they wished to share, record and critically evaluate. Finally, ten months after course completion, an additional qualitative data-gathering opportunity was conducted through semi-structured interviews with students to explore their lasting perceptions regarding personal impact, course objectives, and expected outcomes.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide this study:

1) What are the self-perceived and observed learning experiences of students enrolled in a faculty-led, short-term study abroad course?

2) How does student development theory inform and enhance the learning experience of these students?

Definition of Terms

- Study abroad – any variation of an educational program that allows college students to study outside the home country
- Short-term – summer, eight weeks, or less
- Mid-length – one long semester
- Long-term – one year, or longer
- Direct enrollment – students directly enroll in courses at a host university in foreign country
- Hybrid program model – students enroll in both courses offered by the host university as well as courses offered by home faculty
- Island program model/faculty-led – students enroll in a course at home institution, led by home faculty and travel and study together as a group
- Service-learning – volunteering within a community with an educational, curricular component
- Home country/institution – of student's own country
- Host country/institution – of the foreign country

- Intervention – an intentional program design that can be added to any type of study abroad type such as living with a host family, providing cultural mentors, incorporating a pre-departure orientation, etc.
- Cultural mentor – an individual who can either travel with the student or remain at the home institution, who has in-depth cultural knowledge, and who is also trained to guide students through culture shock and immersion, facilitate discussion, and aid in general adjustments to a new land, people and culture
- Third-party study abroad provider – organizations independent from universities that facilitate study abroad opportunities for students

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Study abroad in the United States has endured a long history of popularity, public interest scrutiny, and complexity within the college realm. The research surrounding college study abroad is vast and varies in topics, such as expected outcomes, student learning, destination differences, acculturation, global mindedness, career aspirations, language acquisition, attitude changes, maturation, and more. This chapter will more narrowly explore study abroad issues of (a) a historical overview of study abroad in the United States; (b) basic assumptions and criticisms of study abroad courses; (c) incorporating individual assessments within course curriculum to promote personal development while studying abroad; (d) the study's conceptual framework demonstrating the application of student development theory to creating a study abroad program design; and (e) a description of theories which contribute to the overall conceptual framework.

History of Study Abroad

Although sending a student to Europe to round out studies in a foreign language has been an option since the onset of our first colonial universities, keeping records on a standardized, national scale has only been a practice within the last century. Notable figures such as John Quincy Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and later W.E.B. Du Bois, studied abroad as did other sons and daughters of well-to-do families (Beck, 1996; Carroll, 1967; Comp, 2010; Diehl, 1976; Hoffa, 2007a). But just as collegiate enrollment during the early colonial years was very small due to educational elitism and limited access, so followed the numbers of students studying abroad (Rudolph, 1990). To put this in perspective, 11 colleges had been established by 1790

since Harvard's establishment in 1636, yet of the total population at the time (3,929,326), there were only 1,050 (.03%) students enrolled in higher education that year, with 240 conferred degrees and no known records of national study abroad data (Cohen, 2010).

One of the leading institutes promoting international education, The Institute of International Education, was founded in 1919; its first annual report was produced in 1920, with no documentation of exact numbers of students studying abroad at the time (Institute of International Education, 1920; Institute of International Education, 2014a). During World War I, national leaders determined that more needed to be done to educate our citizens on knowledge beyond our national walls, most prominently in European countries, with future interest in learning more about Latin America and Asia. Realizing the national focus was then exclusively concerned with matters relating to the United States, the mission of the newly-formed Institute was to gather information on international partners and education, and to share that information nationally, though the first annual report cited difficulty in getting overseas partners to respond to inquiries to gather such data (Duggan, 1920). World War I served as an introduction to international matters, as did historical events such as World War II, the end of the industrial revolution, and the tragic events of 9/11. These and other monumental events helped the United States understand that although it had enjoyed a history of world leadership and power, underestimating other forces and our complacency with the lack of knowledge of our world partners would decrease competitive advantage over time politically, socially, and economically (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Altbach, Reisburg, & Rumbley, 2010).

Universities have been asked to assist with the endeavor of educating our students with a globally-minded perspective, and have been happy to rise to the challenge (Blum, 2006; Bollag, 2004; U.S. Network of Education Information, 2013). However, according to expectations that

have been put before American universities, the number of students studying abroad has fallen far behind proposed goals for current and coming years. Several U.S. Senators and Representatives, along with Bush's Presidential administration, advocated for a steep increase in U.S. study abroad participation. They put forth the challenge that by 2016-2017, one million students would study abroad per year (Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program, 2005). Just as September 11th was cited as a direct concern for increasing study abroad numbers, the Cold War was cited as a direct concern of the Institute of International Education's Annual Report of 1990, wherein they proposed the goal that by 1995, at least 10% of college students would be studying abroad (Institute of International Education, 1990). To the dismay of both these challenges and many others, the United States' best record-breaking numbers have not been able to surpass the 2% mark of students studying abroad (NAFSA, 2013).

In 2005, Senator Richard Durbin worked to continue the vision of the late Senator Paul Simon, who tirelessly spearheaded the creation of the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program. In his article "The Lincoln Commission and the Future of Study Abroad" he stated beautifully and motivationally, "The United States is a military and economic giant, yet it is continuously threatened by a serious lack of international competence in an age of growing globalization. Our world ignorance is now seen as a national liability" (Durbin, 2006, p. 4). Certainly, there is still much work to be done on the part of universities to provide more opportunities, as well as for the federal government to fund what it has clearly identified as a national priority.

Assumptions and Criticisms of Study Abroad

What is known about the benefits of studying abroad is actually quite scarce. Students of course boast excitedly upon return from their time abroad with a few stories and pictures, but usually use summary statements like, “It was a transformational experience,” or “study abroad changed my life,” with no real ability to explain more about what was transformed or the process through which it was transformed (Vande Berg, Paige & Lou, 2012). Luckily, longitudinal studies have tracked the likelihood of additional successes study abroad alumni might achieve, and therefore asserted that future students who study abroad might reach the same levels of success in the four key areas of academic attainment, career impact, cultural development, and personal growth, regardless of the type of study abroad course in which they participate (Dwyer, 2004a; Dwyer, 2004b). Individual courses that have been examined are typically faculty-led courses, or direct enrollment courses where the home institution is still significantly involved with the intentional growth of students as measures by specific student learning outcomes.

It may be assumed that studying abroad is something that every student would do if given the opportunity, yet there are still far more students who do not study abroad than those who do. To understand the low numbers of study abroad participants, Salisbury, Umbach, Paulsen, and Pascarella (2009) conducted a study of 4,501 full-time freshmen from 11 different colleges to explain an intricate interaction between socioeconomic status, social and cultural capital before college, and social and cultural capital obtained during college, in order to highly predict the likelihood that a student will or will not study abroad. Even though Caucasian students are more likely to study abroad than any other minority group, this study found no difference between race/ethnicity in intentionality to study abroad, and found only economic- and social capital-based differences (NAFSA, 2014b). While costs may deter a student from being able to find the

resources to study abroad, this study suggests that even if a fully funded opportunity were made available for a student, low sources of social and cultural capital before and during college would make it highly unlikely that the student would actually take the opportunity.

Goldstein and Kim (2006) also attempted to narrow down specific predictive variables that would help determine a student's likelihood to study abroad. A four-year longitudinal study of 179 undergraduates found that intercultural variables were more critical determinates of predicting study abroad activity than academic or career factors. Results supported the hypotheses that students with low expectations of study abroad, high scores of ethnocentrism and prejudice, less frequent prior travel outside the United States, and low interest in speaking a foreign language were less likely to study abroad than those from opposing sides of the scale. It should be noted that any student participating in a short-term option of less than a semester were not included in the results, leaving only students who had studied abroad a semester or longer to compare with students who had not studied abroad at all. The authors suggested that universities should attempt to create campus activities designed to lower prejudice and ethnocentrism levels in students as an attempt to cultivate cross-cultural competence and thereby reignite new interest and increase in study abroad propensity.

Cost barriers were also found to be significant reasons that deter students from both the United Kingdom and United States from studying abroad in a report from the Education Intelligence of the British Council. The report found that even though students were interested in the idea of travel, and even felt comfortable doing so, the lack of information regarding study abroad, concerns about costs, and difficulty leaving family and friends proved the largest barriers for students when choosing whether or not to study abroad (British Council on Educational Intelligence, 2013).

These reasons, along with the growing number of students who must work while concurrently enrolled in college, and increased financial hardship, make for understandable barriers to choosing a study abroad option at all during college years (Hunt, Boyd, Gast, Mitchell, & Wilson, 2012; Gladieux & Perna, 2005). If resources are scarce and personal demands are high, this makes choosing a study abroad program of any duration a difficult one; therefore, the collective barriers explain the myriad of reasons students make the decision to study for a short-term option over any other duration option.

The research efforts that are placed on individual courses are typically to study the effectiveness of a particular treatment or intervention to the course design to obtain more desirable outcomes, and therefore are not as easily generalizable to all study abroad courses. Researchers have criticized this and called for more study abroad research that involves control groups so that interventions can be properly compared for statistically significant differences in outcomes (McLeod & Wainright, 2008; Poole & Davis, 2006; Tarrant, Rubin & Stoner, 2014). Nevertheless, outcomes such as intercultural competency, ability to overcome difficult situations through coping and problem solving, reducing out-group prejudices, the ability to work collaboratively between groups and in teams, increased communication between groups or fluent language acquisition, and generally to have a more open, accepting mind regarding the world and its people as a whole are commonly sought after, measured, and studied (Savicki, 2008; Vande Berg, Paige & Lou, 2012).

From the early colonial years when traveling abroad was an opportunity only taken by well-to-do families who could afford to give their children a unique and glamorous educational experience, to the last half century where central government has encouraged study abroad for the masses, the goal has always been the same – to achieve a once-in-a-lifetime, transformational

experience (Hoffa, 2007; Strategic Taskforce on Education Abroad, 2003; Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program, 2005; U.S. Network of Education Information, 2013). When we look closely at the various reasons each might push for an increased study abroad agenda, the motivations might look slightly different.

For instance, the U.S. Congressmen representing central government cited within the Lincoln Commission Report are of the mind that not making every effort to educate our young scholars and budding national leaders on critical foreign matters would be to voluntarily leave our country vulnerable and susceptible to weakness in the international playing field (Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program, 2005; Durbin, 2006). These exact same sentiments are noted in the various annual reports and records of national associations with international education interests. The point is to protect our country, or as John Dewey would describe it, to create a stronger democratic system by attempting to make each citizen as strengthened through education as possible (Campbell, 1995; Dewey, 1916; Institute of International Education, 2014a; NAFSA, 2014a). But while these entities tend to be more focused on the public good of study abroad, higher education must serve as the liaison between the public and the individual enrolling in courses, taking care that both are being served well by the intentions of studying abroad.

Many university mission statements refer to international education within their concise messaging to their audiences, letting the public know that their aim is pointed much higher than just to affect the local community. For example, Yale University's mission includes, "to attract a diverse group of exceptionally talented men and women from across the nation and *around the world* and to educate them for leadership in scholarship, the professions, and society (Yale University, 2014)." Penn State includes, "engage in collaborative activities with industrial,

education, and agricultural partners here and abroad to generate, disseminate, integrate, and apply knowledge that is valuable to society" (Penn State, 2014). Michigan State, a public, land-grant, research-intensive university includes such wording several times: "to contribute fully to society as globally engaged citizen leaders … expand human understanding and make a positive difference, both locally and globally," and "lead to a better quality of life for individuals and communities, at home and around the world" (Michigan State University, 2008). And finally, here at home, the short mission of the University of North Texas ends with, "to become thoughtful, engaged citizens of the world (University of North Texas, 2013)."

Even with such bold mission statements that are painstakingly written by university presidents, chancellors, or boards, it would be presumptuous to assume that mission statements are what compel students to study abroad. Strategic marketing to reach students and their parents is left to the endeavors of university study abroad offices, or even third party study abroad providers, who list the menu of reasons students should study abroad, clearly painting the picture that by not fitting such travel into their collegiate plan would do themselves a serious disservice. Students can find lists of expected outcomes to influence their decision to travel that range from personal growth, career exploration, language acquisition, adapting to new cultures, maturation, being competitive in the job market, or becoming a more well-rounded individual (Boyle, 2012; Dwyer, 2004a; Dwyer, 2004b; DeKeyser, 2007).

So while the federal government intends to stay at the forefront of global awareness and competition, and universities wish to meet the needs of the society by producing prepared global citizens, and students hope to gain all the positive benefits listed in their study abroad brochures, who is responsible for measuring whether what we think happening abroad is actually happening? Accrediting agencies, governing bodies, university administrators, donors, parents,

and students, have begun to ask, and have every right to ask, this very question and demand answers (Bennett, 2008; McLeod & Wainright, 2009; Sutton & Rubin, 2004). To add to the legitimate questions regarding student learning, recent concerns about safe, legal practices on the part of faculty and staff (Farrell, 2007; Hoffa, 2007b; Redden, 2013a; Redden, 2014) and excessive fee charges and misappropriated funds by third-party study abroad providers and foreign universities have circulated the news (Fischer, 2008; Philipson, 2013; Redden, 2013b).

If one were to attempt to find a unifying link between our nation's idea of why students should study abroad and typical learning outcomes of study abroad courses, the outcomes may not appear to directly match. Our country's leaders' intent for wanting more of our college graduates to have had a global encounter that widened their horizons is to support the United States' position as a leading global competitor, which may not necessarily be reflected on all learning outcomes for study abroad courses. Here, an important distinction must be made in the differences between direct enrollment courses and faculty-led courses. Direct enrollment, or exchange, programs allow students to take courses at the host country's university, which means that students earn credit for a particular course on their degree plans, but taking the course elsewhere. Unless the home university implements any sort of additional program that prepares the student for the cultural immersion, or assists the student through critical reflection of encounters within the host country, important steps may be lost in gaining the intended outcomes of embarking on a study abroad course (Engle & Engle, 2003).

Conversely, faculty-led courses create the opportunity for faculty to design their own syllabi with specific learning outcomes for the course. Here, there is more control in determining what will be encouraged as far as intended learning, typically a blend of course content with intentional insertion of international and cultural learning. However, since faculty are able to

design their own syllabi which are then monitored by department and university standards, it is not guaranteed that the international or cultural learning will be promoted in the same ways from one course to another (Bringle & Hatcher, 2013).

If the outcomes listed and measured in any type of study abroad course, whether direct enrollment or faculty-led, are only those related to actual course content such as architecture, art history, language, marketing, merchandising, and more, then why study abroad to get the same outcomes as a course offered at home at such a cost difference? If it is the case that taking the same course either at home or abroad produces the same academic outcomes, then theoretically the only ones gaining an advantage by adding a study abroad component are the visual or kinesthetic learners of the trip, leaving the aural and reading learners to have the same advantage as they would have had at home (Fleming & Mills, 1992).

International educators would argue that there are certainly far more positive outcomes by studying abroad that just adding a tangible component to what is being studied; however, they readily admit that embarking on quality research that will show this finding is quite difficult. They also are critical of the low number of adequate faculty who understand there is more to international-based learning than simply dropping a student in a foreign country in hopes the act will produce the exact outcomes one expected. While there is certainly a growing body of research that is slowly shaping our understanding of course outcomes that can be attained by studying abroad, each study ends with a desperate call for more research and knowledge (Vande Berg, Paige & Lou, 2012; Savicki, 2008).

Global Citizenship as Acceptable Terminology

To address a matter of definitions that has created some disagreement among international education researchers, it should be mentioned that cultural competency and global

citizenship are overarching goals toward which all study abroad course outcomes should aim. Global citizenship is introduced and described by several researchers (Falk, 1993; Dower, 2000; Dower, 2003; Dower & Williams, 2002) as an expansion to the idea of citizenship, which is what we attempt to teach our college students in order to create more peaceful and functional societies. Dower expressed that our own local communities are not the only societies in need of increased understanding and practice of citizenship. The world is desperately hungry for people who are interested in its development and ready to act on its behalf. In response to modern issues plaguing our global society such as terrorism, poverty, turmoil, genocide, and more, he sets forth global agenda items such as ethics, human rights, peace and security, environmental development and governance as topics in need of immediate consideration.

Also, further practice of global citizenship is needed in response to development of global civil disobedience and unrest among political leaders both in the United States and other countries. While these researchers call for more individuals, regardless of national citizenship, to become more aware of global issues and fulfill a global duty to directly promote human rights, nowhere is the audience specifically identified as students, college students, or sojourners of study abroad courses. Rather, it is a wide casting call for any person willing to take on such a challenge, which inevitably may include students with a predisposed interest for international travel and global learning (Cabrera, 2010; Folk, 1993).

Since the inception of the term global citizenship, however, international educators have applied global citizenship to possible outcomes that could be attained through secondary education curriculum (Schweisfurth, 2006) and collegiate study abroad (Ibrahim, 2010). A statement from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Director of the Division for the Promotions of Quality Education shifted the

responsibility of cultivating global citizenship to education rather than leaving it to chance, which has spurred its popularity among international education researchers (Pigozzi, 2006). However, those who have attempted to utilize the "global citizenship" term as an outcome of their studies and to sow the seeds of its initial ideals in student participants with no ill intentions to evolve its misuse have come under fire by critics who question the meaning of "global citizenship," as it is used in their studies, and also whether valid assessment truly exists for its measurement (Killick, 2012; Ogden, 2011; Tarrant, 2010; Tarrant, Stoner, Borrie, Kyle, Moore & Moore, 2011).

Davies (2006) questioned whether or not the idea of global citizenship is too abstract of an idea to expect measurable growth from one curriculum or course, but affirmed its importance and suggested that components of its charge could be included in very specific courses. Lyons and Hanley (2012) opposed the claim that gap year volunteerism promotes the kind of cultural tolerance, global citizenship, and altruism that third-party organizations claim as deliverable results, with the claim that neither volunteerism or tourism without guided facilitation will absolutely lead to expected outcomes. Woolf (2010), on the other hand, rejected the use of the term "global citizenship" and lists fallacies with its idealistic approach. For the purposes of this literature review and study, "global citizenship" is still regarded as credible; however, instead of "global citizenship," the terms "intercultural competency" or "development" will remain prevalent, since there are several assessment tools that measure its existence and growth over time. This will be covered extensively in the following section.

Long-Term Versus Short-Term Study Abroad

As noted in Chapter One, there is a general belief that nothing is as beneficial as a long-term study abroad experience, and that offering anything less is to rob a student of all the positive

outcomes they could have gained if their study lasted at least a semester or more (Dwyer, 2004a). Important gains in global-mindedness (Gillan, 1996), socio-cultural adjustment (Ward, 2001; Ward & Kennedy, 1999), and intercultural sensitivity (Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen & Hubbard, 2005; Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004) are found after longer durations of study, which leaves one with worry as to whether these gains are attainable on shorter-term courses. Further, as higher education strives to maintain a leading role in societal progress (Campbell, 2005; Dewey, 2008; Fried, 2012), shorter-term courses that are offered in higher numbers are at risk of being seen as mere vacations, or just another fancy selling point universities offer their students as nothing more than an badge-worthy item on a collegiate check-off list, and a pricey one at that (Geller, 2005).

Positive outcomes of short-term study abroad courses have been found in many studies. Bradshaw (2013) discussed how faculty-led courses at the community college level allow professors to create valuable connections with non-profits in order to establish educational service-learning projects for students directly linked to employment opportunities upon graduation. Le, Raven, and Chen (2013) also found that adding a service-learning component to a short-term study abroad experience provided a positive impact on student learning. Perry, Stoner, and Tarrant (2012) promoted short-term study abroad courses as opportunities to creatively engage learners through transformative and experiential learning. For faculty who have been discouraged from organizing short-term study abroad programs, Sachua, Brasher and Fee (2010) offered three models of short-term study abroad that are viable options for the creation of meaningful learning experiences, along with a helpful list of basic logistics to ensure a successful course.

From the encouraging words of prominent researchers and international educators, Victor Savicki and Robert Selby (2008), “there is no reason to believe that students will not benefit from short term study abroad experiences (p. 345).” While they agreed that longer terms allow for more immersion and opportunity for exposure, they would readily promote a short-term course that was well designed and offered support for students than a longer term that left students to their own devices, which could prove much more harmful in the end to both the student and the host community. Opportunities for harm will be discussed further later in this chapter. Nevertheless, trends show that students are choosing short-term study abroad options in higher numbers than ever before (Institute of International Education, 2013b; McKeown, 2009).

Tools and Interventions Used to Impact Learning on Study Abroad Courses

A number of quantitative tools have been created over time in hopes of being able to measure student study abroad outcomes beyond course content such as the Intercultural Development Inventory (Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman, 2003), the Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennett, 1986), the Intercultural Development Continuum (Hammer, 2009), and the Intentional Targeted Intervension (Lou & Bosley, 2008). Paige and Vande Berge (2012) reviewed the research of nine different study abroad programs based out of various universities with strong study abroad programs that utilized one of these inventories and concluded that (a) giving students cultural content helps students prepare for what they will encounter during their travel; (b) providing opportunities for reflection during a course is essential to cultural interventions; (c) opportunities to engage with the culture cannot be passed up; (d) attempts to provide intercultural learning throughout the course of study are more effective than only providing content at pre-departure; (e) online interventions are not as

effective as in-person interventions during a course; (f) comprehensive intercultural interventions have a greater impact than non-integrated, or single-layer, interventions; and (g) the use of cultural mentors is key in intervening during the learning process.

Of the many quantitative tools used by the nine study abroad programs reviewed by Paige and Vande Berge (2012), the most commonly used instrument across these programs was the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), designed by Hammer, Bennett and Wiseman (2003). The IDI measures a student's orientation towards cultural differences

The inventory model is available for both quantitative and qualitative researchers and is a 50 question instrument with additional questions that can be used for individual or smaller groups, providing open-ended contextual prompts for written responses, or for focus groups (Hammer, 2007). Aside from the open-ended questions that could be asked of students during their trip via online tools or a hardcopy journal, these qualitative instruments are only useful upon the student's return, which means they must draw from the length of their recorded memory of the trip in order to provide responses in these settings. Further, it takes a commitment on the part of the faculty or researchers to choose to include the qualitative options, as gathering this kind of data is clearly much more tedious and time-consuming than administering a 50 question survey once or twice.

According to the review of instruments measuringstudent learning outcomes abroad, the most prevalent use is a pre- and post-test which measures a numerical increase on a scale after applying the independent variable (e.g. a study abroad course versus on-campus course, or a particular intervention strategy over another). What is missing in the discussions of many studies utilizing the these various inventories is the role of the students. There is little mention of what a student might have thought in response to the initial score versus the concluding score, or how

they believed they achieved an increased score or any other exploratory questions. In other words, the aggregated, quantitative data are delivered and discussed quite extensively, but the use of the qualitative functions of the inventory are rarely mentioned as assessment tools of choice (Paige & Vande Berge, 2012). While there is absolute merit to analyzing cultural competency from the macro view, there is also merit in understanding the deeper explanations at the micro level (Creswell, 2009; Glesne, 2001; Merriam, 2009).

Although prior to any research showing that intervention on the part of international educators was a critical component to cultural and intellectual development, Allport's contact theory (1954) makes it difficult to criticize the traditional "sink or swim" study abroad practice. As a social psychologist, he posed contact theory in 1954 as an answer to why racial prejudice and discrimination was occurring in the United States. Allport examined hiring policies, citizens' committees, legislation, education, mass media, and individual therapy to conclude that prejudice beliefs played a cognitive role in affecting everyday attitudes and behavior towards individuals in minority groups. He posed that a decrease in prejudice of other groups could occur simply by spending time in close proximity with those of a different background or culture; however, later research wavered on similar conclusions in the assumptions of the theory versus the predictability of true outcomes, and that reduced prejudice does not simply occur by happenstance (Pettigrew, 1997; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, Christ, 2011).

Whereas Allport's contact theory was born at a time of within-country racial conflict in the United States, studies have repeatedly shown results that are applicable to the international setting. Where previous negative beliefs may have been held about another group, isolated experiences with members of that group can lead to diminished prejudice views of that entire

population. It should be noted, however, that these contacts were made by choice rather than force or unexpected encounter (Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe & Ropp, 1997). Students who choose to study abroad compare to participants of these studies because they will have encounters with other groups by choice, and are expecting to encounter new groups and cultures.

Results from other studies show that contact with groups different than one's own group leads to some level of benefit and reduction of prejudice, but it only accounts for a limited percentage of the complete picture (Dixon, Durrheim & Tredoux, 2005; Pettigrew, 1997; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, Christ, 2011). The majority of the work of helping individuals get past difficult differences between groups, then, is left to the intentional design of study abroad intervention models. In fact, failing to apply some form of intervention on a study abroad course regardless of type can lead to more harm than good, resulting in induced stress, lack of coping mechanisms, personal turmoil, and compounding prior negative judgments of culture with a perceived threatening environment (Engle & Engle, 2002; Savicki, 2012; Voci & Hewstone, 2003; Ward, 2001), which supportsDewey's theory of mis-educative opportunities (Dewey, 1938).

Building upon contact theory, Hammer (2012) coined the term *immersion assumption,* aptly naming what we have come to believe studying abroad can do for a student. It seems logical, if following contact theory, that if students are simply dropped off in a foreign land, surrounded by new people living within a different cultural framework, they are bound to learn something new and possibly even absorb cultural understanding. Thus, one version of theory on study abroad follows a relativist framework in that a mere shift of frame of reference, and can lead to bountiful gains in learning, personal development, and global citizenship (Bennett, 2012). Yet, no successful attempt at actually measuring the assumed cultural growth and awareness or

other benefits of study abroad have really been developed and statistically vetted until the last few decades (Stuart, 2012).

Extensive research using the IDI tool revealed a few important implications for the design of cultural competency and study abroad courses. As the intent of the IDI questionnaire is to measure cultural competency, it is suitable for use both in on-campus settings to measure gains in understanding domestic diversity as well as in international diversity while abroad. From an on-campus perspective, IDI research showed that students from highly diverse campuses did not show increases in IDI scores if no intentional programming or voluntary activity was available, even when opportunities to partake in cultural programs were offered. This questions research that claimed universities should strive for enrolling students with a span of diversity traits, because findings showed students of culturally diverse campuses gain positive impacts in academic success and student development while in college (Hurtado, 2001).

Perhaps on an even more controversial note, IDI research also suggested that students who studied abroad longer only made marginal gains in cultural competency scores by enrolling in longer stays than in short-term options (Hammer, 2012). This directly contradicts the 50-year longitudinal study by Dwyer (2004b) that demonstrated the great disparity in outcomes within the four categories of academic attainment, intercultural development, career impact, and personal growth. Ward and Kennedy (1999) also concluded that best outcomes in sociocultural adaptation are not attained until about two months into the sojourn, and level off at about six months out. However,, according to what we know about trends in term length choice, most study abroad students will never even reach the first level of adaptation because short-term length is only eight weeks or less and accounts for more than half of all students studying abroad (Institute of International Education, 2013b).

In a few additional studies utilizing the IDI as a measurement tool of cultural development, researchers found that programs that lack an intervention strategy had the lowest impact in post-test IDI scores. Examples of intervention strategies were orientation sessions or preparatory courses prior to departure, online journal or chat components, and providing cultural mentors during travel. The Georgetown Consortium Project, which included 61 study abroad programs over a four-year span, found a variety of factors that contributed to increased IDI scores (Vande Berg, Connor-Linton & Paige, 2009).For example, students who had never traveled before their study abroad course earned greater gains in their IDI scores than students who had (Pedersen, 2010); incorporating an orientation and re-entry course within the School of International Studies (SIS) at Pacific University to serve as intervention strategies before and after a study abroad course increased IDI scores significantly compared to the average scores of two other groups (non-SIS who had studied abroad and non-SIS students who had not studied abroad) over the same three- to four-year span (La Brack, 1993). The Westmont in Mexico program also created an Orientation-Study Abroad-Reentry course series over three semesters, which revealed similar increases in IDI scores for participants compared to those students with lower IDI scores who studied abroad without the pre- and post-intervention courses (Doctor & Montgomery, 2009).

Perhaps the most interesting finding from the studies that involved a cultural mentor, whether faculty, program facilitator, or professional staff, showed that this addition proved to be a compelling variable in whether students would raise their IDI score at the end of a specific intervention model, and by how much. Some demonstrated that involving a cultural mentor, or someone who could guide facilitated thought, discussions, or assignments and give valuable feedback, was a critical component of any study abroad type as concluded by Paige and Vande

Berg (2012). These studies attempted to detail what kinds of cultural mentor roles and actions were more beneficial than others. For instance, some revealed an increase in score when the mentor was on-site throughout the course rather than back home communicating via technological means, and expressed the dire importance of concerted, adequate training for those embarking on the role of the cultural mentor (Lou & Bosley, 2008; Paige, Cohen & Shively, 2004; Vande Berg, Connor-Linton & Paige, 2009; Vande Berg, Quinn & Menyhart, 2012).

Consistent data regarding the meaningful variable of incorporating a cultural mentor in study abroad efforts was especially important for university decision-makers, as human capital is always much more costly than any one curricular assignment, intervention method, journal prompt, or inventory tool. The sheer resources required to make sure that an adequate number of cultural mentors were available per course, that training was facilitated, and that compensation was accounted for are probably not costs that have been factored into the nation-wide call for increased study abroad offerings; however, countless results pointed towards this inclusion as one that we may not be able to afford to discount (Paige & Vande Berg, 2012).

To conclude the examples of research utilizing the IDI instrument, the Maximizing Study Abroad Research Project (MAXSA) (Paige, Harvey & McCleary, 2012) conducted three years of research to create a new text book for students studying abroad that would enhance cultural and language learning through an online course (Cohen, Paige, Shively, Emert & Hoff, 2005; Paige, Cohen & Shively, 2004) MAXSA is noted for its pioneering efforts to measure cultural development as a result of applying intervention strategies to a treatment group that served as a comparison group with a control group to which no intervention strategies were applied. While no statistically significant differences were found between the intervention and non-intervention groups, they did find that overall, students' IDI scores were higher than students who had not

studied abroad. Moreover, this notable, multi-year study served as a benchmark for other research projects that were launched in attempts to creatively design interventions that would strive to increase cultural development scores for study abroad participants. Finally, this study also found slightly increased IDI scores for students who studied abroad compared to students who did not, which minimally supported prior laid assumptions about contact and immersion theories, and more so compelled future researchers to design interventions that could lead to significant increases (Paige & Vande Berg, 2012).

Though not to discredit the assumptions of contact theory altogether, it does contribute to building relationships and the diffusion of prejudices with out-groups. The remaining majority of building intercultural competence comes from either the intentional on-campus programming, which focuses on exploring and appreciating diversity, or taking it a bit further to enroll in a study abroad opportunity, which includes immersion and international cultural education (Savicki, 2012). Without first setting the stage to bring together those of diverse backgrounds to create further intentional programming, activities, reflection, or exercises in critical thinking, students would have difficulty drawing in viable personal experiences from which further growth and understanding could stem. The largest remaining portion of fostering intercultural competence, then, must be left to international educators to create intentional, thoughtfully designed programs, activities, interventions, and curricula in addition to finding willing, invested faculty and staff, according to the pleading conclusions of many researchers (Bathurst & La Brack, 2012; Engle & Engle, 2012; Hammer, 2012; La Brack & Brathurst, 2012; Lou & Bosley, 2012; Lou, Vande Berg & Paige, 2012; Paige, Harvey & McCleary, 2012; Savicki, 2008; Savicki, 2012).

Personal Assessment Tools

Two important personal assessments that have not yet become popular choices for study abroad courses, but that certainly have made their mark on understanding more about the perils of traditional education versus experiential and engaged learning, are Kolb's Learning Styles Inventory (LSI), based on his Experiential Learning Theory, and Clifton's StrengthsFinder (CSF), based on positive psychology and strengths-based performance (Clifton & Anderson, 2004; Kolb, 1985; Kolb, 1999). Due to their frequent use in other settings such as the classroom and workplace, there is reason to believe that their usefulness to the individual and larger group is easily translatable to the study abroad setting and would yield similar positive outcomes.

Kolb's Learning Style Inventory (LSI)

David Kolb has researched and refined his first iterations of applying learning styles in the classroom for over 40 years; and over time he and others attempted to create new versions of the original inventory from 1985 (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Along with its immediate popularity among a variety of educational settings, researchers launched a string of criticisms questioning the inventory's reliability and validity (Allinson & Hayes, 2008; Freedman & Stumpf, Kolb, 1981; Koob & Funk, 2002; Garner, 2000; Gergstiner, Avery & Neumann, 2010; Lamb & Certo, 1978; Manolis, Burns, Assudani & Chinta, 2013).

Remarkably, Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory and Learning Styles Inventory have withstood the test of time and countless critics, and has not changed much even in Kolb's own version updates or in new models proposed by other researchers (Kolb, 1999; Manolis, Burns, Assudani & Chinta, 2013). Despite specifics of psychometrics, validity, and reliability as a quantitative instrument, the application of what a learner can come to understand about themselves in their learning space has tangible meaning and creates room for academic and

personal growth. A *learning space*, as Kolb described it, is the space between the person and environment where transactions occur, which he adapted from Kurt Lewin's *life space* where a subject encounters experiences which lead to individual behavior (Kolb, 2005; Marrow, 1977).

Integrating a learning styles approach to classroom education has proven useful for student learners no matter the topic or setting. Since its inception, educators have successfully utilized Kolb's LSI to achieve goals such as communication skills, personal interaction, leadership skills, better grasp of course content (Sharp, 1997; Turesky & Gallagher, 2011), and career guidance (Atkinson & Murrell, 1988), from courses in a wide range of fields and majors such as nursing, chemistry, engineering, social work, business, education, and geography, for both undergraduate and graduate students in the US and other nations (Abdulwahed & Nagy, 2013; Garcia-Otero & Teddlie, 1992; Gyeong & Myung, 2008; Healey & Jenkins, 2007; Loo, 2002; Laschinger, 1986; Massey, Kim & Mitchell, 2011; Pfeifer & Djula, 2011).

Research on the application of Kolb's LSI also offered practical application methods and tips for counselors, educators, and trainers (Sugarman, 2011) when delivering complex content (Pfeifer & Djula, 2011) and fully appreciating the diversity of learners. Teachers and professors have also explored altering course modules, syllabi, group assignments and examinations based on what the LSI has helped them understand about the variety of learners in their classrooms (Gaur, Kohli & Khanna, 2009; Muro & Terry, 2007; Hawk & Shah, 2007; Pedrosa de Jesus, Almeida, Teixeira-Dias & Watts, 2006).

Clifton's StrengthsFinder (CSF)

Clifton's StrengthsFinder (1998) is the second, and much newer, assessment tool mentioned that will be used in this study. Clifton worked closely with the Gallup Organization, known for their surveys that poll members of the US and other developed countries. The first

inspiration and studies based on positive psychology and its role in strengths-based productivity came from the common workplace. Positive psychology posited that focusing on individual personal traits, optimism, personal talents and positive intuitions can translate into leading a happier, healthier, and more satisfying life. Focusing on and leveraging the positive rather than the negative, contributes to what Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi (2000) called a "life worth living."

Managers can be perplexed about how to gain the most from each employee for the life-span of employee-manager relationships. Armed with research from psychology experts, Gallup polled the world's best managers to learn more about motivating and encouraging employee productivity, job satisfaction, life satisfaction (Judge & Watanabe, 1993; Tiat, Padgett & Baldwin, 1989), self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998), well-being (Diener, 1984), quality of life (Andrews & Withey, 1976), and anything else they could uncover (Hodges & Clifton, 2004).

Created in 1998, the Clifton StrengthsFinder (CSF) is an assessment tool used to measure individual "Strengths," developed after more than 30 years of research by Gallup (Gallup, Inc, 2014). The assessment measures immediate reactions to scenarios, and allows test takers to identify their top five strengths, learn more about their individual talents, and how to maximize them in order to lead a more satisfying and productive life. According to decades of longitudinal research, people who use their strengths on a daily basis were six times more likely to be engaged in their work, and teams who focused on group strengths were more productive (Gallup Strengths Center, 2014).

Since its first debut among the business world, interest in applying the use and benefits of the CSF in different settings has been widespread. Its use has grown in the business world

(Hodges & Asplund, 2009) along with the spread into religious leadership, self-help endeavors (Rath & Clifton, 2004), and within academia at both the secondary (Austin, 2006) and post-secondary levels (Cantwell, 2006; Clifton & Anderson, 2002; Louis, 2012; Steger, Mankin & Jewell, 2011; Williamson, 2002; Winesman, Clifton, Liesveld, 2003).

Louis (2012) delved deeper into how the CSF can be used for student development purposes. She first reminded the reader of Clifton's original driving question, "What would happen if we actually study what is right with people?" (pg. 1), and also of the salient points of past research that asserted:

1) Knowing your strengths is not enough; they must be applied in daily life,
2) Strengths development is a very personal matter to each individual,
3) Development takes tremendous effort, and
4) Strengths grow in contexts of relationships, teams and organizations.

Louis also covered research on implementation of Strengths at the K-12 level as well as post-secondary. Research was performed both in classroom courses, including freshman seminars and subject specific courses, and outside the classroom, dealing with personal development factors. Each was reviewed for both strengths of the generalizable findings and for statistical weaknesses.

One study assessed the impact of using Strengths on college students' intent to re-enroll and GPA attainment. Students in the treatment group reenrolled with more semester credit hours and achieved higher GPAs than the control group who did not receive the Strengths intervention. Also, the retention rate of students in the treatment group was 97%, compared to the control group with 87% (Williamson, 2002). However, with the remaining handful of studies which attempted to measure the impact of applying Strengths to leadership qualities and growth, Louis found reoccurring flaws in the quantitative studies due to sampling problems, lack of

triangulation, no control group as a comparative sample, confounding variables impacting credibility, exclusive reliance upon self-reports, and response and interpretation biases (Louis, 2012).

This level of criticism on studies involving the CSF as it relates to student development demonstrates that while the encouragement and drive exists to see StrengthsFinder stretch to new lengths and impact areas of growth in students, neither the Gallup Organization nor its researchers haphazardly welcome research that has not been carefully designed. Attempts to perform research using their proprietary assessment should be well thought out beforehand and meticulously considered throughout the research process.

Additional studies have attempted to incorporate the CSF in various ways that were not included in Louis's review. Steger, Mankin & Jewell (2011) approached a new way of creating a group dynamic in classroom assignments by using student's results from the 34 StrengthsFinder themes to separate students. Cantwell (2006) found numerous unintended yet positive outcomes in her public speaking course which she divided into two groups: one received a Strengths-based approach and assessment, while the other was taught in a traditional manner. She found the surprising, unexpected differences were not just simply demonstrated at the end of the course through performance and grades, but rather throughout the course itself: students who received the Strengths-based treatment came to class on time more frequently, had better attendance, asked more inquisitive questions during class, had fewer disruptive behavior incidents, and turned in assignments on time more often than students in the control group. These results were also closely matched by findings from Austin's (2006) study of a freshman seminar in a high school setting.

Compared to the long-term application and research on Kolb's Learning Styles Inventory, those covering the CSF are still in infancy. Although there has been less than ten years of application within all possible contexts (workplace, religious organizations, secondary education and higher education), strides have been made to reveal the vast uncharted territory there is to understand more about how the CSF can better inform student learning and development. Unfortunately, much of what has been implemented is at the practical, non-research level, so there is much work to be done. Current applications include uses for first-year, at-risk student success (Ramage, 2005), transforming classroom teaching design (Austin, 2006; Cantwell, 2006) and in developing faculty and staff to use their Strengths as personal assets and capital when working with students (Bowers, 2008).

Incorporating Student Development Theory in the Study Abroad Paradigm

Since the inception of student development theory, authors and researchers have deemed the focus of developing students holistically as work that is done outside the classroom. The assumption was made early on that in-classroom experiences are only for the teaching and learning of course content, leaving students' time outside the classroom for opportunity to stagnate, fail, or succeed in areas of personal development (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; Kuh, 1995; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Since a traditional aged student in college typically has just moved away from home, arguably the most critical transition of their lives, researchers of student development have stressed the importance of intervening in students' lives in meaningful ways (Kuh, 2009; Tinto, 1998; Upcraft, Garner & Barefoot, 2004).

Only recently has the need to bridge student development with academic affairs been realized, and the divide between the two that has been created over the last few decades has proven a difficult one to close. If student learning is truly the goal of all universities, then there should not be a clear divide between the goals of student affairs and academic affairs. Instead, a

collaborative mission should be realized and strides taken to share best practices across campus that can lead to student success. By not working together, each side has allowed assumptions to guide beliefs about the other without truly understanding each other's goals, and moreover, both have been blind to the fact that the goals are actually in alignment. Publications praising universities or individual programs for successfully creating collaborations between student affairs and academic affairs are becoming quite common, and each urges more and more faculty and staff to break down their silos to join the unified cause for student learning and success (Frost, Strom, Downey, Schultz, & Holland, 2010; Kuh & Banta, 2000; Schmidt & Kaufman, 2005).

Because of this historical separation between the two, neither academic affairs nor faculty members have taken into account that some student development approaches and practices are actually already being used in some classrooms. If a faculty member does more than simply imparting information on students, and takes any steps toward getting to know the students in the class, encouraging their progress, and taking a vested interested in their personal, individual development, then he/she may already be practicing the theories of college student development without naming it as such. Thus, this study will attempt to incorporate student development theory as it pertains to learning within the classroom, covering all areas of importance from individual brain and cognitive development, models of challenge and support, and finally describing in detail the theories upon which the conceptual framework for this study is created.

Constructivism as a Basis for Learning

Shifting focus to the importance of understanding developmental theory as it relates to college student development and learning while studying abroad, Stuart (2012) explored the numerous theorists who have both influenced and informed the work of inventory creators. By

topic clusters these included human needs, cognitive development, self-related stages, and moral and intellectual perspectives development. Although Stuart noted the importance of having a solid understanding of the various theories is necessary to approach studies around student learning abroad, he noted the challenge of following them without considering how they might truly function in reality. While each theory model is based on a hierarchical string of events, true life occurs in anything but perfect linear progression and rather exists in waves, loops, swirls or any other non-linear motion (Stuart, 2012).

Although college student development theorists have created models with linear progressions of various types, one common theme, constructivism, transcends them all. Compared to a Newtonian positivist approach where the world is based on simple cause and effect phenomena following the simple rules of nature, and the Einsteinian relativist approach where all occurrences exist in a frame of reference related to other occurrences constantly shifting with each observance, constructivism is quite different and helps make the most sense of rich, experiential learning opportunities. It posits that each individual constantly defines the world around them, building upon the last experience with each encounter, and in essence, constructing a structure of building blocks made up of observable collections that can later be defined even more through deeper reflection (Bennett, 2012; Stuart, 2012). So without making explicit mention of it in such a noticeable way, we come to realize that much of the existing research in study abroad outcomes is already deeply rooted in development and student development theory.

On the further topic of constructivism, Zull (2002; 2011) discussed two of his previous works, The Art of Changing the Brain: Enriching Teaching by Exploring the Biology of Learning (2002) and From Brain to Mind: Neuroscience as a guide to change in education

(2011). While the specifics of these works go beyond the scope of this study, it is important to remember the critical role each individual brain plays in the life of a student and the learning and transformation that will occur for that student. According to Zull (2012), the brain harbors complex networks capable of storing memories, emotion, behaviors, and knowledge that has been created over time, and studying abroad can cause serious disruptions in these networks. Disruptions do not always have to mean negative outcomes, as the brain remains flexible to take in new forms of memories, emotions, behaviors, and knowledge; however, without exerting care and support throughout this process, the outcomes will define themselves for better or for worse..

John Dewey, a pioneering educational theorist, explains that not all learning environments result in education as we intended, but rather end in what he called mis-education. In his 1938 work, *Experience and Education,* he writes:

> Experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other. Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience. An experience may be such as to engendered callous; it may produce a lack of sensitivity and of responsiveness. Then the possibility of having richer experience in the future are restricted. Again, a given experience may increase a person's automatic skill in a particular direction and yet tend to land him in a groove or rut; the effect again is to narrow the field of further experience. (Dewey, 1938, pp. 25-26)

Within this work, Dewey made the claim for experiential learning as a beneficial, innovative alternative to traditional instruction. Even nearly half a century before research on study abroad became popular, Dewey's work justly informs what we have come to know about a study abroad experience and coincides with most research on student outcomes. He believed that a traditional education left the learner out of the equation of learning; however, creating an

experiential learning opportunity without proper guidance was just as hurtful or more to the learner than reverting to old forms of education. This is confirmed by the many study abroad studies reviewed by Paige and Vande Berg (2012), in that several programs found that having cultural mentors to provide students with in-person, guided learning for the duration of their travel proved more effective in increasing scores on various instruments measuring cultural development (Dewey, 1938).

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Student Development Theories

The following student development theories are ones in which student learning can be explored, specifically in a setting such as a short-term, faculty-led study abroad course. This section will cover Perry's (1970) Theory of Intellectual Development, Kolb's (1985) Experiential Learning Theory, Schlossberg's (1984) Transitions Theory, and Sanford's (1962) Model of Challenge and Support. Each of these have stood as landmark staples within the practice of student development, and have been applied to settings within the college environment through research which can lend translatable implications toward their beneficial use in a learning experience abroad.

Perry's Theory of Intellectual Development

William Perry Jr., an educational researcher from Harvard University, created a landmark theory to explain ethical and intellectual development in college students. He was largely influenced by Piaget's prior works on psychological, cognitive, and intellectual development theories. His study took place over a period of ten years, from 1953 to 1963, which resulted in gathering 109 students for a total of 366 interviews, 67 of which were followed for their full

four-year collegiate term. Of these interviews, the theory of intellectual development was born, which includes nine specific positions and three additional positions which represent alternative deflections to the main line of development. The nine positions along the main line of development are divided into three sections, The Modifying of Dualism, The Realizing of Relativism, and The Evolving of Commitments, and are described as follows (Perry, 1970):

The Modifying of Dualism

Position 1 – Basic Duality:

The student sees the world in polar terms of we-right-good vs. other-wrong-bad. Right Answers for everything exist in the Absolute, known to Authority whose role is to mediate (teach) them. Knowledge and goodness are perceived as quantitative accretions of discrete rightnesses to be collected by hard work and obedience (paradigm: a spelling test).

Position 2 – Multiplicity Pre-legitimate:

The student perceives diversity of opinion, and uncertainty, and accounts for them as unwarranted confusion in poorly qualified Authorities or as mere exercises set by Authority "so we can learn to find The Answer for ourselves."

Position 3 – Multiplicity Subordinate:

The student accepts diversity and uncertainty as legitimate but still *temporary* in areas where Authority "hasn't found The Answer yet." He supposes Authority grades him in these areas on "good expression" but remains puzzles as to standards.

The Realizing of Relativism

Position 4 – Multiplicity Correlate or Relativism Subordinate:

(a) The student perceives legitimate uncertainty (and therefore diversity of opinion) to be extensive and raises it to the status of an unstructured epistemological realm of its own in which "anyone has the right to his own opinion," a realm which he sets over against Authority's realm where right-wrong still prevails, or (b) the student discovers qualitative contextual relativistic reasoning as a special case of "what They want" within Authority's realm.

Position 5 – Relativism Correlate, Competing, or Diffuse:

The student perceives all knowledge and values (including authority's) as contextual and relativistic and subordinates dualistic right-wrong functions to the status of a special case, in context.

Position 6 – Commitment Foreseen:

The student apprehends the necessity of orienting himself in a relativistic world through some form of personal Commitment (as distinct from unquestioned or unconsidered commitment to simple believe in certainty).

The Evolving of Commitments

Position 7 – Initial Commitment:

The student makes an initial Commitment in some area.

Position 8 – Orientation in Implications of Commitment:

The student experiences the implications of Commitment, and explores the subjective and stylistic issues of responsibility.

Position 9 – Developing Commitment(s):

> The student experiences the affirmation of identity among multiple responsibilities and realizes Commitment as an ongoing, unfolding activity through which he expresses his life style (pages 10-11).

The three additional positions that deflect from the main line of development are Temporizing, Escape and Retreat, which are described as follows:

> Temporizing: The student delays in some Position for a year, exploring its implications or explicitly hesitating to take the next step.
>
> Escape: The student exploits the opportunity for detachment offered by the structures of Positions 4 and 5 to deny responsibility through passive or opportunistic alienation.
>
> Retreat: The student entrenches in the dualistic, absolutistic structures of Position 2 or 3.

Although Perry's initial study only traditional college age population of mostly males, Knefelkamp (1999) spoke to the issue of its supposed lack of diversity generalizability with mentions of the later inclusion of a larger audience span, and also offered valuable updates to the original model. Some of the positions were only slightly changed, but the most important change was to that of position 5, which Perry and Knefelkamp believed could be more suitably named "contextual relativism." This position serves as an anchor of sorts, separating positions 1-4 from 6-9 as positions that occur prior to any realization and understanding of situational context and after. Position 9 was also slightly modified in that it was previously seen as simply a development of commitment to that of "resolve." Rather than seeing the last stage of the model as a final destination, Knefelkamp explained that it should be treated as more of a place where one can continue to grapple between the self and environment or an existential stance with active reflection and resolution.

Perry's model of ethical and intellectual development has inspired countless other theorists, and has an influential foothold in just about every student development model one could possibly list. Therefore, it is easy to see that the list of studies that have been influenced by his model is extensive, including within the literature of study abroad. Pusch and Merrell (2008) described the link between the model and student development during study abroad by mirroring Perry's interview transcription excerpts that fell under each position and offered similar excerpts of students' statements throughout their travel.

Students' dualistic perspectives while studying abroad can be observed in egocentric, narrow-minded viewpoints of the world where they may believe that there is a right and a wrong, and those positions may link to culture based on prejudices (Pusch & Merrell, 2008). However, study abroad courses are largely comprised of individuals who self-selected into the experience and who are typically predisposed to be ready and excited to learn about other cultures. Therefore, students who harbor dualistic cultural ideas are not likely to choose study abroad as an option (Goldstein & Kim, 2006).

Students entering multiplicity might be more likely subjects to choose study abroad, which is a nice position to begin exploration of the world and other cultures. Students might believe that there may be more than one "right" way to view the world, and be open-minded enough to accept that everyone is entitled to their own opinions, values, and way of life. As students move into a more contextual understanding of the world, they may come to realize that "right" is merely dependent upon the specific and situational context surrounding issue. Through closer examination and thoughtful evaluation of new experiences abroad, students may be able to break down a situation for themselves to more thoroughly understand all sides of the matter and arrive a conclusion that demonstrates growth in intercultural competence, a key outcome of study

abroad endeavors. The last stage of resolve is the obvious goal, but may or may not be adequately demonstrated by students while abroad. So long as growth along the model is an observable outcome by innovative program designs, it would be difficult to deny that definite strides had been made in terms of student development (McKeown, 2009; Pusch & Merrell, 2008).

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory

As mentioned, Perry's theory of ethical and intellectual development spurred the future work of several other theorists, including Kolb (1984) and his experiential learning theory and learning styles inventory (1985). But Kolb credits most of his foundation of education and learning on John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piaget, naming them "the foremost intellectual ancestors of experiential learning theory (pg. 15)." Where each specialized, there is common convergence that overlap between all three within the various frameworks they used to theorize their platforms: T-Groups, action research, democratic values, pragmatism, development, dialects of learning from experience, and epistemology. From these, and each individual's version of a theoretical design as it relates to human development, was born Kolb's experiential learning theory, where "learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience; knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience (Kolb, 1984, pg. 41)."

Kolb (2005) listed six positions he believes are shared by each intellectual ancestor and has used as the foundation of his model:

1) Learning is best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes.
2) All learning is relearning.

3) Learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world.
4) Learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world.
5) Learning results from synergetic transactions between the person and the environment.
6) Learning is the process of creating knowledge (pg. 194).

From these six propositions of learning, we can begin to see that the convergence of ideals that have been theorized and studied over time have converged and found a welcoming home in the study abroad stage. If learning is considered from the constructivist standpoint (Bennett, 2012; Stuart, 2012), and learners are accepted as unique individuals each with their own impulses and perceptions (Chickering, 1977; Erikson, 1959; Jung, 1960; Piaget, 1971), and the brain is appreciated for its many flexible intricacies (Zull, 2002), then this model does an excellent job of integrating these aspects into a reasonable model of experiential learning that can be applied to just about any person in any setting. Even the subtle art of conversation can create a learning environment, as two individuals or more begin to intimately intertwine and share their views of the way they have taken the world in and interpreted it (Baker, Jensen & Kolb, 2002). Within his writings, Kolb took individuality very seriously and posited that each journey of learning is special and unique, which is why it fits in nicely within a student development perspective, where the student/learner is key and central to the purpose and the individual learning space is taken into account (Fried & Associates, 2012; Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Savicki, 2008).

If one thinks of a circle running clockwise, there are significant sections of the cycle of experiential learning, including concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract

conceptualization, active experimentation, and back to concrete experience to begin the cycle again. Kolb explains that people take in experiences by either concrete experience or abstract experience, and they deal with experiences either by reflective observation or active experimentation. Utilizing both options to take in and deal with experiences rather than just relying on one from each category leads to an optimal learning experience. However, people may be initially inclined to stick to what they know, thus creating a barrier to truly absorb a learning experience to its full potential (Kolb & Kolb, 2013).

These categories can be further described within a real world context. Concrete Experience (CO) is learning by experiencing, perhaps through relating to people and being aware of others' feelings; Reflective Observation (RO) is learning by reflecting, perhaps delaying judgment until after careful judgment, considering the meaning of things and alternative viewpoints; Abstract Conceptualization (AC) is learning by thinking, perhaps by logical analysis and planning and acting on systematic, intellectual understanding; Active Experimentation (EA) is learning by doing, perhaps by takes steps towards demonstrating action and influencing others and possibly taking risks along the way (Kolb & Kolb, 2013).

Using one's preferred method of taking in and dealing with experiences, Kolb creates the most typical styles that are based on the four steps of the learning cycle. *Divergers* utilize Concrete Experience and Reflective Observation to "view a situation from many perspectives and rely heavily upon brainstorming and generation of ideas" (pg. 187).*Assimilators* utilize Reflective Observation and Abstract Conceptualization to "use inductive reasoning and have the ability to create theoretical models" (pg. 187)." *Convergers* utilize Reflective Observation and Active Experimentation to "rely heavily on hypothetical models" (pg. 187)." *Accommodators*

utilize Active Experimentation and Concrete Experience to "carry out plans and experiments and adapt to immediate circumstances" (Healey & Jenkins, 2007, pg. 187).

At best, a student at optimal practice of learning through experience should have a concrete experience, reflect upon this experience through observation, analyze the experience through systematic logic, take steps toward putting that new understanding into practice by acting upon it, then create another concrete experience. If one can then imagine this cyclical pattern moving not on the same plane, but increasingly spiraling upward with each new rotation of the cycle, this leads to a new angle in the model: the accounting of growth and development. If development moves in a forward direction, then the cycle should not remain in one place, but rather move outward along the direction of the progressive growth. Kolb called these progressions Acquisition, Specialization, and Integrations. The self moves from a stage of infancy, allowing him to develop into his own unique character with self-efficacy, and finally to a stage of fulfillment and satisfaction with how he has come negotiate his position within the environment. As such, Kolb envisioned experiential learning along the path of human development (Kolb, 1984).

The critical question for higher education and, in turn, international educators, then becomes, "How do we ensure experiential learning and growth actualizes itself in each student?" As demonstrated repeatedly by reviews of study abroad programs, learning environments that are intentionally designed, that consider the learner as an individual, and that insert interventionists to guide reflective learning, are environments where the student reaps the most benefit and growth (Savicki, 2008; Fried and Associates, 2012; Vande Berg, Paige & Lou, 2012). Experiential learning theory has been integrated and studied in various classroom settings, study abroad courses, and within the service-learning model.

Within the classroom setting, experiential learning theory has piqued the interest of faculty who have attempted to apply it in order to get the most out of their students and leverage their curriculum. It has been used to create specific classroom practices that can help to develop all four stages of the learning cycle in a geography classroom with implications for faculty to become more aware of how their teaching styles affect students with various learning styles (Healey & Jenkins, 2007). A treatment group within a chemical engineering lab used a hands-on approach and other forms of sessions within a lab course, while the control counterpart was not allowed to partake in extra activities outside of basic instruction; the treatment group performed significantly better by comparison, validating the idea that a constructivist, multi-faceted approach rounds out the learning process so that students can grasp an idea more fully and perform with more success (Abdulwahed & Nagy, 2013). Finally, Kolb has also been used in classrooms focused on language acquisition. Kohonen (1992) and Kim (1998) both found the experiential learning cycle as key to helping students engage in the cycle of studying another language and also having the opportunity to actively practice and continuously improve in language proficiency.

The application of experiential learning within a learning environment is not an approach that lacks in positive delivery. Dewey called upon education to rise to the challenge of moving from a traditional, positivist approach to an experiential, constructivist approach. He shared his committed view that the process of learning is better when the learner takes into consideration and engages in the process with hands-on opportunities. The counter to that claim was that experiences are not always positive, and if students are left without guidance along the learning path, experiences can result in “miseducation” in place of the intended goal (Dewey, 1938). Demonstrating this theory, Kirschner, Sweller, and Clark (2010) analyzed the problem with

experiential based learning when it was provided without expert guidance. Unguided instruction is most commonly found in distance learning models where students can self-pace learning, which has been shown as less effective and efficient than with guided instruction. After all, if the experiential learning theory implies that experiences along the learning cycle lead to learning, then to what sort of learning does incorrect analysis of concrete experiences and observations lead but to miseducation (Barnard, 2006)?

When it comes to teamwork, many people shy away from wanting to be a part of groups because of past negative experiences with domineering leaders, social loafing, diffusion of responsibility, and more (Kayes, Kayes & Kolb, 2005). Kolb's work has also been extended to the needs of teams to better understand how roles and group dynamics can help a team achieve a goal with collaboration and synergy (Kolb & Kolb, 2013). The team approach has been used in professional settings on the job (Lounamaa & March, 1987; Miller, Riley, Davis, Hansen, 2008; Stumpf & McDonnell, 2002) as well as in the classroom with interdisciplinary or specific field of focus (Bobbitt, Inks, Kemp & Mayo, 2000; Gremler, Hoffman, Keaveney & Wright, 2000; Jarmon, Traphagan, Mayrath & Trivedi, 2009), demonstrating its beneficial application to more than just the individual learner's development.

Perhaps one of the most rewarding means for a student to embrace experiential learning is through the act of studying abroad. It is one thing to demonstrate the cycle of learning in the classroom, or even in the work place or a through a service opportunity at home among familiar people and surroundings, but to add an entirely new setting to the experiential learning process is like no other,,whether the experiential learning goals are to integrate the value of immersion to assist with gains in academic enhancement (Montrose, 2002), language proficiency (Allen, 2010; Archangeli, 2008; Brecht, Davidson & Ginsberg, 1993; Carroll, 1967; DeKeyser, 2007; Tanaka

& Ellis, 2003), intercultural communication skills and competency (Williams, 2005), global citizenship (Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002), and personal growth (Savicki, 2008; Vande Berge, Paige & Lou, 2012). Murray (1993) noted when addressing how truly personal and reflective the learning process is abroad: "I start with the assumption that everything the [learners] observe about Nepal is equally an observation about themselves and that every observation about themselves-their behaviors, feelings, values, likewise reflects Nepal (pg. 27)."

Service-Learning as a form of Experiential Learning

If the study abroad experience alone can be considered a highly rewarding form of experiential learning in college, so too can service-learning. The various fields of study that can touch on the topics of social problems, community impact, and creative solutions are many, and the opportunity to add a service-learning component to these studies can have an even greater impact on the student by means of truly experiencing the problem and solutions first hand. Kuh (2008) names service-learning and study abroad opportunities both in his small list of "high impact practices (p. 21)" From a university mission perspective, if done correctly, service-learning should assist in reaching the goals of academic, civic, and personal development of students (Bringle, Clayton & Hatcher, 2013).

Because service-learning has been defined many times in different ways, the definition that will be used for the purpose of this literature review and study is by Bringle & Clayton (2012) as:

A course or competency-based, credit bearing educational experience in which students

a) participate in mutually identified service activities that benefit the community, and

b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility. (pp. 114-115)

It is equally important to know what service-learning is not. It is not simply volunteerism, which may have a beneficial community impact and assuage altruistic emotion, but is not linked to any particular discipline or course work. On the other hand, it can come in a plethora of forms, whether in a short- or long-term project; the setting can be on campus, within the local community, abroad, or even facilitated in an online environment; and it can assist constituents from individual people or families or work in conjunction with non-profits, businesses, or government agencies (Bringle, Clayton, Hatcher, 2013).

The most impressive role, then, that the high-impact practice of service-learning can potentially play in the life of a learner is the opportunity to develop intellectual capacity and critical thinking if faculty positions it as such. Faculty should assist students along the path of this development by means of helping the learner think critically through situations and their meaning in such a way that will help them do so for themselves later (Fascione, 1990; Paul & Elder, 2008; Fitch, Steinke, & Hudson, 2013). The process of metacognition, or thinking about thinking, is important in the experiential learning process and will play an significant role in this study from a qualitative means of data gathering (Kolb, 1984; Zull, 2012.

An intended goal of service-learning, out of several, is that of civic learning for future civic engagement. In order to develop students into eventual social change agents, they must first be made aware of exposes to social problems. Then after this has had time to settle in and critical analyses have been had, decide to do something about those social problems rather than just allow diffusion of responsibility to make it someone else's problem (Battistoni, 2013). This

would be very opposite of the goal of global citizenship, as discussed previously (Falk, 1993; Dower, 2000). In fact, instilling the importance and practice of civic engagement as an outcome of higher education is such critical agenda item for the country that the *Presidents' Declaration of the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education* called for campuses to "renew [their] role as agents of our democracy, [and to] catalyze and lead a national movement to reinvigorate the public purposes and civic mission of higher education (Campus Compact, 1999, pp. 3-4)."

The Social Change Model was created as a way for students to understand more about their own leadership development and what their role in that process should be in order to effectively bring about positive social change. The model triangular model begins first with the *individual*, then moves to the individual partnering with others to form a *group* which then begins to create larger scale goals that eventually impact the *community*. After the larger community phase is impacted by some form of social change, the cycle moves back to the individuals who were affected by the social change and can begin the cycle again to create even further improvements as leaders for the evolving needs of the community (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996).

Although the integration of service-learning components within course curricula seems quite the norm, if not an expectation, Howard (1998) shared the sentiments of faculty views which regarded service-learning in the classroom as counter normative pedagogy, conflicting with that of traditional pedagogy in several ways. He listed several conflicting viewpoints between the two pedagogies, calling into question the disparity in competing values on whether traditional, academic education is to be regarded as more or less valuable than service-learning, whether the faculty controls what students learn, or the experiential service, whether passive learning with a high degree of structure is ideal or active learning with a low degree of structure,

whether students are welcome to contribute to learning or just the faculty, and whether the objectivity of the classroom is to be more or less valued than the subjectivity of the experiential service. He suggested, moreover, the internal conflict that faculty may have with realizing that traditional learning may not truly be the best way that students can gain holistic, valuable learning, though they may regard it intimately as a tried and true method of imparting knowledge on students.

This exact sentiment was that which theorists from the constructivist viewpoint challenged, the notion that knowledge is an absolute truth rather than to be carefully constructed over time and made personal by the individual learner (Bennett, 2012; Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984; Stuart, 2012). As King (1993) described it best, the faculty should not poise themselves as the front and center of student learning, but rather should move from the main delivery mechanism of knowledge as the "sage on the stage" to the "guide on the side," helping students find true learning for themselves.

The effects of service-learning on student learning and development have been studied with both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. A political science course found that integrating a service-learning component showed increases in students' satisfactory feelings of the course and also in their semester grades (Markus, Howard, & King, 1993). From a more in-depth, richer perspective, students in an economics course making economic determinations for local non-profits offered meaningful data through journals, papers, presentations and exit interviews, documenting their movement through the experiential learning model (McGoldrick, 1998). Some have successfully gathered both quantitative and qualitative data within their course-based studies (Batchelder & Root, 1994), such as Govekar & Rishi (2010), who supported including service-learning into classroom curricula after gathering evidence from

student journals and end-of-course evaluations that demonstrated their personal growth, problem-solving skills, and grasp of course-related content. Their quantitative method included a pre- and post-test using two separate instruments to assess student perceptions of the course, their own learning, and their perceived benefits of service-learning.

Through much research, the general benefits of service-learning on students have been recorded as higher academic success rates in college (Strange, 2004), a greater understanding of the world and its citizens, career development through strengthened purpose and skills (Stukas, Clary & Snyder, 1999), dispelling population myths (Blieszner & Artale, 2010), leadership and problem-solving skills (Easterling & Rudell, 2010), social responsibility (Eyler, Giles, Stenson & Gray, 2001), and identity development and moral reasoning (Batchelder & Root, 1994), all of which are concluded in Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, and Yee's (2000) longitudinal study *How Service Learning Affects Students,* which included more than 22,000 undergraduate respondents.

Expanding the stage for service-learning to an international setting, we will evolve to the term *international service-learning (ISL).* Bringle and Hatcher (2013) combined three educational domains to create the whole representation that makes up international service-learning: service-learning, study abroad, and international education. Building upon their original definition of service-learning, ISL is:

> A structured academic experience in another country in which students
>
> a) participate in an organized service activity that addresses identified community needs;
> b) learn from direct interaction and cross-cultural dialogue with others; and
> c) reflect on the experience in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a deeper understanding of global and intercultural issues, a broader

> appreciation of the host country and the discipline, and an enhanced sense of their own responsibilities as citizens, locally and globally (pp. 19).

It is within the ISL context that students can truly learn the importance of global citizenship (Falk, 1993; Dower, 2000) through hands-on, real experiences abroad. The opportunity to learn more about other cultures, work with nongovernmental organizations to provide service, establish reciprocity between their university and the served community, make connections between the service and academic and more is provided to students when choosing to participate in an ISL course (Brown, 2011). ISL courses can be set up in a number of ways, from hosting the entire course in the host country; a sandwich approach where a period of full-time study is followed by full-time service followed by full-time study; a sandwich approach where service in the home country is followed by service in the host country followed by service in the home country; a practicum of long-term, pre-professional learning experience; and competency-based service where students must fulfill the outcomes in order to reach disciplinary or professional competencies but not necessarily for course credit (Jones & Steinberg, 2011).

Thus far, no specific ISL program design has proven more impactful than another; however, here again, arises the topic of duration. While the question will always remain as to which length of term truly creates the most beneficial outcomes for students, and which intentional student-focused program designs will engage student learning directly, the topic of service-learning brings in an entirely new population to consider: the community. One similarity that holds steady for both domestic and international service-learning is that the impact on the community consistently reports the same message that long-term service is more optimal than short-term service. While attempting to use service-learning to develop a culturally aware and sensitive agent of social change charged with global citizenship, researchers have come to realize

that perhaps the benefit has always been more one-sided than mutually beneficial (Bringle & Hatcher, 2011; Martin, SeBlonka & Tryon, 2009; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009; Wells, Warchal, Ruiz, & Chapdelaine, 2011).

Martin, SeBlonka, and Tryon (2009) attempted to shed light on the multi-facted problem of short-term service-learning. On the part of the community, when short-term service projects are created, there is the risk that what was put in place as an aid to the community will not be continued by the population because they were not integrated into project or taught ways to sustain it after the course completes its term. Thus, the students came in to implement a creative solution to an identified social problem, but in the end the learning and development are experienced by the students, yet the social problem remains.

Stoecker and Tryon (2009) expanded upon this notion to focus more on the individuals within the community. If they feel as though they are merely a learning tool or a project, and not treated as people who are cared about, resentment may ensue. Finally, several researchers within international education (Bringle & Hatcher, 2011; Reeb & Folger, 2013; Wells, Warchal, Ruiz, & Chapdelaine, 2011) focused on the ethical concerns of sending students abroad who may not be adequately prepared for the types of situations they may encounter during the service, or for the kinds of people with whom they will be interacting prior to the service, which raises the question of measuring students' readiness or preparedness, and considering the harm that may come to both the students and community if appropriate training measures are not taken. Similarly, Lin, Schmidt, Tryon, and Stocker (2009) raised the question of being able to serve diverse populations as a reasonable concern on both the domestic front as well as the international. In this case, not only is the potential there for a negative experience on the community membership being served, but also for the individual students who may find

themselves in distressing situations for which they were unprepared to handle, resulting consequences brought about by lack of readiness such as undue stress, anxiety, depression, retreat, or negative self-efficacy (Reeb & Folger, 2013; Savicki, Cooley, & Donnelly, 2008; Savicki & Selby, 2008; Ward, 2001).

Regardless of the problems that have been raised in studies on international service-learning, researchers (Lin, Schmidt, Tryon, & Stoecker; Reeb & Folger, 2013; Tryon, Hilgendorf, & Scott, 2009) also offer helpful advice as a result of what their studies uncovered and suggested there is still hope for short-term service-learning both locally and abroad. Adequate training for students prior to their travels abroad and interaction with host communities should be properly prepared for, both in a situational context as well as related to the foreign culture. Just as good program design is forged during the course, the same focus should be applied before the course members depart for foreign travel or community interaction. Creative solutions for maintaining beneficial and sustainable solutions to societal problems are where university partnerships with local non-profit and non-governmental organizations can prove especially useful. To solve the disruption of a short-term invasion of project-based service-learners, a university should make attempts at creating long-term partnerships with organizations and communities to bridge the project sustainability and maintain a positive relationship with community members

Also, Tryon, Hilgendorf, and Scott (2009) stressed the value of working with a non-profit group that has a stake in the well-being and livelihood of the community in service. Working with groups with foundational roots within the community, and that are more likely to truly understand community needs, will create the best application of solutions to social problems. Without these partnerships, students, faculty, and universities run the risk of assuming the needs

of a community, and in turn, either wasting time and resources or actually inflicting harm on a community. Littlepage and Gazley's (2013) work focused on the well-being of the community and suggested that taking appropriate measures and precautions to ensure benefits to the community members. In this way, the same benefits of high-impact practices that ISL offers can still be attained by students while also ensuring that the well-being and interests of the communities are truly served, and not disserved, throughout the process.

Schlossberg's Transitions Theory

Schlossberg's (1984) Transitions Theory was originally introduced to inform counselors on how to assist adults to successfully deal with significant transitions in their lives. While past renditions of adult development models mapped a general landscape for how adults should typically progress through life, they did not include the role of significant life events and how they can either propel a person forward, or greatly hinder personal progression. Her work has helped contribute to the field of adult development and counseling so that those who are facing significant life events can rely on assistance and support from those within a counseling role to help them gain new perspective on and appropriately process situations in order to successfully respond to change.

Schlossberg defines a transition as an "event or nonevent resulting in change" (pp. 43). When attempting to help others effectively deal with events resulting in change, she considers the transition itself, the coping resources available, and the transition process within her model. With each transition the type, context, and impact are considered.

Transition Types

Determining the type of transition that a person is dealing with is the first step in determining how to assist adults in transition. The event may be been something anticipated

through normative life development such as a graduation or marriage, unanticipated such as a car accident or layoff, a chronic hassle such as caring for a sick child or conflict with a coworker, and a nonevent which was expected but never occurred such as going to college or having a child.

Transition Context – relationship to transition and setting

To continue understanding the transition, the relationship of the person to the transition must be considered as well as the setting of the transition. The transitional event can be personal such an illness, interpersonal such as a disagreement at work, or within the community on a larger scale. Transitions can occur within the self, such as a change in identity, or with family, friends, work, or economics.

Transition Impact

The most important aspect of any transition is not the type or the context but rather the impact has on the person. A job change may involve moving to a new state, an illness may involve the loss of physical abilities and change in identity.

Transition Process – assimilation and appraisal

How a person reacts to the transition over time and assesses it within the context of his lifelong story is considered the transition process. Assimilation to the transition can involve several stages of ranging emotions from sadness, anger, bitterness, to shock, disbelief or confusion. When some form of resolution and acceptance is finally reached, a person may then be able to appraise where the transition fits into the bigger picture. Understanding a person's appraisal of an event is the primary way to assess how a person is coping with the transition.

Key points that Schlossberg made are that events often trigger more events, resulting in sometimes overwhelming amounts of transition at one time, and that transitions have no end

point and continue to have lasting effects with continuous need for assimilation and appraisal. Although Schlossberg's theory was first used as a way for counselors to assist adults in transition (Schlossberg, 1984; 1989; Schlossberg & Leibowitz, 1980; Schlossberg & Robinson, 1996), it has found its way into the college setting (Schlossberg, Lynch & Chickering, 1989), specifically in helping to understand how students traveling abroad can use it to interpret how critical incidents affect their development and identity.

Since events commonly arise as crises or experiences that challenge expectation, applying Schlossberg's approach to understanding transitions is well placed in settings abroad. Arthur (2001) used it in a short-term travel to Vietnam to understand student response and adjustment to critical incidents and cross-cultural transition. This study found that these factors contribute more to predicting how students adjust than the commonly accepted U-shaped model of culture shock. Studies such as this and others applied transitions theory to give meaning to the new lens students create while assimilating to transitions and appraising their newly acquired outlook on the world and their role within it (Volet & Jones, 2012).

Arthur (2000; 2002) wrote about the importance of preparing students both domestic and international for their coming experiences in the workplace, which expects more and more for employees to effectively work alongside others with different backgrounds or cultures. By applying Schlossberg's (1984) transitions theory to students undergoing such transitions, Arthur (2002) made the case that transitions can greatly shape and shift a person's world view, and that guidance through these transitions should be of high importance to college educators.

In attempting to apply the transitions model to international student development given their immense amount of changes and events they encounter when studying long term in a country away from home, Kim (2012) suggested that Schlossberg's theory is a practical start, but

a more complex theoretical model may be needed in order to adequately include all possible stages of international student identity development given the additional levels of transition points they encounter by leaving home. For now, the theory informs understanding domestic student transitions and is a basic start to understanding international student transitions, which can be utilized by practitioners to assist students through their key transition points.

Mentoring and Sanford's Model of Challenge and Support

In the world of teaching and learning, Laurent A. Daloz (1986; 1999) has made a name for himself with acclaimed published works on mentoring using the ideals of challenge and support, an approach which served as a key intervention in this study, although not specifically used as a lens for data analysis. Taking the root of the meaning back to Greek mythology, Mentor was the person who Odysseus entrusted with the education and guidance of his son, Telemachus, during his travels to faraway lands (Roberts, 1999). At first consideration, mentorship has been seen by education and pedagogy as different than teaching. Whereas teaching is traditionally limited to an academic and classroom environment, the idea of mentoring is found in any pocket of life from education to coaching to career development. Authors of mentoring works agree that an exact definition of what a mentor is has been difficult to reach. Some hold steadfast to an attempted, exclusive definition, while others have accepted that a definition is created in the eye of the user.

For instance, Sambujak & Marusic (2009) insist that "mentoring is a dyadic relationship between a more experienced or senior person and a less experienced or junior person (pg. 2591)" that is ongoing and intimate in nature rather than short-term and "should not be confused with peer support, tutoring teaching, coaching, supervising, advising, counseling, sponsoring, role

modeling, or preceptoring (pg. 2591).” Daloz’s (1986; 1999) use of challenge and support openly blended the teaching and mentoring world, so for the purposes of this study, mentorship will not be defined any more loosely than an attempt for one person to teach, guide, or impart wisdom upon another along one’s path of development. The point of these authors’ works was to assist those who found themselves in roles where offering guidance to others was paramount to their work and personal satisfaction, and so limiting users of his model restrictive definitions would be far from the intended goal.

Sanford’s (1962; 1966) model of challenge and support integrated three factors: challenge, support, and readiness. With too much challenge, a student may become overwhelmed and give up with feelings of failure; with too much support, a student will only experience dependency and never truly learn critical skills for growth and development. Challenge and support work in tandem with each other, with growth functioning between the two as the ultimate goal. The third factor, readiness, is one that is important to evaluate before deciding what words, treatment, or guidance to offer a student. Correctly assessing a student’s readiness can mean the difference between successes and failures for the student, both small and large. While the allowance of some failure creates optimal learning experiences, too much can certainly end the journey altogether with onset of anxiety or quitting (Hunter, 2008).

Student readiness is an extremely important factor that must be considered by international educators, particularly when taking into account the many stressors and challenges that come with the very nature of travel and being immersed in a strange land with foreign culture (Ward, 2001). In fact, failure to exercise due diligence in assessing student readiness to encounter cross-cultural experiences is truly a matter of poor ethics. The goal of such travel is to enable benefits for the student to expand their horizons, not to set the stage for depression,

anxiety, isolation, or other form of impairment (Savicki, Cooley, & Donnelly, 2008; Savicki & Selby, 2008). In the best case scenario, a student that is simply not ready to embark on such a potentially life-altering journey can merely retreat into some form of the familiar while abroad, such as choosing Western foods or being surrounded by those with similar language or cultural values, essentially missing out on the entire experience (Hunter, 2008).

Understanding and measuring student readiness are the focus of many theories of intercultural adjustment. These include but are not limited to culture shock theory (Oberg, 1960), anxiety/uncertainty management theory (Gudykunst, 1995), and the culture-learning approach (Ward, 2001). With emotional regularity and critical thinking as a forefront of its creation, the Intercultural Adjustment Potential Scale (ICAPS) (Matsumoto et al., 2001) is a popular tool used in study abroad research, along with Bennett's (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, which is helpful when balancing optimal learning with stressful contexts (Bennett, 2008; Savicki, Binder & Heller, 2008).

For decades now, international educators who have adopted the challenge and support approach use it as a means of intentional intervention to promote student learning abroad. In 1984, Kauffman & Kuh applied Sanford's (1966) and other theorists' perspectives of emotional, social, and intellectual development (Perry, 1970; Piaget, 1969) to their study on the impact of study abroad. They concluded their study with debriefing interviews after course return facilitated additional growth, as they did not realize the continued potential role of challenge and support even after student return until after the interviews were completed, so the authors admitted there was no way to have measured this assumption. Vande Berge (2008) incorporated in the use of cultural mentors to guide students in the Georgetown Consortium Study, separating the class into groups, where Group 1 had built-in assignments to get students out of their comfort

zones and integrated with the host culture, while Group 2 decided for themselves if they wanted to venture out on any similar outings. This group required more training and preparation on the part of the faculty as far as intercultural education was concerned, but through this, Group 1 also received more pointed facilitation on unraveling their intercultural experiences through critical thinking and reflection (Pedersen, 2010).

Although Kuh's (2005) writing of "Student Engagement in the First Year of College" was not directed at study abroad, he urged all educators, faculty and professional staff alike, to take a concerted, hands-on approach to challenging and supporting students because, "student success is everybody's business (pg. 87)," which supports the claim of international educators that we cannot just leave the role of student learning and success to chance. Instead, as authors Fried and Associates (2012), Savicki (2008), and Vande Berg, Paige and Lou (2012) pleaded, something must be done to make certain student success happens through intentionality during study abroad experiences.

Supporting and developing students along their college and study abroad journeys is no small task, and those stepping up to the challenge must face it with full commitment toward student learning and success. If the role of higher education is to create more well-prepared citizens for the world ahead, and in turn, create a stronger democracy (Arrue, 2008; Dewey, 1916; Fried 2011), many argue there should be no reason that the academy should harbor the strict distinction that academic affairs and student affairs play in students' lives, and study abroad can serve as the ideal vehicle to combine efforts. If students are so wise to realize that both contribute to overall learning, achievement, and personal growth, why then, shouldn't we?

Perhaps the words of Victor Savicki (2008b) best describes a desired outcome of this study:

> As more students elect to study abroad, and as some programs shorten the duration of student sojourns, international educators will need to become more efficient at teaching, training, and coaching the skills and knowledge that yield the greatest positive outcomes for students. Study abroad programs that harness experiential and affective approaches will move more deliberately toward the goal of attaining program outcomes by design instead of chance. (p. 90)

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that was applied for this study was William Perry's (1970) intellectual development theory coupled with David Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory, and Schlossberg's (1984) Transitions Theory. These three theories of student development were used as a lens by which to explore student learning during a study abroad course with an international service-learning component. Kolb's Learning Styles Inventory (LSI) and Clifton's StrengsthFinder (CSF) were administered to students prior to departure, who were guided through critical thinking and reflection activities throughout the course, during which a deeper understanding of the self and environment as students interacted within their learning space to develop their individual strengths, learning styles, and intellectual development. Since instructors played an active role in the research as a function of the course, Sanford's (1962) mentoring model of challenge and support was actively applied to all student interactions during the study as an intentional intervention.

Within Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (1984) are four distinct positions which create a cyclical pattern: active experimentation, concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization. The service-learning projects and daily interactions accounted for the

first two positions in the cycle, while students retreated to their own thoughts for the last two positions, giving an opportunity for students to draw upon their own memories of past events to help interpret present scenarios, as in Schlossberg's (1984) Transitions Theory. At all points, faculty in the course were able to interact with the student with both challenge and support to help facilitate learning, personal growth, and intellectual development, according to Perry's (1970) Theory of Intellectual Development. With each opportunity to both act within and reflect upon activities in the environment, students were able to make strides toward higher level knowledge acquisition, thinking, and understanding, ultimately making upward progress in a sort of spiral effect toward increased learning, personal growth, and intellectual development.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore student learning and experience during a short-term, faculty-led study abroad course through a student development lens. As we face the universal push for increased participation in study abroad, and students are finding more and more motivations to pursue short-term options, the need to explore effective methods of facilitating critical thought, active reflection, and a deeper understanding of course material and eventual intellectual growth and personal development is absolutely necessary. Regardless of course topic, students on faculty-led, short-term study abroad courses should be aided in the process of journeying through the experiential learning process to add the most value to their personal experience.

Research Questions

This study attempted to shed light on the following research questions:

1) What are self-perceived and observed learning experiences of students enrolled in a faculty-led, short-term student abroad course?

2) How does student affairs theory inform and enhance the learning experience of these students?

Why a Qualitative Approach?

A qualitative approach is the ideal methodology to delve deeper into a topic about which quantitative data already exist, but cannot fully answer the question of "why?" Unlike quantitative research, qualitative methods allow researchers to explore more about a human

problem or social condition (Creswell, 2009). Its rich ability to inform researchers more about the breadcrumb trail that quantitative research may create allows a fuller picture to be discovered on a given topic (Merriam, 2009).

In the case of study abroad, many studies have been conducted by quantitatively documenting its effects on academic rigor, retention, duration differences, language acquisition, intercultural competence, and other areas (Vande Berg, Paige, Lou, 2012). However, those employing qualitative methods in the study abroad realm are now trying to explore more about specific program design, interventions, and how they may elicit and track a deeper account of exactly what students go through, how perceptions are made, changed, and interpreted, how participants negotiate decision making and problem solving, and countless other aspects. What has been assumed about study abroad during its history of can no longer remain an assumption. Not only do educators need to know what students are gaining from a study abroad experience, they need to know exactly what types of interventions facilitate such growth, and how to do it in a short amount of time, given the trend of choosing short-term options over longer options.

For qualitative researchers, the approach of inquiry is an avenue that can reveal answers to the types of questions constituents such as government, accrediting bodies, donors, parents, and students ask about study abroad outcomes. As Glesne (2011) put it, “the act of listening can be, in itself, a radical action (pp. 24).” Too often, the tendency to act without thinking or to keep moving forward without necessarily knowing the right direction is the way in which the world functions. If the simple act of listening and analyzing is something that is missing in order to make more informed decisions in the future, then a radical act is what is called for.

Understanding what students are learning during meaningful experiences can be best understood through Lewin’s cycle of discovery, intervention, and evaluation (Bryant, 1996) and

Paolo Freire's (1970) idea of praxis, or transformation, that occurs as learners participate in an ongoing cycle of reflecting, acting on one's insights from reflection, then critically reflecting again on that action. Thus, praxis can serve as the starting point for possible social change (Hunter, 2008).

Working collaboratively within groups to perform an action, then reflecting on those actions to change future actions leads to progress in larger social change (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, & Maguire, 2003) and also improves meaningful relationships between groups (Lewin, 1946).

The main focus of the course, *Global Leadership through Service,* was for students to learn more about social change and how to play an effective role in bringing about social change. The international setting and serving communities through need-based projects was an optimal setting to apply action research. Each encounter that students faced was an opportunity to play an active role in the group projects and goals, while each reflective moment, conversation, or journal entry provided the opportunity to critically reflect on the action and improve future actions of students' praxis. Since the design of a faculty-led course created the close proximity for students and faculty to interact, rich opportunity to guide students' thought processes was ever present. Likewise, being able to interact with project partners who are based in China provided the students in the course the ability to ask questions and gain insider perspective on social issues they may not have fully grasped.

Research Site

Global Leadership through Service was a short-term study abroad course from the University of North Texas (UNT) in which students learned the components of global

citizenship, social problems, social change, and becoming social change agents. Any assigned community or project held the potential to build a service-learning linkage into the curriculum for the course. A local non-governmental organization, NOAH International, served as the course partner because they have worked to build standing relationships with host communities and discussed potential needs that could be aided by short-term service projects. NOAH International focuses on providing applicable or technical education to the working class so that upward mobility within job classifications or pay scale might be possible. Since one of NOAH International's tenets focuses on educational needs of community citizens, community service projects for the course included tasks such as teaching English as a second language with a special focus on pronunciation, and educating about the importance of clean water for health safety by installing and demonstrating proper use of water filters.

The course took place during a five-week Summer I term, and students traveled to China, specifically to Kunming and nearby rural villages within the Yunnan Province. Rural villages and remote smaller cities are typically populated with minority group inhabitants. China's ethnic groups are comprised of 56 different ethnicities, of which 91% are of the Han group, who typically live in larger, developed cities found in the Eastern or central areas of the country. The remaining 55 ethnic minorities who make up about 9% of China's total population typically inhabit smaller cities and rural areas. The Yunnan Province, which is located in the Southwest region of China, is almost completely comprised of a variety of ethnic minorities (Illuminant, 2012).

These demographics were of particular importance to the course because differences in social stratification can create a disproportional amount of resources for a population as well as societal problems. UNT students were able to see first-hand how inhabitants of developing areas

of a country experience lower levels of income, resources, or opportunity and in turn, use lessons from the course to understand their role in creating positive social change. Moreover, they were able to critically consider how the need for positive social change varies between regions, groups of people or cultures. What might be a positive social change for one group may not be of interest or value to another, but this cannot be found out without first taking the time to listen and understand the needs of a particular community (Stoecker & Tryon, 2009).

An additional partnership with a local university gave the UNT students the ability to pair up with students of the Yunnan University of Finance and Economics (YUFE) throughout the duration of the service-learning portion of our course. The community relationships that had been established over time by NOAH International served to identify appropriate community needs, and a short-term project suitable for the two student groups saved the university students time on the ground and allowed the service projects to begin soon after arrival with a short training period. UNT and YUFE students were able to travel to daily service sites, share meals, carry out service projects together, and discuss course topics within class time. Though the YUFE students were participating for different reasons and were not receiving course credit through their university, the goals of the project were the same, and through the pairings each university's students were given the unique opportunity to get to know students from another country on a personal level, both formally and informally. Volunteerism is not a widespread practice for Chinese university students, nor is the opportunity to get to know American students and practice their English with native speakers, so there was a bit of competition for YUFE students who wished to participate in the program simply because it was seen as a novel opportunity.

Additionally, since YUFE is in the Yunnan Province, an area heavily inhabited by ethnic minorities of China, students enrolled in area universities are typically also of ethnic minority groups. The University of North Texas is also heavily diverse and attracts students of minority groups and various backgrounds across the United States. Conversations between both universities' students provided a unique ground for discussion over possible similar perspectives regarding socioeconomic status, how national economic structure creates social stratification, individual opportunity, equality, and positive social change.

Astin and Astin (1996) described social change as a model through which an individual with a certain level of passion and commitment towards solving an identified social problem unites with others with similar ideals in order to impact a larger group of individuals, the community, who are affected by the social problem. Since its inception, the social change model has been applied to various leadership training models in hopes of empowering educated individuals to tackle social problems with thoughtful and innovative solutions (Cress, Collier & Reitenauer, 2013; Komives & Wagner, 2009). The design of this course allowed students to identify social problems within communities of the course site and provide a service for the communities so that they may be better equipped to do the same after the course regarding social issues that are important to them.

Sample

The UNT program was marketed throughout the year to all students as one of many summer short-term, faculty-led study abroad courses at campus study abroad fairs and on the UNT Study Abroad website. Information was also sent to students who have held a role as a peer mentor or another leadership position in a student organization, or who were interested in

volunteerism, community engagement or service-learning. Ideally, a genuine interest in service and prior experience with international travel is helpful, but from a student development perspective and a potential ratio of one faculty member per six students, any student at any stage of the developmental process was welcomed. Also, this course was interdisciplinary in nature, so student of all colleges and majors were encouraged to apply so that a healthy blend of disciplines and student perspectives could engage in critical discourse on how social change agency is applicable in any field.

For the most part, students themselves created the selection process, since there was a specific and narrow pool of students who were interested in a study abroad opportunity to participate in global leadership through service. Interviews took place simply to meet the students and get to know more about their personal interest in the course as well as past travel and service experiences in new environments, and to answer questions they may have had about the course in detail.

Based on the capacity for ground travel and lodging during stays in rural villages, the course was limited to 8-12 students, but produced only six who were able to go based on available resources, whether financial or personal. Of the six, there were five females and one male, four undergraduates and two graduate students, four Americans and two international students, one student who had never travelled internationally, and one student who had previously lived in China with some grasp of the Mandarin Chinese language. The majors of the students were photography, international studies, public administration, sociology (two students), and journalism.The study received approval from the Institutional Review Board, prior to the start of the course. Since students were not recruited specifically for the purposes of the study but rather were self-selected with interest in taking the Global Leadership through Service course,

students were informed of the study on the first day of class. Each student was given the opportunity to voluntarily choose to participate in the study and allow their course materials to be used as data as well as agree to a follow up interview after the course's completion. Students were also informed that choosing to not participate would not impact their treatment or evaluation during the course and that after signing a consent form, they could still choose to cease participation at any point for any reason.

Data Collection

Data from this course were collected by several methods including field observation, photographs, student journals, pre- and post-test material, presentation term papers, and post-course individual interviews. All data were collected during the five week course, both on campus and while abroad, with the exception of the interviews, which were conducted ten months after course completion.

Observations and Ethnography

Observations were made and noted on participants throughout each day, while photographs were taken of the daily activities of the course itself. The course lasted a total of five weeks, with one week of class meetings prior to departure and one week after return built in for presentation preparation, delivery of presentation, and a final exam. The majority of the observations were taken during the three weeks of travel abroad due to the convenience of proximity. Because I participated in this course as an engaged faculty member, I primarily served as an overt *full participant* who took field notes as time and daily activity permits in a variety of contexts such as assisting students' learning through a variety of stages in the experiential learning process, their own personal development, grasp of course content, and daily situations.

At times, I was also able to observe students from the perspective of *participant as observer* during times when students were able to informally interact among one another and engage in their own conversations and activities apart from full participation of the class activities. Two faculty members taught the course and we both kept observation and field notes on student learning, attitudes, behaviors, and overall activities through personal journaling, though I was the only person analyzing the contents of the two journals (Glesne, 2011). Students were also asked to keep their own journal, so the practice of note taking and journal keeping was not an unfamiliar concept to them, but rather something that was modeled and reinforced through faculty practice, in accordance with Bandura's (1975) theory of modeling.

Throughout the collection of observational field notes, I looked for key signs from students' words, attitudes, and behaviors that may have lent insight and perspective to the purpose of the study. Questions that guided my note taking were questions such as:

- What about the students' body language is providing information about their level of comfort in a new setting?
- When the students speak, to whom are they addressing? In what way?
- With whom do the students choose to spend their time and talk to during the service-learning projects, as well as in social situations?
- What are their verbal words saying about their beliefs and values?
- Are the students expressing personal struggle with any part of our trip, such as physical discomfort, guilt, confusion, empathy, etc. either verbally or non-verbally?
- What are the students doing that is helping them overcome and cope with any sort of physical discomfort, guilt, confusion, empathy, etc.?

- Are there any signs that they are beginning to critically analyze their own prior beliefs with new encounters or evolving in any way?
- What methods are they using to cope with their new environment and thrive in each day?

As a full participant of the course in the role of a faculty member, no attempt was made to keep information from students in that my role in their study abroad was both as a lead faculty member as well as a gatherer of data regarding their activity and learning. The students, faculty, and partners abroad were traveling, living, eating, socializing, engaging in course activity and discussion, and serving on projects together, so there was scarce opportunity to venture out without each other. Additionally, our course members did not fluently speak the major language or ethnic dialects of the host communities, so our dependency on the limited number of interpreters also forced the group to stay together most of the time. Toward the end of the course, travel to a larger city with tourist draw created the opportunity to venture out in smaller groups alone, but only for short amounts of sporadic time.

Where ethnography has historically been a goal of anthropologists to study the inner lives and behaviors of a particular culture, the ethnographic context for this study considered the experience of our student participants engaging in a study abroad setting that was completely unknown and new to each student participant (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Therefore, the natural setting of personal actions and reactions, exploring new territories and ideas as a group revealed many opportunities to observe the process of exploration and growth in each of these areas. Additional visual data were collected with photographs of Chinese people, scenery, and settings (Glesne, 2011), which were taken by students and faculty throughout the course. The use and descriptions of students' photographs will be discussed further in the following section regarding student journals.

Student Journals

As mentioned in several portions of the literature review, the process of reflection is a critical component of experiential learning, critical thinking, and intellectual growth (Kolb, 1984; Perry, 1970). Metacognition, or thinking about thinking, is also an important aspect of learning and growth, but best occurs with a devoted time and learning space in which to allow adequate processing (Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Stevens, & Cooper, 2009; Zull, 2012). Reflection has been described by Schon (1983; 1977) as applicable in two different ways: reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Reflection-in-action occurs during an event in which a person can sift through social schemas, ask questions about a scenario and also come up with answers or solutions. This allows the individual to make changes to his behavior during the activity and change the outcome as the scenario unfolds. Reflection-on-action occurs after the fact where the individual might review the scenario in his mind, asking questions about why events unfolded as they did and what changes in his behavior or the scenario in general might have led to a different outcome. Through both of these versions, the individual can use reflection in order to make changes to a scenario either in the moment or for the next opportunity that would lead to more socially acceptable or positive outcomes (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985).

Studies that have incorporated reflective practice into increasing positive outcomes are vast and included in various educational fields such as nursing education (Greenwood, 1998), the teaching and learning of science (Baird, Fensham, Gunstone & White, 2006), development of preservice teachers (Freese, 1999), learning mathematics (Wheatley, 1992), and individual's values development during study abroad (Lindsey, 2013). In each of these studies, the practice of reflection led to participants being able to make positive changes to their behavior in order to reach more highly desired outcomes. Authors Boud and Cressey (2006) have expanded upon the

act of reflection as it applies to the workplace productivity and others have focused specifically on reflection based on informal learning on the job (Ellstrom, 2006), collective reflection as a group (Bjerlov & Docherty, 2006), and reflection as it applies to intercultural competence among colleagues and clients (Friedman & Antal, 2006).

Similar to each situation where a practical application of reflection was used for positive change, the students of the course were asked to critically reflect on their encounters abroad. As it pertained to their journaling, students were able to recount activities of their reflection-in-action and what changes in behavior they were able to make, but more time for thoughtful reflection-on-action was provided through the act of journaling since they were able to think back on the incident and ask themselves questions about the encounter and what changes they could make for the next. Instructors gave instruction on how to keep journals for the purposes of this course during the first few classes on campus the week of departure. Each students' journal entry included a four part entry including a response to the class reading and discussion, a response on a StrengthsQuest or Learning Styles prompt, a personal entry on any topic, and finally an entry describing a particular scene accompanied by a photograph of the scene. For their personal entry sections, students were encouraged to give more than a simple account of their daily activities, and to recount daily encounters with a great deal of description, thought, and effort with helpful questioning prompts such as:

- Why did I react the way I did to this encounter?
- How might my actions have been interpreted or misinterpreted by my host country?
- Did my actions match my beliefs or expressed goals?
- What was I feeling during this encounter?
- What did I cause others to feel during this encounter?

- Am I happy with the outcome?
- Why did the incident occur?
- What could I have done differently to change the outcome?

Where a space to critically reflect is important to the learning process, mindfulness is another important goal of the intentional use of journaling. Mindfulness creates an awareness of what is going around outside the learner and how the learner is reacting to those surroundings in a way that slows down the reflection process so that careful consideration can be given to both perceptions and reactions (Binder, 2008), especially as it relates to growth in intercultural development (Deardorff, 2008).

Incidentally, not only does the practice of journaling play a role in reflection, clarity of thought, and critical thinking, it also allows students to physically write down their initial thoughts or reactions to a situation, and then create their own inner dialogue of discourse and eventual problem solving. In this process, they are able to tap into their own "inner mentor" that can give their own uncensored reactions a reality check and through sensible logic (Stevens & Cooper, 2009), and in turn, begin to answer their own questions. After reading their own ethnocentric interpretations of experiences, they also can become more aware of their biases and begin to question their own perspectives and develop intercultural competence and sensitivity (Arrue, 2008).

Other researchers have noted that the instant review of and response to student journals by faculty is practiced by writing back to the students regarding the content of their entries either on margins, or on the back of the last entry. Adding to the wisdom of the students' inner mentor and internal discourse, faculty bring in their expert guidance to ask critical questions, relate entries back to course content, or bring in a new perspective to the student perspective or opinion

(Durgahee, 2002; Shuttloffel, 2005; Stevens, Cooper, & Lasater, 2006). In this way, faculty actively guide their students through intentional, reflective, and critical thinking activities that are recorded so that they may even go back later to witness the evolution of their own thoughts and learning (Stevens & Cooper, 2009). The two faculty members on this trip employed this method of response to each student journal, asking thought-provoking questions regarding student entries or providing additional perspective to a given topic.

Specific journaling methods have been developed to help students analyze a new encounter by intentionally slowing down the process of coming to a raw evaluation of a scenario (Binder, 2008; Pusch & Merrill, 2008). One in particular, the Describe, Interpret, Evaluate (DIE) Method, teaches students how to write about an observation through the steps of description, interpretation, and evaluation (Bennett, Bennett & Stillings, 1977). Arrue (2008) found that when applying this method to courses, the learning curve on writing a completed DIE process often took training and time; some students failed to interpret a situation and jump to their evaluation with more of a judgmental perspective, and others only gave a step-by-step account of the observation without any further interpretation or evaluation of its deeper meaning. Therefore, during this course's first week in the home campus classroom, time was taken to train and practice writing a proper DIE journal entry using familiar campus observations. For the purposes of this course, the DIE method was used because among the developed models of journaling methods intentionally designed to reduce misinterpretations of other cultural occurrences, it remains a popular choice among study abroad faculty and programs and is easy to follow (Adams, 2008; Arrue, 2008; Bathurst & LaBrack, 2012; Binder, 2008; Chambers & Chambers, 2008; Cohen, Paige, Shively Emert, Hott, 2005; Minucci, 2008; Pusch & Merrill, 2008; Savicki, 2008b; Savicki, Adams, & Binder, 2008; Savicki, Cooley, & Donnelly, 2008).

As mentioned in the observations section, students were asked to gather visual data through photographs. For each DIE journal entry, students were asked to provide a photograph of the type of observed encounter they described, interpreted, and evaluated through their writing. In some instances this was not be possible, but any attempt to capture a visual representation of the situation was encouraged. These photographs were shared later in the students' final presentation, and also used for data analysis in the study. When students attempted to describe, interpret, and evaluate an incident in their writing, they also captured a visual representation of the scene described by the DIE entry, which added to the collection of data. The visual aid can also help outsiders who may be interested in the course outcomes to understand more about the complex encounters and how they were interpreted by the students.

For the last journal entry for the course, students were prompted to give a course evaluation on the many components of the course design, including the orientation and pre-departure, preparatory classes, their journaling assignments and faculty feedback, their assigned Chinese university peers, the service projects, assigned readings, classroom discussion and activities, the Clifton StrengthsFinder and Kolb Learning Style Inventory assessments, the pre- and post-test on course content familiarity, tourist excursions, and their final presentations. Students were asked to provide their perspective of the value of each of these and whether they believed each component added value or should be removed or changed in any way for future replication of the course. This last section, though submitted like a journal entry, actually served as the course evaluation, which provided telling information about students' perspective on valuable versus non-valuable components of the course. Since it was included in their journals, which were encouraged to be written from an honest and open, personal perspective, students

were informed that this candid viewpoint was the same tone in which their personal evaluation of the course should have been written.

Interviews

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were held ten months after return from travel and completion of course. After having traveled in such close proximity with one another, building interpersonal relationships all the while, a level of rapport was built among the faculty and students in order to conduct an interview that sought to elicit the most honest responses from students (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). As a fellow insider, having been through the same travel, exposures, and experiences of the course abroad as the students, we shared common ground in order to begin delving deeper into students' perspectives. The semi-structured interview asked the same questions of all students, but also allowed students to create their own answers through examples or stories that were further explored by additional probing questions. This flexibility allowed the facilitation of a "co-creation of meaning," as Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) describe it, in that a sort of conversation was allowed to grow per interview question prompt.

Students were made aware of the intent to interview them during the course, then contacted closer to the interview time to set up a 45-minute interview per student in a faculty office on campus. All interviews were tape recorded with two different devices and transcribed into a digital document for later data analysis. Each student was monetarily compensated with $25.00 for their interview time, as this portion of data collection occurred well after the completion of their course. Interview questions are available in Appendix A.

Data Analysis Plan

All observation field notes, student journals, faculty journals, and interviews were transcribed into digital document form so that individual analysis could easily take place in one location in the same format. A complete data analysis was conducted in accordance with the research questions of the study in order to lend answers to the study's research questions:

1) What are self-perceived and observed learning experiences of students enrolled in a faculty-led, short-term student abroad course?

2) How does student affairs theory inform and enhance the learning experience of these students?

While any set of data can lend insight toward for either of the research questions, the following were expected to provide the heartiest data per respective question:

- Student journals (class content entries, personal entries, and DIE entries), pre- and post-test, term presentation paper, interviews will lend insights regarding the first research question.
- Student journals (StrengthsQuest and Learning Style entries, and personal entries), term presentation papers, and faculty observations will lend insights regarding the second question.
- Faculty responses to student journal entries, faculty observations compared to supporting student development theories will lend insights regarding the third question.

Upon reading through all the data sources, similar codes, or topical areas, were created for each data source. All data with exception of the photographs were transcribed into digital lines of text for ease when assigning a particular topical code to a specific quote or section of content. Later, these codes were combined into similar groups, or themes. For the purpose of

holistic coding, I began with open coding in order to make note of all possible topics found in the data. Later, for the purpose of this study, only codes and themes were included that held particular value to the central point of the study (Merriam, 2009). Each theme was described in the reported findings and included their own supporting evidence through student quotes, excerpts from instructors' observations, quotes from instructors' responses, excerpts from the pre- and post-tests and term presentation papers, interview quotes, and photographs taken either by students or instructors.

In order to reach triangulation, each set of data was analyzed separately, in hopes of finding similar implications from the various sources of collection. For instance, the faculty field notes on students' perceived personal growth compared to the interpretation of encounters by the students as written in their reflective journals may have revealed similarities or differences. Students' revelations noted in their reflective journals compared to their responses in their individual interview may or may not have aligned, revealing either continuity in beliefs and values or that they have not proven salient over time. However, as stated previously, similar codes and themes were found across several data sets, which added to the strength of each finding.

Once codes were grouped into themes that demonstrated answers towards the purpose of the study, data from the various sources was gathered to demonstrate evidence supporting each theme. This was from such data as general observations in the field notes, direct quotes from students, a photograph demonstrating a complex scenario, or responses from an interview. Once gathered into thematic groups, data were assessed using qualitative content analysis (Merriam, 2009).

Data were reviewed, organized, and analyzed using the conceptual framework of the study, pinpointing supportive evidence of growth in Perry's Intellectual Development (1970), Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (1984), and Schlossberg's Transitions Theory (1984). Additionally, evidence was gathered that demonstrated student's understanding and application of the two personal assessments, Clifton's StrengthsFinder (Clifton & Anderson, 2002) and Kolb's Learning Styles Inventory (1985).

Finally, transcribed data including observation field notes, student journals, final presentation papers, pre- and post-test construct exams, and photographs taken with their DIE entries and follow-up interviews were organized separately then holistically. Through the organization of the data, the researcher was able to more clearly view patterns and emerging insights (Patton, 2002) that may have previously been overlooked by the manual method of data analysis.

Validity and Reliability

Attempts to maintain integrity within validity and reliability is of extreme importance in any research, regardless of methodology, but historically, it faces the most "threats" (Campbell & Stanley, 1963) when conducted by qualitative means because data are susceptible to interpretation and biases created by the researchers themselves, leaving the data essentially unusable and of little value to other researchers interested in the same topic (Merriam, 2009). To combat this problem, Merriam (2009) offered a helpful list of eight strategies designed to maintain credibility when addressing reliability and validity issues within a study (pp. 229). Of the eight, six strategies were used in this study:

1. Triangulation – multiple data sources were used to ensure triangulation through direct quotes or observations. Two instructors kept observation field notes throughout the duration of the course though only I analyzed the various data sources (observations, field notes, student journals, photos, pre- and post-test materials, term presentations paper, and interviews) for reoccurring themes and emergent findings.
2. Member Checks – interpretation of observations and transcriptions of individual interviews were sent back to each student for review to ensure accuracy in information and correct interpretation or representation of data gathered during course. Three of the six students returned feedback after reading through the results to confirm accuracy.
3. Adequate engagement in data collection – at all possible times during the course, both on campus and while abroad and during formal and informal activity, observation field notes were gathered. Student journals were assigned every other day, and the pre- and post- construct exam and final paper both were assigned set dates in the syllabus. Although the nature of the timing of the course is relatively short in length, intense focus on data collection during the course was essential. Additionally, I conducted the follow up interviews and transcribed the data in order to keep their perspectives fresh and to make connections to their recorded experiences from the course.
4. Researcher's position or reflexivity – As stated in the student journal section of data collection, I too kept my own journal of personal reflection during the entirety of the course. The DIE method was not only useful for students as they learning to critically assess a situation before jumping to judgments or conclusions, but it was also useful

for the instructors when attempting to analyze or interpret student behavior. I was in the same position as the students, facing a foreign land and culture from the perspective of a Westerner. Although I had traveled to China and its rural villages two times prior, the extent of surprise or discomfort with some situations still came as a shock to me on some levels, and of course, the longing for something or someone familiar begins to wear on a person after a while.

5. Peer review/examination – since two instructors taught this course, but only one served as researcher for the study, interpretations of student behavior, writing, and more were discussed between the two instructors for assessment and interpretation of data. Also, after course completion the data were transcribed into a more organized setting, the findings were shared with the other instructor to gauge agreement and accuracy.
6. Rich, thick description – were included in all faculty observations, and encouraged in all student journals. If students did not provide enough account of each section of their journals, whether personal reflection, responses to prompts, or DIE descriptions, journals were returned to students to redo the attempt per entry. Each instructor entry described actual scenarios as interpreted by the instructor as well as reflection on student behavior or possible interventions that needed to be taken to resolve a situation or improve student performance.

Limitations

The limitations of this study were:

1) Students who applied for a study abroad with a service-learning component titled "Global Leadership through Service" are a self-selected sample, who likely came with common dispositions towards global-mindedness, cultural competence, leadership, and service as well as personal finances and affordability.
2) The course only allowed 8-12 students to enroll, which greatly limited the ability to gather data on a larger sample.
3) Although the curriculum and discussion were determined by the faculty of this course, daily itineraries and activities were constantly susceptible to change, as we were dependent upon host partners to arrange these details, so a level of flexibility was necessary in order to keep the course flow on target.

Delimitations

The delimitations of this study were:

1) This study was only conducted in one course at one institution in the North Texas region.
2) The qualitative nature of this study postulated that more time spent observing students would yield more recordable data; however, daily and personal decisions were made on the part of the faculty as to how much time and effort was spent per day focused on gathering such data. The hardships of being abroad in a foreign country and rural settings took personal tolls, and inevitably also affected the vigor of data collection. Also, decisions of the same sort must be made in order to allow the students personal space away from the faculty to relax and explore either among their peers or alone, depending on personal need.

Reflexivity, Researcher Role and Reciprocity

My personal love for travel and constant attempt to see something from someone else's perspective comes as a gift from my parents. As an only child of parents who truly were able to move up in social stratification by the sweat of their brow and bootstrap tugs, it was important to them to provide me with the kinds of opportunities they never had and could only dream about. I remember from an early age my mother telling me, "When you have your own family, make it a point to go on a family vacation every single year, and even if you're tight on money, go somewhere close for a shorter period of time. Just promise me you will." If I came home with a complaint about something or someone she was also quick to help me understand the situation from the other person's viewpoint, and that even when behaviors or attitudes may not make sense to me, there is still always an underlying reason if one takes the time to step out of their own shoes and into the shoes of others.

I realized at the start of graduate school that even though I had considered myself very open to diversity and differing perspectives, I had not truly embraced or accepted all cultures of the world as much as I had domestic ones. I had never really thought about the fact that "foreigners" in general made me uncomfortable to the point that I thought it was simply easier to stick with groups I knew, and leave them to the groups that they knew. I was fine with the idea of "co-existing," and accepting that we could all share the same space, but the idea of actually interacting and getting to know each other was never a thought that crossed my mind, nor was encouraged to do so by my social groups or family. In fact, it pains me to admit that my family is inherently very racist to both races within America as well as nationalities beyond our borders. Based on their comments, my conclusions are that most beliefs are not founded on much fact,

some are created out of fear, but the toughest conclusion is that they believe what they believe because they like it that way.

Admittedly, when I began to travel to other parts of the world, I did it as a Westerncentric tourist with a point and click camera, capturing scenes that I could show to those back home with stories like “can you believe that they do this,” “look at what they wear at night,” “isn’t this unreal?” The world was very “us” and “them” in my mind, though at the time I didn’t understand that even if I bore no ill will towards those I passed through the windows of my tour bus, that I wasn’t exactly contributing to the world in any sort of positive way. At the time, I traveled to fill up my knapsack of neat experiences, rather than to intentionally interact with anyone or truly learn something new from a completely different perspective, other human perspectives.

It was not until a work assignment placed me as the hall director of a building that was to become the international student hall one summer that I was forced to face this realization that I was not exactly excited about embracing other cultures so close to my own living space head-on. Through that summer, I was able to understand that love of domestic diversity I had been exposed to during various college trainings was really the same approach that could help me do the same for appreciating cultural differences that are widespread through our globe. The same tit-for-tat conversation should draw out beliefs, attitudes, practices about your own life, exchanged with the same about others. To be able to understand and respect others’ perspectives from both sides of a critical issue is a beautiful thing, and the same pattern of effort can be applied to both domestic diversity issues is the same which can apply international diversity issues, save for a political or geographical difference here and there.

Aside from the first few years of my life when my mother described me as “shy” to our family and friends, I have always been an extrovert, excited about the opportunity to meet new

people and possibly even call them my friends or at least be able to participate in common activities together. I prided myself throughout high school and college as the person who was a member of a number of social cliques rather than a solid member of just one, as many others seemed to be. I was always interested in the unique lives of everyone around me and was delighted to hear their stories and understand that even though people try their best to blend in during daily environments, the background of people's lives reveal so much more about them than one might initially think.

It is for this reason that I am a little shocked at my clear-cut attitude I so recently had when thinking about the world beyond my own country. I would never have described myself as closed minded, or allowed anyone else to, but there is just no other way to describe it. Like my family, I was fine with the way the world seemed, and I was fine with the "us and them" division. I didn't see any reason to put forth effort towards blending those lines because in my mind, the world functioned just fine with me living my life, and "they" living theirs, whomever "they" might be. Nobody move, and we'll all get along just fine.

My own reflexivity for a course like this, then, is to understand that my upbringing and motivation for traveling and interacting with other cultures may be completely different from that of others, specifically our students. However, my love for education, and the greater purpose of enlightening individuals about the world around them to the point that they feel not only personal self-worth, but also social responsibility to become a engaged citizens who care about the communities of which they call themselves members. For citizenship is not just geographical placement or a factual statement that can be found on a passport or driver's license that portrays where you live; it is the democratic participation within communities of belonging by whatever

means the community needs from voting, peacefully assembling, to cleaning up trash, volunteering, or following basic rules for the health and safety of the community.

The insider perspective I shared with the students is that we all share the common experience of being foreigners in another country far away from home with little to nothing that we find familiar or comfortable. We shared the memory of living in a highly developed region, while attempting to keep each other grounded as we live among a less developed part of a country in rural villages and small cities. Oddly enough, one wouldn't consider that simply hearing someone else speaking in a language one finds familiar could come as such a wonderful comfort, but it provided solidarity among eight complete strangers on a daily basis.

The outsider perspective that I and the other faculty leader of the course shared that is different than the students is our actual role in the course. We served as the teachers of the course and from the students' perspectives, as those who were potentially keeping or sharing important information with them at any given time. While there was never a time where information was intentionally kept from them, there seemed to be a constant sense of skepticism towards us as though we knew something that they didn't, and that perhaps every easy or difficult challenge we encountered as a foreign group of travelers was secretly just a funny test we wanted to put them through to see how they would handle it. While I would say that every situation is indeed a test of its own, they were not ones we set out to create, but by mere role differences of students to faculty, we were never fully trusted to be let into their circle to interact as equals, and perhaps should not have been.

These insider to outsider roles moved fluidly from one to the other during the course of our travel, as we encountered the need to share common perspectives and experiences as foreign travelers, yet also needing to actively challenge our students to press through the experiential

learning process, breaking down previous biases or beliefs, helping to develop them personally, holding them accountable for their actions, and facilitating critical thinking and reflective thought. Applying a student development theory of intentionally challenging and supporting our students based on particular moments in each student's daily life proved the most difficult and required a great deal of support on the part of both faculty members to keep each other on track. It is much easier by far to live in a "support only" environment where students are able to be whatever current version of themselves they have laid on the public table and to just respond with praise and support for every bit of it. On the contrary, to decide that it is the opportunistic moment to force the student to critically reconsider their actions or words takes immense effort to face a battle of sorts on the part of the faculty, and is not always appreciated by the student. In that moment, the challenger is seen as the enemy who has questioned the very being of the student, regardless of whether the intentions were to help that student see beyond his or her own perspective and perhaps even grow from what they were able to learn from the situation.

Choosing the route of challenging a student comes with the most uncertain outcomes and requires immense care for the student to even put forth the effort. Choosing the route of support almost always returns the investment with appreciation, trust, and a closer relationship. However, my opinion is that our world has become far too saturated with support, and we have abandoned challenge to our own demise. The culture of "everyone gets a trophy" and "no child left behind" were wonderfully intended, but only led to a watered down system were we have lied to the underperformers and devalued the overperformers. Ultimately, I see the route of challenging students as the road less traveled, but one that can come with immense, unimaginable accomplishments.

My hope is that through this course, students were gifted with the understanding that they are one of the many beautiful components of the world around them and understand that they play a vital role in its wellbeing and livelihood. They each are just as small in a world sense as any other human on the earth, but that each of those humans are valuable and entitled to their beliefs and ways of being. If one is worth fighting for, then all of them are. In that, education should not simply be a private good to enhance the future lives of our students, but also a public good as their personal endeavors positively affect their communities through social responsibility. Understanding that personal education and social change is a unique form of reciprocity is a natural outcome of the study abroad course curriculum that should leave the students feeling like they walked away with something more than they had before, namely a new confidence in themselves and the empowerment that the actions they take can make a significant difference, for better or for worse.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS: PART I

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore student learning and experience during a short-term, faculty-led study abroad course through a student development lens. With only a limited time immersed in the country of travel, the concern that short-term study abroad courses may not yield the same worthwhile outcomes as a longer-term option is growing, yet is the option that college students choose most readily due to restraints of time, funds, or resources. This course, *Global Leadership through Service*, utilized various interventions to attempt to reach positive gains in student learning regarding the course content as well as about personal attributes and development of the individual person.

The various data that were gathered during the five week course were students' pre- and post-assessments on course constructs, student journals, photos accompanied by DIE method journal entries, a final paper, and faculty journals. Ten months upon return from the trip, student interviews were conducted with all six of the course participants as a follow up means of understanding what lasting effects the course had on the students, their perceptions, and behaviors. Kolb's (1984) Learning Cycle Theory, Schlossberg's (1984) Transitions Theory, and Perry's (1970) Intellectual Development Theory were used as a lens to interpret student experience and learning during the course.

Introduction of Participants

Six students and two instructors participated in this study and each of their experiences were captured through the various data. A brief description is provided of each student

participant and instructor as an introduction to the quotes or information that are shared about their experiences throughout the chapter:

Ashton – A Caucasian, female, sophomore photography major chose to embark on this journey as her first international experience because while the rest of her family had traveled extensively, she had never done so herself, and wanted to see more of the world and its cultural to broaden her perspective and improve her art.

Dominic – A senior male, Mexican international student who considered himself far removed from the life he left in Mexico chose to take this course to China to improve his perspective as a manager at work and as a last opportunity to study abroad or travel before becoming a father.

Evie – A Caucasian, female, senior international studies major with ESL concentration who had originally focused on Latin America as her area of concentration but chose to travel to China after her father was diagnosed with cancer as a tribute to him and his own missed opportunity to travel to China earlier in life.

Isobel – A female, Iranian international student in her second year of a master's in journalism had recently moved to the United States just nine months prior to the course's departure chose to go to China to learn about a culture that was very different from Iran and the US.

Leslie – An African-American female, in her second year of a master's program in sociology, chose to take the course because of the service component, which she found to be a personal calling of hers that mirrored her academic concentration on developing countries. She had previously traveled to Kenya on a similar trip but with a religious focus.

Yessica – A Caucasian, female, senior sociology major who was raised by a Christian mother and Jewish father as missionaries in rural China considers herself an activist of humanity efforts and was excited about the opportunity to travel back to China with the purpose of learning more about global leadership through service.

Instructor 1 – A Hispanic female, working in student affairs with a master's degree in higher education and currently nearing the end of a Ph.D. program within the same field. She previously taught this course in China as well as accompanied a study abroad course to Costa Rica and led service-learning non-credit trips to New York City and San Antonio, TX.

Instructor 2 – A Vietnamese-American female with a Ph.D. in higher education who works in an office for multicultural student services and works closely with several student organizations as a staff advisor. She taught this course the previous summer, and serves as a lecturer within the higher education department.

Themes

Three main themes emerged from this study, (a) Change in beliefs, perception, or behavior, (b), Personal development of individual and understanding of others, and (c),Difficulty in sharing stories of transformative experiences abroad. The first section of results will be included within this chapter, and the results of the last two sections will be included in the following chapter For each theme, analysis of data supporting the theme is shared including direct quotes or photographs from the students and instructors.

1. Changes in Beliefs, Perspectives, and Behaviors

Whether or not students encountered new, unfamiliar situations or built new, unexpected friendships, their perspectives were broadened by what they experienced during the course,

which constantly challenged any personal beliefs or perspectives they may have held prior to departure. Various examples of these were found in all levels of the data, which more importantly led to changes in behaviors that students hoped to make at the end of the course as well as continued changes that were still present in their daily lives ten months after the course's completion, as relayed in their individual interviews. The following subthemes that support the theme of a change in belief, perspective or behavior of the students are divided into (a) realizing that others, including fellow classmates, instructors, and those from other cultures are "not so bad after all," (b) realizing through exercises in critical thinking that "it's okay to be wrong," and (c) that learning is personal and creates unique lasting effects. "I guess they're not so bad after all."

Students consistently found themselves second-guessing the conclusions they had made about others prior to the course, but the three groups that warranted particular second looks were their classmates, instructors on the course, and people of another culture. In any case, when students classify others as a "they" who may not act, speak, or think as they do, a very obvious wall can be felt, as though uncertainty of the "other" prevents the creation of genuine relationships. On the other hand, equally obvious is the moment at which the wall no longer exists because both sides have accepted that perhaps there is something to be appreciated and respected about the way the "other" acts, speaks, and thinks. They no longer act like people who are different, they simply act as people who appreciate other people. While students later explained that they would have never considered themselves judgmental prior to the course, the amount of times they found themselves challenging their own expectations of what others are truly like during the course helped them realize that perhaps they put others in pre-labeled "boxes" a little sooner than they should in many areas of their lives, often concluding, "I guess

they're not so bad after all." The following examples of this realization are grouped by changing perspectives about classmates, instructors, and finally about people of other cultures.

Classmates: The next door "other"

Since this course took place in China and was focused on global leadership through service, one may not assume that a key area that students were challenged to alter their preset beliefs about others would include their own classmates. However, as open-minded as the students believed themselves to be by embarking on a course to China, a significant amount of conflict and misunderstanding was experienced within their group dynamic alone. Though, by revealing shared experiences from one another's past or enduring similar hardships on the trip together, the willingness to be able to empathize with each other, hear each other's stories, and treat one another with respect grew stronger after the hardships had been revealed to or experienced with one another. Getting to this point, however, seemed to be a conscious effort and choice as the students understood that the six of them would have to be together for the remainder of the course; they could choose to stay at odds, or they could choose to come to a point of mutual understanding. It was as if their short time together in a foreign country positioned itself as an unexpected yet perfect time to unveil one's most deep, emotional, and personal stories as a way to show vulnerability and carry each other's most painful burdens, which eventually allowed them to become an important part of each other's support networks.

Sharing stories

Sharing stories seemed to be a key determinant in whether students would be able to reach a point of mutual respect for one another. Students tried to quickly assess each other for whether a person would prove trustworthy of sharing a story with, and were soon ready to test the waters of steady bonds and friendships. The course began with an immediate divide between

various class members, each believing that they shared nothing in common that could build any potential friendships, and this manifested into general distrust and gossiping within the group. Although all the students were enduring the same challenges in the course such as language barriers, unfamiliar cuisine, and few opportunities to communicate with anyone back home, these shared experiences did not yield the same bonding effects as when the students became truly vulnerable with one another. Yessica shared in her journal three separate occasions of bonding with different classmates over their personal stories of painful, past hardships and through those moments built a platform for a future support network.

> It's every friend's father who has ever bought her roses, taught her how to kick a ball, said I love you every day or given her a nickname like lady bug or bear. It's knowing that my dad could but doesn't, and so many other people have fathers that don't have to but still do. So I cried with Evie because she shouldn't be losing a father, and I should have had one.
>
> We became fast friends and one night over Chinese beers we tipsily told each other our stories. He was afraid of being his father. I am still afraid that if you unzip me you'll see my father's bones. I told him about why this China trip was sometimes so hard for me. I told him about how it had been five years and sometimes I am okay and sometimes I can't keep my cheerios down because I remember his shoes or the scratchy stuff on his face.
>
> The other night was especially hard. Evie, Isobel, Ashton, and Leslie all sat in our room while we talked about trauma, past hope and what to do with all of those things. When I told them my story Isobel immediately excused herself. I found her crying in the hallway and in broken English she told me she understood and we held each other and both told each other how sorry we were that we knew, that we understood, that we'd been there.

Creation of support groups

Through the sharing of stories, students began to show loyalty to one another and show support for each other whether by looking out for the best interests of others, being aware of the feelings of others in certain scenarios or offering encouragement at key moments of uncertainty.

> Evie: I'm thankful for my classmates because Yessica has been a wonderful sounding board for whatever is on my mind, Leslie has been a great quiet time partner, and Ashton has made me laugh more times than I can count.

> Isobel: However, I really like my little cute doll from yesterday because it reminds me how much my new friends care about me and my feelings. They wanted to make me happy and I am glad that I could have the opportunity to be among them.

Although my co-instructor and I were constantly observing the students to determine how they were faring or getting along with each other, we did not always know what may have happened overnight in order to create such a difference within the team. At some points we felt as though nothing would ever bring them together, and others we felt as though nothing could tear them apart. Even though we offered advisement occasionally to students who sought us out regarding conflict within the group, the resulting bonds seemed to be nothing of what we did in particular, but rather the work they put forth on their own to understand each other's perspectives after a considerable amount of time spent discrediting each other's behaviors or perspectives. The following excerpts were taken from our own instructor's journals during observations of the students which relay an ebb and flow of conflict and comradery that occurred between the students during various points of the course.

> They seem to be trying to get along with each other because I think they realize they are all they have, but I also sense that at many opportunities they get snarky/catty with each other and exchange glares, snickers, eye rolls or comments. The weird thing is they don't seem to care who they gossip with. Even if it with someone they were just talking about earlier. The sense of belonging with commiseration overrides any sense of loyalty to any one person in particular. I feel like the gamut of righteousness between the group is vast. [gamut of righteousness, meaning that every student felt that their level of knowledge coming into the course was at a higher, more sophisticated level than their peers in a particular area]

> Yessica became even angrier and I could hear her barking across the courtyard. "Stop filming!" Every time someone would say "Isobel" it was full of hostility because of her naivety and lollygagging. The students seemed to work things out on their own. I am unsure of the specifics but somehow they bonded on hardships from their past. Greater consideration for one another was created. By the time we could address the issue with the whole class it seemed like a moot point. They were all ok with her filming. I was so confused. It was if they hadn't had the conflict and disagreement then they wouldn't have bonded as well. It's been four days since we talked about Isobel's filming and I haven't heard one single thing about it from the students.

> So anyway, they found this out Friday night and stored up their anger all Saturday and most of Sunday and finally we came to class to find them chatting/sitting together before class started! Afterwards I quickly asked if they were ok and she nodded yes. Thank god!
>
> I'm uncomfortable in Beijing. It doesn't feel safe to me. Then to compound my gut fears Isobel is harassed and groped in front of our hotel. How do we make sure she is mentally ok? Dominic takes a protective role for the rest of the night. No one can leave his sight unless going to their rooms. (instructor journals)

Instructors: The position of authority "other"

As much as the students understood that an island program meant they were under close watch for academic performance and activities at all times, it took them a while to understand just how closely we were paying attention to their all other aspects of their lives as well. Through daily observations and note keeping, we recorded their behaviors and interactions with each other as well as how they were doing in general. Being able to approach students with any form of feedback whether in attempt to curb behavior or performance or simply to offer praise or encouragement, we also chose to share small bits of our own stories with the students as well. This initially caused confusion for the students in that they had never before embarked on such a course or journey with an instructor whose role was more than simply teaching.

> Evie: I think that it was really hard to know the line because in a regular classroom the professor is the professor, and you respect everything and there's like a wall at the front of the classroom, because that's where they are and this is where the student is. And on the trip, it's not like that because you're living in the room above me, and we're together from 8am to midnight every single day for weeks, so knowing the boundaries was really a hard line for me to find and switch when we were in class and needing to bring the proper respect to the table and then being outside of class and knowing it's okay if I joke around a little bit. (interview)

Just as mutual respect was earned through the sharing of stories and revealing vulnerability, we also tried to participate in class discussions which often posed deeply reflective and personal questions of the students. During one class the question was posed, "What made you uncomfortable about today's service project, and why do you think it made you

uncomfortable." In the mix of students' answers, I offered my extreme discomfort with bad smells and how it often impeded my ability to love or care about people, for which I felt guilt because of my privilege. It was an unexpected moment, I teared up a bit through my honest account of the discomfort with the service project, then let another student answer. Some students wrote about that moment in their journals as though it was something astonishing to witness – a professor showing students emotion.

> Isobel: Our gathering on the grass was eye opening. I did not expect Hope to have an emotional moment when she was talking about her feeling toward herself. When she said she felt guilty as she couldn't tolerate smell of orphans in the school, her struggle to overcome her sensitivity about odor was something that I did not expect. When Hope was sharing her story and trying not to show her emotions to us while tears were coming down her face, I was thinking how I would feel if I was Hope. It is really appreciable that there are some people come out of their comfort zone try to adapt themselves to difficult situation of others and bring change. I brought Hope as an example because it happened very recently while I see all of the team exhibiting the same behavior.

When seeking to understand more about how students perceived our roles on the course during the follow up interviews, they each offered a list of various hats they believed we wore and why those roles were necessary at different times.

> Yessica: The trip itself was hard because it wasn't just a study abroad trip, we were also volunteering and we were also learning a lot and reading a lot at a fast pace. I've never been in an environment with a professor before where we traveled under high-stress conditions. I think because not only were you guys our leaders, teachers, and friends, and throughout parts of the trip, I needed you to be those things too, whereas with professors in normal situations, I just need them to be my professor. I just need them to give me the material that makes sense so I can learn, but in this situation I and others needed you guys to be friends too.

> Evie: I think y'all had to wear a lot of hats. Professors, nurse, lending an ear for rants, mediator, to encourage us, put us in line with discipline a little bit, to push us out of our comfort zone, to be honest, tour guide, leader of the asylum and I think that pretty much covers all of them. They changed every day.

Interestingly, although this island program was different from other traditional courses, and presumably in no other course would there warrant a need for instructors to wear multiple

hats, however, Ashton shares how this course helped her understand that faculty are merely people who also make mistakes or don't have all the answers all the time. Learning this caused her to take more ownership and responsibility for questioning more for answers she is seeking and also for her own problem solving as well as to approach other faculty with more ease:

> Ashton: Y'all became a lot more human, which is both good and bad at times. It's like when you see your parents for the first time as people who have faults, feelings, and reactions. I was going in expecting y'all to have all the answers, or y'all to be able to really be a definitive guide, which is impossible to expect now that I know what China is like unless you lived or worked there. In a perfect world, the teacher has all the answers and they have control of the situation because I've always seen teachers as a very authoritative figure, so I've never really been one to talk back to a teacher because they knew more than me, they had more power than me, they deserved more respect than me. Since they knew the answers, they had the power and the final say, and that's not how it was in China. I think I problem solve a lot more for myself now rather than looking to others for answers, and I see my professors a lot more as humans who can make mistakes. It used to be a big deal if an "adult" make a mistake, and now it's not so much, and I think it's been a lot easier to communicate with a lot more of my professors now because they're not this "all powerful" person. It's a lot easier to talk to somebody who you also know makes mistakes. (interview)

People of other cultures: The absolute "other"

Because the course design allowed for students to pair with another Chinese student from our partner institution, students spent a significant amount of time with their partners whether eating meals together, preparing their English lessons, actively participating in the service project, engaging in cultural lessons, or exploring the town's shops and eateries. Each day provided the opportunity for students to learn about Chinese culture through the lives of their partners. Students explained that prior to the trip they only expected their Chinese partners to stiffly perform the service projects with them, or possibly show them around campus, but what they found instead was completely unexpected and took them by surprise which occurred simply by experiencing encounters with the Chinese partners and forming meaningful bonds.

Encountering the absolute "other"

Before ever being able to meet their Chinese partners, students first described what it was like to be in China and compare what they were seeing to how life in China is portrayed through the media or television. Where the expected masses of crowds, they found beautiful landscapes, and where they expected deplorable poverty, they found brightly lit shopping centers and apartment buildings.

> Leslie: When we went shopping in downtown Kunming and we went shopping that day, it was like, "Wow! This is like New York!" And let's be honest, a lot of Americans have this mentality that no country is better than ours because we have everything that is so great and so wonderful, and then you go to another country and it lets you come out of this box. There was a building that was all lit up like a TV, just things that just naturally you wouldn't expect to see because you're just expecting China to be a developing country in need of a lot of help, and then you get there it's nothing like on TV where it's always highlighting the poverty. (interview)

As students spent time with their Chinese partners, they began to ask questions about Chinese culture, and their partners were happy to oblige by sharing their lives with our students and inviting them to partake in meals and leisurely outings. Where they initially did not expect their relationships with their Chinese partners to result in more than stiff partnerships in the classroom or during the service project, they were astonished at how kind, friendly and welcoming their Chinese partners were as well as how much they really did have in common. We soon began to hear daily complaints about how the students wanted more free time so they could go be with their partners. Daily behaviors they would have found out of the ordinary before, such as using an umbrella in the sun, linking arms with classmates to walk across campus, enjoying a boba tea between classes, or starting a morning with group exercise drills, they soon wanted to partake in just to soak in as much Chinese college life as possible. Through their journals, students recount the fun things they did with their partners each day:

> Dominic: I had a chance to explore the YUFE a bit and also got to know Eric a bit more (my partner). His actual name is Zhang Lu. His roommate's name is "James", and they are planning on taking me to the gym sometime this week which I'm stoked about.
>
> Ashton: Yesterday was the bomb.com. We got to go to our partner's cafeteria and eat with our partners, then we checked out their dorms, then played badminton and it was so much fun. James pulled like some ninja moves and would duck super-fast or jump way high in the air. He called me lazy for not going to the gym. That night we watched James' friends play the pipa. I've heard it, because it's in like every Chinese traditional song, but I had never seen them play one. Then we played karaoke where I learned that James loves Taylor Swift and Kelly Clarkson and High School Musical.
>
> Leslie: After lunch, Brooke took me to her dorm room then went walking around campus and had a great conversation in which we both learned about the other's culture. We talked about everything including marriage, kids, family, life in China, school, just to name a few. I saw where they hang out, go swimming, play badminton, where the teachers live, apartments where locals stay, etc. We then stopped for fresh mango juice before returning to campus. It was really fun.

Forming meaningful bonds

If students did not expect to truly get to know their Chinese partners very well to begin with, they certainly did not expect the array of difficult emotions that were faced by having to leave their new friends. Although only a few weeks were spent getting to know their Chinese partners, some students explained how taken aback they were that they had been able to form such meaningful bonds with people from the other side of the globe as compared to classmates from their own campus and courses whom they had known for months or years and never bothered to get to know so well. Below are entries from students' journals and final presentations regarding how deep of an impact they felt their Chinese partners had made on their lives; however, during their interviews, every single student said that they still communicated with their Chinese partners and made efforts to keep up with each other's' lives like celebrating birthdays, sharing accomplishments, and sending one another pictures.

> Isobel: Today was very emotional for all of us and was all about hugging our Chinese partners, exchanging contacts with each other, spending last hours of being in Kunming

> with them, saying goodbye and crying. We are suffering from being separated because we were so lucky that all of us had perfect Chinese matches.
>
> Dominic: I am lucky to have been partnered up with Eric and Amy. I knew I was going to have a partner coming to YUFE, but I didn't think much past that. The bond and friendship we created in only two weeks wasn't expected. I have friends in China now!

Willingness to defend new perspectives of the Chinese

The final and most important stage that students have reached in getting to know that which is an "absolute other," the Chinese, was their willingness defend their new perspective of the Chinese. Since China is a global competitor with the United States, the country and people are often portrayed in negative light by media or social commentary. No longer are the Chinese "aliens" to these students, but rather people, and even friends.

> Isobel: Our journey to China was turning the image of China from aliens to possible friends and sometimes real friends. Before the journey, Kunming was a strange and unfamiliar word for us, and now it is a completely familiar word that has implications of friendship, Dexin school, memories, and Coco, Kevin, James, Sophie, Brooke, and a lot of other friendly names. (final presentation)

In a time of global unrest and "othering" of many nations and people, Isobel comments on the risk that is run in not seeing groups of people as human. If people are simply labeled as bad, then it is easier to take their lives or freedom, but if people were to have the ability to see each other as humans who have shared emotions, it would be more difficult to engage in war or acts of violence against one another.

> When you gain the awareness that they are as emotional as you are, you don't decide bad stuff about them. You consider them human beings. Like ISIS, we are dehumanizing them in American media and Persian media because we both consider them to be enemies and we never give them voice. Of course they are doing bad stuff, but we don't know who they are. And we don't consider them human beings so we can kill them because they are not human beings. And if I go to Oman and talk to them and see that they are human beings who can love, laugh, cry, or be homesick, I can decide to not kill them because I know they are human beings. (interview)

If this sort of change in beliefs, perspective, or behaviors is what a study abroad experience is capable of producing, then what a transformation we would encounter if all individuals of all countries had the opportunity to see the world through such a lens. The wish itself would be too vast to fathom. But on a much smaller scale, and perhaps more feasible and possible is the urge to simply say something. Ashton explains that with her newfound perspective, it is much more difficult to hear negative talk about Chinese people or culture without defending a people she has come to know personally. Before the course, she neither felt confidence in her stance or information, nor the personal connection to feel such an obligation.

> Whenever China comes up in conversation, because there's a lot of tension between China and America, it's harder for me to just keep quiet, so I'll say, 'Well yeah, they're making choice I don't agree with, but as a whole, the country isn't terrible. The country is not what the government is.' I probably speak up a lot about that now. People just view China as a bad country, but it would be difficult for me to see our Chinese partners as "bad" inherently. But before the trip, I didn't have that much knowledge, politically, so it's hard to argue something that important when you don't have the right tools. I pay a lot more attention now to world events and stuff like that. (interview)

If it is an unreasonable wish for all people of the world to come to a conclusion such as Isobel's, then an acceptable option is that more students feel the need to speak up against social commentary in order to combat stereotypes or unfounded claims, such as Ashton.

By simply putting one's self in a position to learn more about other people and refrain from making predetermined judgements about others, allows a vast opportunity to create platforms of mutual respect and understanding of others. Whether the "others" at hand are classmates encountered in every day course activity, instructors who seem distant due to their positions of power and authority, or those from completely different countries or cultures than one's own, walls can be eliminated when allowing one's self to become vulnerable by sharing stories, becoming key members of each other's support networks, appreciating each other's differences, and even in coming to the defense of their new friends whenever necessary.

"It's okay to be wrong" – Use of Critical Thinking to Challenge Face Value

The use of critical thinking was an important goal throughout the course, but not one that came naturally or with ease. Again, students agreed that had they been asked if they employed critical thinking on a daily basis prior to the course, they would have said yes, but did not realize until after the course just how much critical thinking aids in the ability to see a situation deeper than surface level and even from varying perspectives. One student noted what she felt has been of key importance during her educational career is to learn the right answers, then to have the right answers, not necessarily use critical thinking to arrive at a balanced answer or one that can consist of many angles. The following sections are separated into subthemes that demonstrate the various ways in which students were able to challenge their own perspectives through instructors' responses in journals to challenge further critical thinking, by breaking down shocking cultural encounters, and by creating a lasting habit of applying critical thinking in daily life.

Challenging for further critical thinking

Each student journal included responses to topical prompts (See Appendix B) as well as an entry on any topic of personal reflection. Whether students were responding to their take on the course reading or class discussion, reflecting on the service project, or unpacking their thoughts or feelings from the day, they often attempted to make sense of their entries through wrap-up statements or newfound conclusions as a means of interpreting their encounters abroad.

It is not a comfortable feeling to be wrong or feel corrected, therefore when responding to students' journal entries, the approach we took was to ask probing questions about their conclusions in unassuming ways to open the door to new possible answers. Thus, their statements or conclusions may not necessarily be wrong, but at the very least due an additional

consideration in the case that there may be more than met the eye at first glance. Faculty responses, which were intended to probe for further reflection or critical thinking, generally took the following form (shown in italics below):

> I took a picture in the Beijing airport of a barefoot man in army uniform asleep on chairs while his large lady and the tramp suitcase sat below him. I assumed he must be poor, a former military man, and unaccustomed to proper behavior, like keeping his shoes on. I thought about the little-to-no benefits Chinese veterans receive and how lonely and silly his children's luggage looked below him.
>
> - *How are we programmed to think about masculinity? Lady + tramp ≠ manly*
> - *Why was this scene a challenge to what is normally acceptable?*
>
> I asked Matthew who has been sitting next to me why he had not begun eating. He said because the distance between lunch time and the dinner was short today and was still not hungry. I accepted him and his reason from the others, because is a 17 year old boy not yet in college who has spent some time in other countries, one of them the United States. He is not a pure Chinese.
>
> - *What is "pure" Chinese? Are you still considered a pure Iranian or not?*
>
> One thing that has been bugging me is the amount of selfies and pictures at inappropriate times, like at dinner. To me, the selfie is kind of disrespectful because it feels like it's making a commodity of this amazing thing. Selfie with this, selfie with that. The picture would be just as beautiful without you in it, and in fact you would see more of it. Plus, everyone would still believe you were there. Most of the time I don't have a problem with them; it's what our generation does, but there is a time and a place.
>
> - *The entire entry on the selfie is great and critical of your own generation. Why is the selfie so important to people? What does it do for them that a picture of a plain landscape wouldn't?*
>
> Before encountering with our Chinese partners I had a line between me as a self and Chinese as others. This thick line at the end of day became a little thinner. I found them in many ways the same as me and I did not find any significant difference in them that can separate us as self-others. This became more apparent for me especially when I talked with one of them that I cannot remember her name now but I will take her photo to add to my journal. She told me she wants to continue her education as Ph.D. student in America and she asked a lot of questions related to her goal. We talked a lot about this subject and I tried to share my information with her. She was a remnant of my days before coming to the United States. I felt sympathy with her. Another interesting point for me is how our Chinese friends struggle to connect with us…
>
> - *What did this experience teach you about the role of diversity in society?*
>
> Only in a country like America you can find people who are not amazed any more to see other cultures as they are exposed to them in routine life. However, even in America

there are still some places that suffer from lack of diversity, the same as other parts of the world that still even with this communicational revolution they are unfamiliar with the other side. To evaluate this situation I do not know yet which side I want to choose. Diversity is my favorite, as it has been and it continues to be in the future, however, diversified with western culture, would I still like to come this far to visit it or not.

- *Very good question and difficult to answer. Would this change be as meaningful if we had done a service project at home?*

Today new comers had a camera in hand took picture most of poverty and once for one the school changed to be a museum of poverty that everyone come and see it, regardless of their intention for sure, I came to the school for be more grown up, and if possible to be beneficial to students. However, I thought if every week some new comers come to the school, and before having any tangible result be replaced by another group, the school is not school anymore, it's a museum, museum of poverty or misfortune.

- *So how were you different or similar to all the other visitors who come with cameras?*

As far as I'm concerned, it's not good to create a perfect picture for a normal human being with its normal mistakes and everything to secure the power in their hand. Leaders should be judged and evaluated. If they make mistakes, which they do since they are human, they should be assessed and advised to clean up the mess.

- *I like the perspective, and it's a tough balance to strike. Right now in the US, I think we lack a bit of respect for our leaders who are trying their hardest every day yet ONLY receive endless criticism. Who would get to judge and evaluate the leader? The common people or others in power? Who decides what is a human mistake or something worse? (such as immoral?)*

For the purposes of probing for further analysis or critical inquiry over the topics at hand, the questions we posed in response to their entries had no true answers or more importantly, no right or wrong answers. They were only intended to push the student to continue down the path regarding the encounter they experienced that day and wished to toy around with a bit.

As an added note, choosing to read through student journals closely enough to be able to respond to all their thoughts or to come up with probing questions to each conclusive statement required a great deal of time. Students were required to write in their journals every other day, and during their breaks, faculty would spend evenings responding to journals, and so on. This often meant that in lieu of staying at a long, relaxing dinner, going for a walk, calling home, or socializing, our evenings and any free time was spent catching up on journals, giving each

student and each entry thorough responses and feedback. Although students did not take the time to comment on how this affected their learning or helped them achieve higher levels of critical thinking at the time, they each revealed during their interviews how being pushed to constantly think, reflect, question, and think a bit more created a habit they had not had before and further, that they each were able to apply their new habit in life after the course.

Isobel explained how although the responses she received about her entries were sometimes difficult to consider, they ultimately inspired her to ask herself the same kind of probing questions in situations after the course.

> Especially about our notebook, the notes I received from you, some of them were really inspiring, I really mean it. Whenever I was getting good feedback from my professors that my analysis on the right path, it was really good. Through my notebook, my faculty encouraged me to talk more about what I'm seeing and to analyze things so I can open a door in my mind to talk about them in other ways that maybe I didn't even want to talk about – whether about my past, or about putting everything together, analyzing them all at once. And whenever I received a note, I knew that I could go even further, because it was encouraging. It was inspiring. You pushed us hard.

Breaking down a shocking cultural encounter

An additional exercise that was used during the course was the DIE journal method (See Appendix C) where a student took a picture of a scene they found to be unfamiliar or strange. Rather than simply allowing themselves to jump to a conclusion about the scenario, they were asked to break down the scene in three different parts: to describe the scenario in factual, plain language, to interpret the scene by describing what was happening in the scene, and finally to evaluate the scene by taking into consideration some possible explanations for what was occurring in the scene. Presumably the scenarios they chose to use as their DIE exercises were not scenarios that they would have encountered had they not been in China or foreign country, therefore the exercise itself served to challenge an ethnocentric viewpoint of the world, regardless of home country or culture.

In each of the four following photographs, students captured moments which initially appalled or disturbed them, then chose to use the scenario as a DIE exercise in order to work more methodically towards an understandable explanation for the scenario than they were first prepared to accept. The first is a photograph of complimentary condoms provided at a hotel in the Pu'er village. The second photograph is of a flower shop owner's baby who defecated on the ground. The third photograph depicts bowls of live animals being sold on the ground at the market. The fourth photograph was taken at an open-air meat market and captures a recently boiled and skinned dog that was hanging from a meat hook. None of these scenes were what students were familiar with back home, and because encountering them evoked emotion, whether surprise, sadness, disgust, or curiosity, students were encouraged to work through these emotional encounters and push past any sort of conclusions that were solely based on their own ethnocentric perspectives. For instance, rather than simply concluding, "These people are gross," or "How can anyone do something so horrible," a DIE method was utilized to slowly take steps backward to better understand a well-rounded perspective of what caused the scene and why it may be acceptable if considered from a different angle.

When we first checked into this particular hotel, the first exclamations from the girls' room were heard down the hall, "Oh my god, are those condoms? What the heck?!" They immediately worried what kind of hotel or neighborhood we had booked ourselves into and questioned the cleanliness of the hotel and moral ethics of the management team. After their initial disgust, some students continued to joke about it, and most took them home to serve as a laudable souvenir and story for later.

Evie was able to evaluate this scene in the following way, considering China's one child policy, the cultural norms of sexual behavior, and comparison of education regarding sex between China and the US and even among urban versus rural areas:

> When I think about China's one child policy, the condoms make sense. Over 80% of women in China are on birth control of some form (according to the UN) so it also makes sense that men would be held accountable. It all leads me to wonder about the cultural ideas regarding sex and the public sex education. In the US, sex sells, as I'm sure it does elsewhere. In SexEd we were constantly told that the best contraceptive was to just not have sex. It really bothered adults when they would hear us discussing sex class and tell us to talk about something more appropriate. I wonder at what age they start SexEd here and what the course content consists of. The culture seems more conservative in regards to sex, but I'm not sure if that is more of a generation thing. The couples at YUFE seem

to have no problem hooking up behind the dorms. I don't think SexEd would be left up to the parents, except maybe in very rural areas. Otherwise I can't see the contraceptive percentage being so high.

The second photograph was taken in the flower market. Students had been forewarned with stories of children being outfitted with split-bottomed pants to allow for easier and quicker means of letting the child relieve itself in public areas, though they brushed it off assuming it may be an archaic practice and certainly not something they would get to – or have to – see for themselves. During a walk through a different market, however students were taken by surprise when a small child exposed his bare bottom and began urinating next to a series of carefully laid out products for sale on the ground. Jaws dropped, faces of disgust were shared, and a collective, "Gross!" was yelled. Dominic had himself come from a developing nation growing up and thought he thought nothing in China could surprise him. Though, he submitted this photograph as a DIE entry because the allowance of letting children use the restroom in public had been taken to a new level, in that a shop owner who was sitting next to her flowers balancing her baby on one knee and her lunch on the other, simply turned to lower her child to the ground to let him

defecate, then moved him back to her knee to continue eating her lunch without ever getting up from her stool or bothering to clean the baby's mess.. Through Dominic's evaluation, however, he came to understand that for children, urinating or defecating in public is an acceptable norm in China and also that the working mother had limited resources in which to tend to the baby and the shop separately among other competitive flower sellers.

> This scenario to me has been the most eye-opening one and I don't refer to this one in specific but just sanitary conditions in general. I must understand that what the mom did was normal here and had she walked away (as most of us would) to clean her baby elsewhere then her flowers would have been unattended. She simply did what is culturally and morally acceptable here and went on with her day.

The third photograph depicts a scene at an outdoor market where sellers have laid out various containers of live aquatic animals from fish and shrimp to turtles, eels, and crawfish.

Students did not say much as they walked in different directions through the markets, simply soaking in all the scenes. Later Ashton revealed through a DIE journal entry that seeing live animals for sale on the ground seemed cruel to her and questioned whether they knew they were being sold to soon die and be eaten. Then, after more consideration, she realized this practice is actually not so different from her own home country, but that by choice, she does not prefer to eat seafood, or eat at high end restaurants where fish may be specifically chosen for a meal and prepared fresh for a customer.

> Part of me thinks it's cruel to keep them in a bowl like that. That's not a fun life. No more cruel than sticking it on display maybe. The thought of buying them alive like that is less weird after I thought about our lobster restaurants. They're not that weird, and not that different. I've also never been to a fish market because fish gross me out, but I always heard that they were alive when you pick them out.

The final photograph that will be included in this section was the most difficult for students to take in. As we walked through a new section of the market, the meat section, I knew the section itself was tough to walk through since some of our students were vegetarians by

personal choice or religion. At the end of the section, this scene was so shocking to the entire group that every one of us, stopped almost dead in our tracks and were so immediately saddened that no one could find the words to say a thing. There was almost a comfort that all of us felt by being together, knowing we all carried the same sentiment: it's immoral to kill and eat pets. Slowly I noticed that about half of the group, still somber, pulled out their cameras to capture the moment so that we could all leave the dreadful meat market, and likely everyone gave their pets back home a mental hug. The fact that this was so difficult for students to witness, made us especially proud that the immediately recognized this as a "DIE moment" with which they could challenge themselves to understand a different perspective than their own. Here, Ashton reflected on her own feelings while still being able to evaluate the scene from an objective lens:

> I knew that they still eat dog. I know that it's not the same kind of dog that people keep as pets. I know all of this but it's still hard to see. I am so attached to my dog that eating one would be like cannibalism. Eating dog is something that has been happening for so long, and I've always been aware of it. No one thought it was weird or bad until Westerners came in and said so. While it may make me uncomfortable, I'm glad that he's still doing it. Why should he stop? He needs the money that the meat brings in. He's not doing anything wrong or even unheard of. Life is too short to be upset all of the time.

Although students finally were able to grasp the formula for writing up a DIE entry through the three steps of describing, interpreting, and evaluating, it took them quite a long time to understand what kind of scenes they should be looking for, how to write the three sections separately, and also to understand why they were being asked to do it. In fact, we spent the first few classes receiving a considerable amount of pushback from students who agreed that asking them to do the DIE entries was like asking them to "intentionally be judgmental when we're not at all. It's like you're asking us to look for something to judge about people." The idea that people hold their own biases and privilege close to them, usually without knowing, and contributes to the way they interpret the world and treat people within it was a concept that they

did not want to believe could be true about themselves. Instead, they wanted to believe they were above human fallacy and that they were judgement free and open to all things, people, foods, behaviors and more. What they found throughout our journey helped them see that being human simply comes with fallacies and that through reflection and critical thinking, they would be able to break through their own walls to understand more about the world and its people.

Given their progress with the DIE entries, I am grateful we did not choose to give in to their complaints and simply give up the task based on their claims that it was "too hard." Moreover, during her interview, a few students neatly described how the DIE method has had lasting effects in their lives and that they appreciated learning the new skill in the end.

> Yessica: One thing that was helpful about the DIE is that I can see something 100% with my own eyes and literally be 100% wrong about it, so it taught me not to trust myself always, but in a good way so that I would be less likely to act or jump to a conclusion and then make judgements or responses to situations because of it. In some ways that seamlessly seeped into my life and you can't just always take things for what they are.
>
> Isobel: My feeling towards China changed, and I learned that whenever I want to judge about things that I have not had any close experience with, I shouldn't be in a rush to judge them. I should gather more information on my own, not just base my beliefs on indirect information.
>
> Evie: I had a really hard time originally in the journal. I think that now in social situations or evaluating things in general, I'm quicker to identify that what I see is just one part of the situation, so it has broadened my outlook on new situations, and I'm slower to step in because we really were challenged to think "well this is my background, and this is what my automatic response is, but what is that wrong with that, or what am I missing?" I think that's the really big question.

Lasting effects of critical thinking as a habit

Not only were students able to reach new levels of critical thinking and analysis of a scenario during the course in ways they had not before, during their follow up interviews, each student was able to describe various ways they have utilized their new habit after the completion of our course whether in social situations, the workplace, or other classes. Below, students

explain in what different ways taking the time to critically think through a situation has helped them to gain a deeper, well-rounded understanding of a situation at hand.

Although Yessica still strongly considered herself an activist for human rights, she now thought twice about blindly accepting all activists as "good people with good intentions."

> I'm still 100% an activist but I realized lot of the activists I was around at home were a lot of toxic people and for legitimate reasons, since they had had really bad things happen to them. But instead of it leading to anything like positive change it just leaked out angry poison onto other people making them angry too, and then they would attack each other. So now when I meet an activist, I ask them, 'what kind of activist?' and also 'why do you want to be an activist and how do you handle things in activism?' whereas before I was a lot more like 'okay you're an activist, so you're good,' which is not the case at all; they're some of the worst people that I've met.

Evie applied critical thinking in other courses to draw her own conclusions rather than taking the text book or professors words at absolute face value.

> So it made me have to think about world events, not just saying this is what the US perspective is or Latin America's perspective, it's that being able to be in another country that is completely different than anything I've ever seen was definitely something that now when I'm reading my text books and stuff I have more to compare it to and am better able to make solid conclusions about hot or controversial topics, instead of reading that this is what it is in Latin America, so that's what it has to be. I can say I have this opinion about Mexico, but this is what happened in China, so how is that similar? It's just so much more to compare it to and so much more access instead of just the book or just the professor's opinion.

Dominic explained how he uses critical thinking to further evaluate his employee's performance and by getting to know them personally, can better assess how their talents can be used in ways to enhance workplace productivity.

> I was no longer making blind conclusions, just like 'oh they're good at what they do because they've been doing it forever,' but you know what? That guy is good at what he does and kills trailers he unloads - because he used to work at UPS; that make sense. Oh, this lady who looks like she hasn't slept in days, in fact hasn't slept in days, so it's not that she just looks like that, this lady actually works overnight, she goes to take care of her grandkids, so don't be too judgmental. If she's dragging today, you know what?

> Maybe I can move her out of the line, where she can be just as productive, but it won't be as heavy on her because she's not having to do all this extra walking. So you get to know these people in person, and make them feel like their supervisor actually knows them and appreciates their work.

If the use of critical thinking to arrive at other possible conclusions is a goal of probing and challenging students for such an outcome, the exponential and unintended effects of that outcome is that students now fee prepared to ask similar probing questions that were posed to them during the course when interacting with peers who may be relaying a one-sided conclusions without first critically thinking about the many aspects of the situation. While I was exceedingly pleased with the fact that students continued to apply the habit of critically considering new scenarios beyond face value, it was quite unexpected that the intended effect actually expanded far beyond who and what we hoped to reach through the course roster alone. In the same vein that we posed probing questions or alternative possibilities to challenge students' conclusions in their journals during the course is the same approach students took when helping others to see deeper than face value in the following scenarios.

Isobel described going to another city to help sister her move into a new apartment within a city with a high population of African-Americans. Since her sister was also an international student and had few encounters with Americans or various races/cultures within the country, she created an immediate negative conclusion about all African-Americans after one had abruptly cut them off in a traffic incident.

> After two or three bad experiences, she was really mad at them. And she was just about to create a conception about black people and their culture that day, and I told her don't be judgmental. *I used my experience to tell her that just seeing 3 or 4 people do this thing doesn't mean you can make a decision about the whole black community.* I told her about black people that I know, who are cultured, educated and helpful. I tried to analyze this situation for her, and I think I was successful because I didn't want her to have a bad picture about people that she would be in high contact with a lot. Now that she has been here for about eight months, she doesn't have that same bad feeling anymore, but that

> first week of being in America was difficult for her. We cannot base our judgments on just a few people. It's not healthy, and we need to learn it.

Yessica was, too, able to help another walk through additional possibilities as an alternative conclusion to the one he had made regarding prostitutes who had walked into a high-end restaurant in Dubai who were attempting to mingle with patrons.

> He was like upset about it and said 'these people are disgusting, awful women and I don't like being around these sorts of people,' and so we left. *I was trying to explain to him that they could be trafficked, they could be this, they could be these other things, but you're just seeing this one thing and assuming you know everything about these women's past and you have no idea.* Months later he told me he had met this woman who was Russian and had acid burns all over the side of her face. She was told she was going to get a waitressing job, but they took her passport, she had been forced to start selling herself when she was in Dubai and when she tried to escape so they burned her with acid attack. Then he admitted he was very wrong at the time and very sorry because he realized that people can also be other things outside of their current situations, so that was good.

Learning is Personal and Creates Lasting Effects

Although courses have limited scope and can only measure what can be demonstrated during a given term or within the confines of classroom walls or exam questions, the luxury of being able to follow up with students ten months after the course allowed me to learn just what sort of lasting effects the course had on their perspectives and actual habits. Exams may capture what the holistic outcomes of the course intend to impart on the students, but true learning is exceptionally personal, and what students choose to take away from a course after the final exam is uniquely meaningful and uniquely applied in their lives through constructivism interwoven with other learned information, personal histories, events, people, environment and more. Kurt Lewin's *life space* is described as the environment in which a subject encounters experiences which lead to individual behavior (Marrow, 1977). Kolb (2005) later built upon this notion to

create the idea of *learning space,* where a subject can create tangible meaning between academic content and personal growth.

Throughout the open-ended interview questions, each student was able to share an example of how what they learned in the course influenced them to adopt different habits than they would have considered before the trip. The claim that learning is personal and creates lasting effects stems from the fact that no two students took the same new habit away from what they learned in the course; they each were unique and personal yet a worthwhile development. The student's newly adopted habits are listed below range in topic from consumerism and conservation to more humanistic habits like combating bullying and allowing people grace to be themselves and become more "human."

Overconsumption of material possessions

Two students discussed the difference in how they now view their own spending habits and also the spending habits on children during holidays. Dominic explained how before the course, he figured if he worked hard, then he owed it to himself to purchase anything he wanted for himself regardless of whether he needed it or how many of that particular item he may already own. Now, he questions himself before he makes a purchase, and although has not completely altered his spending habits, has downsized considerably.

> When it comes to materialistic concerns, we're all about getting the iPhone 6 plus, but down the road… do you really need it? Do you have to have it? Is it nice to have it? Yes, I mean, everyone wants to have something nice and everyone is entitled to it if they earn it and they work for it. But do I find myself referring back to experiences that we did and things that I saw. Now when I'm about to make a purchase I think 'do I really need it? Well I already have something like that at home, so I can make it work. I really don't have to have three of these, maybe I can survive with just two.'

Leslie took a different angle because her personal passion is working with children in developing areas. In comparing their happiness to her own nieces and nephews, she questioned

what sort of items and gifts are truly needed to fulfill the needs of a child or to show them affection. In the end, and whether the purchase is necessary or has a true return on investment, and if not, she chooses to put her money elsewhere.

> I often refer back to the orphanage in Yunnan Province, and I don't know what their houses were made of, but they weren't houses; they were just some materials. So you have all these kids who live in poverty and it really makes you evaluate situations. So looking at my sister's four kids at Christmas- they're getting all these toys and stuff, and yet they're still complaining because it's not enough. There are kids who are really dealing with real issues and you're mad because you didn't get the game that you wanted? Or the $200 Jordan's? I would rather take my money and give it to a charity that's helping a child that really has a real need, because I feel like this is really helping somebody versus something that you just want or desire. It's the evaluation of whether this is really a need. Is this really necessary? And if it's not necessary, then why am I or we doing this?

Water conservation

Because one main service project in the course was to bring clean water to schools and classrooms for the children and teachers, it allowed the students to demonstrate the importance of clean water and also how to achieve it through water filtration. After seeing the water supply the schools were dependent upon before the water filters helped students to understand that clean water is a privileged commodity that should not be taken for granted or wasted. Through this, one student shared:

> All that stuff we did with the water, I never thought of that before, so now when all those commercials about saving water and electricity come out, I don't dismiss t hem immediately. I'll shut off the water and things like that. I actually drink a lot more water now, because before I drank next to no water.

Combating bullying and discrimination

Ashton explained that because she witnessed bullying between the Chinese partners who were from mainland China versus Hong Kong, the difference seemed absurd to her since they

were all Chinese. It made her realize how petty the differences are similar between people in the states who choose to discriminate each other based on race, region, religion, etc.

> I felt that it was very reflective of here too how people can be from the same place or even so similar, but also be so separated, how segregation is everywhere, and how to look for it. Especially in America, we're familiar with segregation between races, but I mean even within artists. Even photography people treat painters differently, and things like that. It makes me think a lot about how people treat each other, and how those things really shouldn't matter. It's weird to think of me treating someone from Indiana differently just because they were from Indiana or something like that. So I think it helps me stop before I do something like that and see that it's so trivial. I now see how damaging something like that can be.

Seeing homeless individuals as human

Ashton also realized that directly working with impoverished families and children in Kunming and Pu'er has altered the way she sees impoverished people in the states. Before the course it was easy for her to ignore homeless people since their lives did not ever interact, but after being closely intertwined with the children and teachers at the different schools, she cannot help but see them through a different lens.

> I was in Seattle recently, and there were a lot of homeless and impoverished people. I think because I did spend that much time in China and we were with the kids a lot, it was easier for me to not dismiss them as quickly. Because it's easy to get in your own bubble and just ignore them, so I guess it made that a lot harder, because it made them more real. They become more human and the world seems smaller.

Workplace management

Dominic explained how after the course, he has learned how to utilize a team more effectively by examining what attributes the team members bring and through appropriate delegation.

> I learned so much in that I was being hard on myself because I wanted to be the one involved in step A through Z 100% of the way. And I feel like you have to learn to manage people skills and use them in the right way, and use them in the right way to fit your puzzle together. You really have to step back and realize that even when you're the leader that doesn't mean you're the most appropriate one to do everything on a task

> because there could be someone on your team that could potentially do something better than you. That doesn't make them the leader, it just means you're smart enough to step back and let someone do it.

Giving people grace to be themselves

Yessica described her outlook before the course was to put people in designated boxes as a form of mental organization, which she later realized was a debilitating practice that did not allow for people to become more than the label that had been placed on them. She explained that people deserve the grace to be themselves and even change over time, and not be held back just because her mind refused to switch their label.

> I didn't think that I thought of people as one dimensional before the trip and was pretty open minded about letting people be who they wanted to be and giving them grace to be other things as well. But I think through my friendships and conflicts on the trip, I think that I realized that I really quickly cauterized people and put them in boxes, like this is this sort of person and this is this other sort of person and then they could never leave that box once I put them in it. Before the trip I wouldn't have thought that I box people like that in at all, and then after that moments on the trip, it forced me to have to think about how I treated people, and not necessarily how I acted to their face but also how I thought about them which affected how I treat them to their face after an encounter. So this is more of a personal change on how I view people in the world.

When considering Perry's (1970) Theory of Intellectual Development, much progress can be seen throughout the writing and experiences of each student. No longer were they consumed by black versus white views of the world as being right or wrong, us versus them, but rather they developed a perspective past dualism and in many cases past multiplicity. Not only did they move past believing that there was only one right answer, or even three different possible answers, but as many answers as a given context and moving factors allowed. As one student explained, "it's okay to be wrong," but further than that was the realization that the end point is not necessarily that there is a wrong but a plethora of contextual rights.

Reaching this end is a paramount approach that faculty took when teaching, communicating with, providing feedback for, and interacting with students on a daily basis. Where students have demonstrated the applicability of critical thinking to inform a newer, well-rounded opinion on a current situation, to be able to see a scenario from a new perspective, recognize personal development, or even to be able to consider or implement a change in behavior, progress was noted and used as a new platform for even further development.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS: PART II

2. Development of Individual and Understanding of Others

The focus on the individual and personal development was a center point of this course and study. Regardless of any location, activities, or course topic, students embarking on a study abroad experience cannot engage in transformation of any kind that does not involve change within the individual, for better or for worse. However, given the course topic, global leadership through service, a considerable about of time was spent helping students understand just how they may realize and apply their own levels of leadership on a local and global level. Even though this was included in the course description and outcomes in the syllabus, students were constantly astonished or even frustrated at how much of the focus involved them as individuals.

Regardless of the reassurance or frustration the focus on individual development created, successful outcomes were still achieved and are demonstrated in the following categories: learning about and owning personal strengths, understanding of personal limitations and acceptance of strengths of others, aiming for a personal best interpretation of the present scenario through historical event memories, and a renewed sense of self-worth. As this section is heavily focused on the self, a considerable amount of time is spent dwelling in Kolb's (1984) Reflective Observation and Abstract Conceptualization portions of the complete Learning Cycle. Additionally, drawing from Sanford's (1962) Model of Challenge and Support, faculty responses and feedback tended to demonstrate more challenge than support in pushing for further analysis and critical thinking in the previous section, whereas this section will reveal far more support from the faculty in helping students realize their qualities and attributes in the form of praise and encouragement.

Learning About and Owning Personal Strengths

Students were able to take a deep and ongoing look at their personal strengths and attributes as revealed through each of their StrengthsFinder assessment results (Appendix D). The outcomes of the assessment were used to encourage students to personally reflect on how their strengths played on in their lives, and in turn were the basis of positive affirmation that was received by other peers as well as instructors throughout the course. The exercise itself was something that seemed to be a foreign concept for students to apply in a course setting, yet proved to be a very satisfying activity which boosted students' confidence and abilities at key moments during the course.

Personal reflection of strengths

Students were asked to include a response regarding Strengths within each journal entry every other day, and toward the beginning of the course, these focused mainly on helping students understand their own strengths and how they played out in their lives on a day to day basis. Since students were new to the idea of the StrengthsFinder assessment and its terminology, a learning curve existed which took students the first week to overcome. Not only were they new to the terms, they also took a bit of time to truly see how the results of their "top 5 Strengths" might really apply to them. Some even questioned the legitimacy of the assessment and did it out of course obligation rather than having actual interest in yet another "silly self-assessment quiz."

However, once the students began to better understand how the strengths really did describe them, they began to identify examples where they played out in their lives and write about these in their journal entries.

> Evie: *Empathy* - I see this strength with my friends asking for advice. It also fits with my love language: words of encouragement. *Developer* - I really do find joy in hearing about others' experiences and learning about their passions. I think this is a strength that has really helped me with roommates. I can better connect to them through their interests, not

just our shared ones. *Includer* - I used to be part of the welcome group for new students and this skill probably helped me a lot. *Adaptability* - This one might be my new favorite. It is encouraging to know that though flexibility does not equal instability. It also helps a great deal while traveling. *Input* - I had no idea that reading for fun was a strength. While I love learning, I normally spend time learning about random things. Reddit is my favorite website and it plays directly to this because I can learn about many things in one place.

Isobel: *Learner* - I always enjoy learning new things, and I never want to lose it. *Communication* is a hobby for me. Without it the life is difficult. The man who I met in the plane from Dallas to Chicago has sent me an email already and wants to know more about Iranian culture.

Dominic: The strength I've use the most so far is this trip is *Focus* because even though I missed our last class meeting at UNT because of work, I was able to stay on track on our readings by staying awake on the plane. I've used *Restorative* when the first problem was encountered immediately at DFW airport having to deal with Isobel's over packing, but quickly resolving it and adapted to the situation.

Leslie: I agree that the five strengths have a description that I feel describes me very well. With *Belief* as a strength, I often push for changes that will benefit humankind, which are my own goals and dreams. *Futuristic* empowers me to motivate others and self when I'm feeling stressed. With Achiever, I will also go to whatever extent I need to go to in order to feel productive. This strength is what empowers me to get things done and do them well. Responsibility empowers me to take ownership in what I'm doing with commitment. Finally *Discipline* is how I am able to survive my busy life with neat and orderly routines and structure.

Once students began to understand how and where the various strengths played out in their daily behaviors, they were able to begin using a common "Strengths language" with each other when attempting to explain themselves and their preferences to one another. In this way, they began to find a way to offer a reason for why they may act a certain way in a given situation that may initially seem foreign to the other person. If a student noticed she was taking longer than others in a museum, she would say, "Sorry, I lost track of time reading the panels; I'm a *Learner*." If a student needed time away from the group to read the next chapter, he may offer, "I'm a *Focus* and really need quiet time alone to get through my chapter." Or a student may offer, "I can take the notes and organize our lesson plan for tomorrow because I'm

Responsibility." Thus, as students began to grasp their own strengths and ability to contribute to course or team goals, they began helping the rest of the group understand how they could fit into the bigger picture.

Affirmation of strengths from classmates

Towards the middle of the course, we began to shift the focus of the strengths journal prompt portion to other classmates. Students were asked to write about strengths they did not possess that were held by others in the class and how their strengths helped them get through a given day or achieve goals. In this way, students were able to understand that although they may not hold the same value in contributions or attributes, there was still value to be found. Students began to write about each other's strengths in the following ways:

> Yessica: Evie's Empathy was apparent from the first time I met her. Our first conversation quickly betrayed both Evie's large heart and her desire to act on it. The thing that I've noticed separates a lot of "feelers" versus a lot of "doers" is that they don't want tanning bed vitamin D, they want the sun. That's why I think you find so many empathetic people in non-profit work. They don't want fictional feels, they want the real deal, the passion, the purpose. I wish the world had a couple more Evies.
>
> Evie: Leslie's first strength is belief. For her it presents itself through religion. This strength is one that could be difficult to relate to, but I think this is a really admirable strength. She is strong in her morals and resolves to stay true to them. She doesn't drink or cuss, and she prays before meals.
>
> They even included our own faculty Strengths in this exercise from time to time.
>
> Isobel: Hereby I want to say thank you for solving the misunderstanding between me and Yessica in a very intelligent way. I think *Analytical* strength of Uyen and *Communication* strength of Hope are two that can be really helpful to resolve any conflict in the group. After our meeting, me and Yessica went to drink coffee and it was obvious that no matter what ever misunderstanding would arise again, now we are open to talk about it.

Affirmation from instructors

The role of granting students support as described in Sanford's (1962) Model of Challenge and Support was one that was often applied when affirming students' strengths after observing their daily activities. Supportive feedback was given to students both verbally in formal and informal settings as well as through journal responses. While students were at the cusp of understanding more about their personal strengths and how they played on in their lives, and before students could serve each other with supportive encouragement, the first form of external affirmation came from the faculty. Sample entries regarding student display of strengths as witnessed through instructors' field observations were:

> Dominic is always prepared, ready to go, and good natured. He is from Mexico, so obviously has also traveled internationally before. Competition, Focus, and Restorative sticks out a lot.

> Isobel - Oh, man, does this girl have guts, courage, perseverance and social skills. But as I use those words to describe her, you would never think those things when you immediately meet her. She is soft spoken, understanding, kind, positive, and very curious about the world. The group rolls their eyes at her when she lags behind, (Ideation/Learner) because wants to soak in every possible thing around her.

What we were able to learn about students either through direct conversation, observable actions or group discussions we used as a tool to better craft any message of encouragement that could help a student recognize their own strengths and leverage them in other areas. We took any opportunity that presented itself. A few journal responses to student entries involving strength affirmation are shared here (shown in italics below):

> My aunt dropped by to bring me dinner and almost had a panic attack about how much I still needed to do before leaving. I see it differently. This mess may be the physical manifestation of my procrastination, but it is also how I am processing things. I tend to procrastinate until I either can't put it off any longer or I start getting excited. I had been going back and forth between being glad I am going and apprehensive about whatever was currently dwelling in my mind. After meeting with the team, each night my apartment has gotten a little bit cleaner and I have progressed in my packing. With it, my mood has improved and I am finally excited about going to China.
>
> - *Adaptability will surely serve you well in this class. I'm excited to see how you will process everything and feel about all the new friends you will make.*

Overall I found this survey very interesting because it gives you clarification and explanation for your strengths according to the answers given on the survey taken. I found out that the results portray my qualities as an individual…

- I definitely see your Competition, Responsibility, Focus and Restorative right off the *bat when meeting you. You didn't waste one second in taking care of all your paperwork and materials to make sure you could come on the trip! You were more on the ball than we were! The Analytical, I'm sure we'll learn more about as we hear you discuss leadings in class and reflection journals.*

Later on the class met at the dining hall to discuss about our reading and really put the learning about the social change model into our discussion when we were asked about the purpose of us pursuing an education. Also, the discussion about differences between stereotypes and generalizations led us to going to a tea shop and continue the discussion among our peers and after all the controversy I came to realize that perhaps the difference about the two is a matter of perspectives. As much as I want to wake up early to go workout at the outdoor gym around the corner, I haven't fully recovered from the lack of sleep. Perhaps tomorrow will be a different story.

- *I'm glad you're on this trip! Your easy going nature and responsible approach to focusing on what our purpose here is I think is a really good influence on the rest of the group. When they are lost or tired or lacking perspective, I think they look to you to find a realistic balance again because of your Restorative.*

Stepping outside Strengths language, we also found ways to encourage students based on their performance that day or as a response to a written journal entry.

I just love their ads. They're like a propaganda poster. A lot of them borrow themes from the propaganda posters. The colors, the way people are either very happy, or serving a good for their country. Kodak and their ads were what first got people to smile in pictures. Before that, everyone was serious. Photography took too long to be smiling the whole time. There's a famous propaganda poster, which I cannot remember the name of, but it depicted a mother and daughter, surrounded by pink and falling blossoms, looking up and smiling at a shrine (if I remember correctly), with a saying like "Long Live the Chairman," or something to that effect. I can see those themes in their ads today, especially for ads of the country itself.

- *I love your perspective on what you're seeing around you. Definitely from the viewpoint of an artist who understands strategy in capturing human responses to "art."*

I'm nervous about teaching 6 ESL classes for the next couple of days. I know how tired I am after just 3. Leslie and I have good lesson plans down for tomorrow and that really helps. I hope our partners have gotten more sleep than I have though because what they

do is much harder than what I do. It is nice to share the class load between two sets of partners so I don't feel so stressed.

- *ESL is a tough thing all around. So long as you're trying and not giving up, that's progress!*

I really enjoyed what we were discussing this time. The theories were really interesting, and after the discussion, I think I changed my answer to conflict theory. It's hard to say that I've had many times where I wasn't fueled by want and struggle. Maybe part of that is because I am the youngest and have fought to get everything that I have. I think most people are the same way though. I was really happy to hear from Leslie, especially since it's her field of study. I feel like I learned a lot from this reading and I really enjoyed that.

- *You had some great points to share in class. Glad you enjoyed it.*

I'm super excited for the Chinese and the tea ceremony class. However I'm still really anxious about going and teaching. I'm fine talking in front of kids or strangers, but I get very anxious talking in front of my peers, especially when I had <u>just</u> met my partner. I'm just afraid of completely choking when it comes time to present the water filter to the kids, or ESL. I don't want to disappoint anyone.

- *It's normal to feel anxious, but after a few days with the kids and some familiar, fun games, you'll find your flow with them and they'll warm up.*

I keep seeing people riding down the street on motorbikes wearing colorful ponchos. I realize that it rains more frequently here and more people have motorbikes because they are cost effective and easier to get around with. Today, I saw a poncho up close and realized that it doesn't just protect the person, it also protects the bike. I didn't get a picture but it reminds me of a convertible car with a soft roof, only it's a bike with a plastic hoodie…lol!

- *Good job in finding the functional utility behind the seemingly unfamiliar practice.*

The message we constantly tried to send here, regardless of actual content, was, "you are great at something, and it is worth sharing because you have something to contribute." Again, our responses to student journal entries were not something that students really mentioned during the actual course; it may have even been a necessarily evil or taken for granted at the time. However, during the follow up interviews, students mentioned how they not only felt pushed but also encouraged on a continual basis, and through both of those constants, they began to find truth in our words and felt as though they became a better version of themselves.

Acceptance of Attributes of Others through Understanding of Personal Limitations

Towards the end of the course prompts and class discussion regarding strengths was intended to help students gain the most from a team in order to reach goals by understand what they could contribute, the extent of limitations of their own strengths, and how the contributions of others could easily fills gaps to create an optimal team dynamic. Getting students to recognize their own limitations required serious reflection and honesty from the students, but proved worthwhile.

> Yessica: My two strengths that I know can be viewed as negatives are *Woo* and *Empathy*. With *Woo* I can both be perceived as manipulative and act manipulative because, I have an overwhelming desire to make everyone like me. Also, my *Empathy* can act as a weakness sometimes because it makes me more apt to be taken advantage of. Too often I've surrounded myself with relationships where people catch onto me for emotional support, cornered relief, or just a baggage drop off.

> Dominic: Individuals with *Competition* tend to measure their progress against the performance of others. I can see that as something that anyone would misinterpret in a sense of "this person is always trying to beat me?" even if this is not the case. With *Analytica*l, I'm always thinking of all possible factors and can dwell about reasons and causes. People can misinterpret this strength by thinking I'm not "easy-going" because I tend to over analyze rather than just go with the flow. With *Responsibility,* sometimes I take charge of any scenario, so I can see anyone without this strength as misinterpreted because even though all I'm trying to do so to commit and follow through anyone would think I just want to do things my way without considering their input.

The exercise of understanding one's own limitations allowed the perfect ground to help students see how the strengths of others can be used to bolster areas of weakness when reaching team goals. In many cases, students were asked to consider a scenario, and if given the opportunity to find teammates with qualities that could help reach the intended outcome, considered what sorts of strengths or people they would consider inviting to the project. Evie described her team in terms of looking for particular qualities, while Yessica described her team with real people who held the qualities she found of importance.

> Evie: If I was building a team it would be one for working abroad, non-profit style. I would need the *Arranger* strength to help plan projects and work within the affected community. I would want someone with command for various emergency situations. *An Activator* would be helpful, along with a *Maximizer* to turn the ideas we have into the best possible programs, *Positivity* for the hard times, *Strategic* and *Responsibility* to work with everyone to keep us all on track. I think it is also important that most of the team have some sort of people-centered strength because it is so important for people in non-profit to have a real love of the mission. When thinking of this team I tried to pick strengths that would balance out all of my feeling ones. I know that sometimes I don't see a way from point A to point B so I tried to accommodate for that as well.
>
> Yessica: I think I would put Leslie and Dominic on my dream team. Leslie is very motivated and a go-getter goal oriented person. A lot of things I want to do never get past dreaming stage. I feel like a combination of Leslie and me would mean I could dream up the big ideas and then we could motivate each other to actualize them. Dominic would be a great person to have on a team as well because he is always executing his plans or helping other people accomplish things. A combination of my ideas, Leslie's goals, and Dominic's diligence and attention to detail would be able to accomplish quite a bit.

One particular evening in class, the group was unusually down. They were tired, some were sick, some were frustrated that they didn't get enough time to get dinner, and in general, they not very responsive to the readings or questions posed in class discussion. This instance was one of many that just felt like the only thing to do would be to give up, call it a day, and hope for something better the next day. However, as a last ditch effort, we abandoned the discussion on the reading and decided to end the stiff evening with an attempt to raise everyone's spirits through a Strengths affirmation exercise. I asked everyone to consider the top 5 Strengths of each classmate and attempt to describe how they saw their strengths play out in daily activity during the course. It took them a bit of time to think through everyone's qualities, but eventually the attempt was a success at helping the students realize that others had been paying attention to them and appreciated the qualities they brought to the team. Some even teared up when others were talking about them and ways they were appreciated because of their strengths. Later Ashton shared in her journal:

> I'm really glad we went through and talked about one another last night. I think it benefitted the team a lot and reminded us of why we're here. No one really knows me because I don't let them. It's difficult for me to hear people talk about me or compliment me or praise me because, well, I don't really know why. I guess it's sort of a "you like me, you really like me," sort of thing. I always assume that people don't ever think about me or find me or find much value in me, because of things in my past that has made me feel that way.

Isobel also wrote:

> What is the usage of our strengths if we cannot use them professionally and especially when we are in a team? I wish these were used more often in professional settings so that whenever we are in a team, put our strengths on the table to completely understand the members for the sake of the team.

Later in her interview, Evie discussed why the strengths focus of the course helped her solidify who she was and what qualities she had to offer. Unlike how her classmates was able to use a Strengths-based language to give each other feedback, peers in classes or at work give her feedback in laymen's terms, which she is able to interpret through strengths language to find a positive outcome and use the feedback as constructive.

> I think that the feedback on the trip was strengths-based – "I loved how you used your *Empathy*, I loved how you used your *Developer* skill" and it's nice that it was just so focused, instead of just "you're funny sometimes." I can remember Ashton telling me that I really encouraged her one day, and it was just an off handed comment that I didn't even think about, and since I've been back I still keep in contact with Isobel as well, and all of the time when we see each other it's just "I'm so happy that you're here, and I'm just so happy that you're *Achieving* things" and I think that now when I hear feedback from other people, I'm much more able to take negative criticism as constructive, whether or not it was intended that way I take them as constructive because I know there are things that I do well and it's not just one or two things, I can do a lot of things. So then when I'm hearing stuff from people outside the trip, it's a lot easier to be like, ok, I'll take it… thank you very much, and that's it. So that's nice, and just very different of how I used to be before.

Aiming for Personal Best

Within Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle, is the idea that with each revolution of the cycle, a person should be able to achieve overall growth and development by analyzing the ebb and flow between doing and thinking. Praxis (Frerie, 1970) serves as a means through which

social change is actively evolving through improved practice to make intentional progress. Of course the aim of constantly offering students challenge and support through their journey of personal development was something that we did relentlessly, but nothing was quite as meaningful as the students analyzing their own actions and performance and using positive self-talk to map out a path for their own improvement.

A few entries we made regarding disappointment in student performance or course climate had us worried at some points that perhaps the task was far too great, and that perhaps we should just retreat in our efforts of trying to push for progressive outcomes.

> I am disappointed that our students are not paying attention as each group does a run through presentation. No one has this perfected and they could learn from one another. Yet side conversations are happening. Do our university partners see that as poor behavior? Maybe I just don't want us to look bad and this makes NOAH look bad.

> But overall from yesterday, I felt extremely disheartened by the students in general. I couldn't tell if I was to blame for the things they complained about, or whether I was being defensive being one of the designers of this course, or whether they are just ungrateful and like to complain rather than trust an unknown process that makes them feel like they aren't in control. I can understand that loss of control doesn't feel good, necessarily, and also that there is a tendency to blame others for the lack of control.

Towards the end of the course, the outcome we were aiming for finally began to shine through:

> Our electricity went out in the hotel tonight and our students came to ask if their journals would still be due in the morning since they had no writing light except for the fire lights in the hallway. We told them no, so they pretty much had a journal writing party sitting in the hallway. They aren't half bad after all! They have good hearts and are wanting to learn something here. I'm not sure what it means to them to truly learn something or to be "transformed," but I think they are hoping to be transformed.

As stated, more valuable than our own observed entries regarding disappointment in student performance were their own entries which recognized room for improvement in their performance.

> Isobel: Now that the school project finished, I feel like I already miss some of them, especially the third grade. I feel so guilty that being too tired affected my productivity.

> Ashton: I feel like I didn't do a good job in class today. No one wanted to talk. I guess I wasn't asking the right questions. I thought that they were open enough for people to respond. I was trying to get people talking and thinking about how we communicate, and how that affected this trip. Like what we said, the Chinese like to actually meet. I'm not cut out for this teacher thing.

Once students decided they were not going to settle for a previous performance that they felt they could improve, we began to see them encouraging themselves to alter their approach through positive self-talk in their journal entries. Where they believed they were too tired to do a good job, they resolved to get more sleep, where they felt they hit a roadblock in communicating with a Chinese partner, they resolved to try a different approach the next day, and so on. In some cases, they also shared how they were proud of themselves for reaching a new outcome by attempting a different approach.

> Isobel: I cannot put it into words how stressed I am for this journey, because in my point of view I'm still not ready. I am afraid of not being able to take the whole advantage of this journey, to learn as much as possible, and just ruin the great opportunity. However, I promise myself to do my best.

> Dominic: I should be reflecting more and weighing my pros/cons prior to making a decision. In order to be able to make the best decision I should be prioritizing my time better by planning my tasks in order of importance and thinking systematically. I think my biggest opportunity in order to become a better analyzer is to observe carefully at any situation and understand all factors before making any assumptions.

> Evie: We will get through it and can always improve the next time if we don't do as well as we would like today. I am doing my best to be prepared for the lesson. I also know that I interact better when I feel well so I went and ate breakfast and am trying to fight yesterday's dehydration with Pedialyte. It really is salty!

As described by Stevens and Cooper (2009), students often find themselves becoming their own mentor through their reflective writing, in which they stumble upon answers through their writing process, recounting daily activities, their actions, and steps for moving forward. Becoming one's own mentor can have far longer lasting qualities than simply relying upon a

mentor, teacher or guide during one course. If dependency is created in which a student only is prompted to strive for improvement through the prod of the teacher, life-long learning and continued personal growth may be thwarted over time.

Interpretation of Current Scenario through Historical Event Memories

The way that students construct meaning of situations within their new environment abroad was heavily influenced by memories and learning that came from previous, historical live events, whether from childhood or adulthood, positive or negative, or even ranging from only slightly significant to heavily significant. This is the basis of Schlossberg's (1984) Transitions Theory, since according to the theory, events only have significant meaning that is transformational in nature if the person assigns value and meaning to it. This is why events are unique to each person and the same exact event occurring or not occurring in a handful of lives will be interpreted and applied in unique ways to each individual person.

Throughout the course, it became increasingly apparent just how much personal historical event memories affect a student who is engaging in experiential learning within a learning space. Just as Zull (2002; 2011; 2012) described the changing brain of humans within educational environments as extremely complex, so too are the observed and unpredictable behaviors of students who are encountering new things, people and environments abroad. Where one moment a student may be happily engaged in conversation and laughter, the next he silently retreat to a bench away from the group, become frustrated by an encountered scenario, or even trying to hide back tears. At any given time we would ask ourselves regarding one student or another, "What's going on with so and so?" "What happened?" "What did I miss?" Observations alone simply left us with bewilderment, and we often had to decide between approaching the student to see if she was doing alright and simply letting her have some space and hoping if she needed anything

from us, she would let us know. More often, however, what might have affected them came through in their journals, and what was on their mind would have never been something we could have guessed; their minds were clouded with memories from the past that were seeping into the present whether welcomed or not that was taking its course on helping the student to form an interpretation or evaluation on the given situation.

Memories were recalled for any reason at all, whether because the class was discussing each other's strengths, or if a classmate experienced a scary situation, if the children at the schools were overjoyed to spend time with our students, or even if no specific trigger was present at all other than space and time. Memories were drawn from childhood, family situations, and recent events in college or from the workplace; they knew no boundaries. If they had posed a mental stamp in the student's mind as something that had transformational quality, it would attached itself to all future interpretations the student encountered whether they realized it, welcomed it, or not.

When students were initially beginning to understand how their personal strengths may have come about, Yessica and Evie had a particularly difficult time coming to terms with seeing their strengths as positive since something in their pasts had told them that having *Empathy* or *WOO* was a highly negative thing that should be eradicated as soon as possible.

> Yessica: My mom picked us up from school and dumped all six of us kids in a pastel colored room, where a Christian counselor told me I felt too much. He said my heart was too big and that's why I constantly felt like I was carrying too much. "Imagine your heart is a giant cave and things keeping falling in it. Your heart is only supposed to carry a few things but you've got armchairs, spiders and other things that don't belong there." I remember sitting across from him feeling no loss and no more blind wondering what the heck I was going to do with my creepy furniture heart.

> Yessica: Through my first and second set of guardians, I learned it wasn't so much about me, it was about making sure they liked me (WOO). I learned from my first set of guardians that if I memorized Bible verses, raised my hands during worship at church, acted like I enjoyed all of the cruel and unnecessary things they wouldn't worry about me

> messing up their image. Then I agreed tight lipped and polite so I could stay at friends' houses on the weekend and pretend that the few miles between us were galaxies and the black hole that made up that home was light years away. So I have to tell my story, I have to stay friends with people who belittle me because they give me rides to work. I have to pretend to be friends with misogynistic frat boys in class and laugh when I want to throw up so that they'll lend me the books I couldn't afford to buy.

Evie, too, shared similar uncertainty about the good of her Empathy because of the negative feedback she received about these traits growing up. Regarding her Empathy, she clearly remembers times where she was harshly criticized for having too many feelings and that this was not the right way to be, which she shared during personal conversations. Here, her perception of both seems to have been highly shaped by opinions of others, yet ironically have still been included in her top 5 Strengths out of 34 possible options.

> Evie: My parents often told me growing up that I didn't handle emerging situations correctly because I wasn't worried or immediately reacting. *Empathy* is by far my least favorite strength. First off, most people see it as a weakness; sometimes, I do as well. Second off I'm only empathic when it is self-serving. I haven't cared about anyone else today and have most definitely been standoffish. I associate empathy with nice people, and I'm not really a nice person.

In both of these cases, for Yessica and Evie, learning that they had something in their top 5 lists of strengths that had previously been something that caused pain through harsh criticism clearly took them back to the moments when they heard those words through relived scenarios. In many ways, they both despised those things about themselves and in turn despised the assessment for affirming that they were exactly what people had told them was bad about them. Other historical events referenced in journal entries were:

> Ashton: I was born and raised in a very unstable environment, moving from one place to another a ridiculous amount of times, especially for a child. At times, I wouldn't even be able to build friendships before it was time to move again. With all the moving and the changes and overall emotional instability I had to adapt all the time considering that every place I moved to was very different! Therefore, I think that's what led me to having a balancing learning style, especially because I always had to change my approach depending on the situation we (my family) were in.

> Leslie: The first time I can remember being a *Reflector* was around 12 or 13 after I became a Christian. During this time of my life, the only way I could make sense of the many things that I went through was by meditation and reflection. I never thought of myself as a reflector but as I look back on life lessons, every lesson I've learned has been through reflection.
>
> Yessica: All of a sudden I was fourteen again, waiting in the Chicago airport for my connecting flight to Washington State where I would meet my first set of guardians. When you are fourteen, pimply, and your family is falling apart there is very little you know anymore. There is a lot of stigma surrounding a messed up family and a lot of stories you haven't learned to turn into punch lines yet.

Being abroad in a rural area of a country that was far different than our home country proved to be difficult in one way or another to everyone on the trip. At one point, everyone was expected to get sick or to have an emotional meltdown. For whatever reason, it seemed that Dominic had everything completely together, and was able to process the things around him seamlessly enough to stay focused and to keep a good nature about him. So when it came time for him to finally shed his own tears, it was almost a shocking and unexpected thing.

> Isobel and Dominic seemed to take it the hardest. Everyone, on both sides, had become so attached. I wondered if their own journeys to learn English was playing a role I their emotional response. Both had tears and expressed amazement that students would give them gifts. Dominic couldn't wave goodbye to those outside our bus windows. He sat on the last row of the bus with his baseball hat covering his face – silent, sobbing. (instructor journal)

There seemed to be no good time to ask Dominic about his emotional moment since he seemed to want to deal with it on his own; however, he did end up writing about the moment in his journal that evening which revealed that he felt a sense of connection to the kids since he, too, had come from a developing country with hopes of finding something more in life.

> Today, I hit a breaking point when I kept receiving smiles, handshakes, hugs and all the warmth form all he children before we left for many reasons. I kept seeing myself in their eyes, full of dreams, ambition, desire and hope. Why is my simple name on a piece of paper so significant to them? What does that leave them with? Will my presence have

> any effect in anything they do with their future? All those thoughts hit me at once and it was very overwhelming and humbling.

During her interview, Yessica shared that a particular difficult time during the trip for her was an incident that occurred to one of the other students. As we were walking back to the hotel after buying bottled water from a corner store, the student was groped by a strange man on the street. This upset the entire group, sending the girls into a fearful tailspin, Dominic on a mission of protecting the group, and us hoping we were strong enough to defend our students while also ensuring we wouldn't be visiting a Chinese prison. But our reactions paled in comparison to the memories it caused Yessica to revisit since she had previously experienced sexual assault during her teenage years, coincidentally in close proximity to the location of the incident that occurred on our trip.

> One that sticks out to me was the night when I was sick and wasn't feeling good so I stayed back and then that night that thing happened to Isobel. That was just scary, and really it took me a scary place for a little bit and also it was scary for Isobel. Because of the thing that happened in China before to me when I was 15, and where we stayed in Beijing was right next to that place where that thing had happened to me, so it was already anxious. I was doing really fine with it all, but then that happened and I was like… aahhhhhh!, and also because it wasn't just my experience, it was also Isobel's and everything was really bad. Yeah that's a clear connection for me as to why that was bad.

Not only did it bring up negative memories for Yessica, it also did the same for Ashton for different reasons, who explains why it evoked anger in her as well as a more staunch approach to her feministic stance.

> It mostly makes me angry that we have to be aware of these things. Nothing like that had directly ever happened to me or so close to me before. Of course I'm a woman so I'm aware of it, but because of that, I became hyper aware. I do have so many issues with my dad, that there are times where I'm kind of an angry feminist, so I have a lot of issues with guys in general. So Isobel's incident that just kind of strengthened it; I just don't tolerate being treated poorly by guys anymore because I did so much growing up. So I think that's why it resonated so much for me with Isobel's incident. My dad treated my poorly growing up and still does. It wasn't ever like physical abuse, but I would be things like, you're a [explicit], you're this, you're that, so it was being made to feel like I was

> less than something by a man. And even still, when I was cheated on, I felt like I was less than something again, and so I just don't tolerate it anymore. So I'm like, no, screw that.

A student's ability to interpret a given encounter is very personal and is often the work of the lens that is built through a series of life events which reshapes the identity of the person as they develop. To assume that one single class project will induce the same exact learning outcome for all the students is to assume that they are each blank slates devoid of personal histories. Instead, the learning opportunity may look and feel as though it is the exact same thing when presented to students, but after it has gone through the interpretation through each of their minds, the way the learning experience is processed as unique to the brain in which it is processed.

In this way, we must understand that students while may appear to be listening to a lecture the same way, taking the same notes, or answering the exam questions with the correct answers, what they are experiencing that is beyond what can be observed is hidden, internal, and personal. We may only be privy to what a student is truly taking away from an incident if they trust the listener enough to talk about their experience, yet this assumed the student is actually able to decipher why and what they are feeling or experiencing for themselves, which may often not be the case. The approach to teaching and developing students must not consider them to be a holistic group of learners, but rather a group of individual, very unique people who are learning.

A few examples of faculty responses are shared here which followed a student entry involving vulnerability and pain.

> I don't think you're giving yourself enough credit or understanding for your "right now." You are going through an incredibly difficult and unforeseen time and also juggling it with past hurts. So to say "I don't know what's wrong with me lately." First, nothing is "wrong" with you. You're dealing with it as best you can and as best as anyone could hope to. Being honest with yourself and others who care about you in that regard can help you feel like it's okay to leak out here and there from time to time because keeping it

> bottled up will lead to…oh let's say emotional constipation (☺ yay analogies!) which is never fun or comfortable.
>
> You have a wide and unique perspective on humanity- the good, bad and ugly. Thank you for your willingness to be open and for trusting us with this very personal information. I admire your perseverance and strength. I'm curious - what do you do to maintain peace when there is so much turmoil or stress?
>
> I can't imagine how heavy and conflicted your heart and mindset are each and every moment of this trip. It's hard to believe that there is a reason for everything and that we must completely let go to allow the universe to function as it needs to- but sometimes I feel like waging war against it. Justice is an interesting thing. The more we fight for it, the more it seems nature tries to remind us that we don't get to choose who receives it. Which then makes me wonder if justice actually means what we think it means, can something so small as humans really control something so grand?

Although no response we could have ever come up with would have provided a perfect answer, or an answer at all, they were attempts to let students know that we heard them, we cared, and we were on their sides. If students feel it is safe enough to be vulnerable enough to share their personal stories of why they see the world as they do, it then presents the listener, or faculty in this case, to respond in such a way that lets the student feel they have been heard, understood, and ultimately cared for. There are never words that can undo hardship that students may have encountered, but attempting some form of comfort is far better than making a student feel alone in their story, in need of picking herself back up in solitude.

Renewed Sense of Self-Worth and Confidence

Every single student experienced an emotional breakdown of some level, and coupled with the constant soul searching, reflecting, personal digging, revisiting significant life memories, students somehow grew exponentially during the course. Change is not always easy and often requires an unwelcomed catalyst such as difficult feedback, or realizing that one's efforts are not reaching the intended goal no matter how much effort is applied. Students were pushed outside their comfort zones on a daily basis whether by intentional course exercises,

probing questions in their journals from faculty, having to work with teammates different than themselves, or simply by being in a foreign country away from all forms of familiar support.

Regarding emotional breakdowns, both faculty reflected on whether breakdowns play a key role in the formula to achieving personal breakthroughs and development.

> Sunday Evie seemed exponentially better. Is a breakdown necessary to really learn what you've made of, thus making you an effective leader?
>
> Well, now I think officially everyone has cried. Not that I want everyone to be unhappy but there's something about crying that symbolizes a breakthrough. A final surrender to vulnerability letting the witness know- ok fine, here are my cards, here's who I really am. It's a magnificent thing because almost certainly the times after that part will be a million times different and better. Better how? Better in that there has been a rapport built- that not necessarily will each side see eye to eye after that point but at least they can appreciate or understand the other's perspective.

At one point, I found myself writing statements on behalf of each student that I felt depicted their outlook on life with regarding to particular topics that had vastly changed from the beginning of the course to the end. I wrote the following below and include juxtaposed statements below that I felt mirrored the evolutions students had gone through up to that point. Although students did not explicitly come up with these statements, what they shared verbally or through their journals or final presentations all led me to create these conclusive observations of the kind of strides they made during the course.

> I realized yesterday that at first I saw Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle as something that happened in much shorter cycles of revolutions, but instead there may not be a time limit on it. So much of what the students have mentioned in class involved recollecting something that happened a long time ago and took them several years to reform in their minds and realities-beliefs like
>
> - Yessica: Christianity is the only way.
>   Christianity is not the only way.
>   Maybe Christianity was onto something but also has some faults.
> - Ashton: Chinese people walk upside down.
>   Chinese people do not walk upside down- maybe Americans walk upside down.
> - Yessica: I cannot trust men.
>   Maybe not all men are bad.

Men still ultimately have a need for physical intimacy.

- Evie: I am a bad person who has character qualities that should be eliminated.
  I have qualities that should be worked on, but I'm not a bad person who is an unloved burden.
- Evie: I came to China because my family told me I was coming.
  I came to China to discover something about myself.
- Dominic: I am far removed from the person who used to live in Mexico.
  Remembering where I came from fuels my compassion for others who are in the position I used to be in.
- Yessica: My mom is to blame for why this man hurt me.
  This man is to blame for why this man hurt me.
- Evie: I am a selfish person.
  I am an empathetic person.
- Leslie: I am not a representative of my culture.
  I am a representative of my culture and I am proud to be a good one.
- Isobel: We are so different.
  We are so similar.
- Isobel: I want to tell my story to those who can't understand it.
  I will tell my story in a way that others can understand.
- Leslie: I don't consider myself a global citizen.
  I am a global citizen.

From the students' actual perspectives, they shared a renewed sense of self-worth and confidence during their follow-up interviews based on what they learned about themselves during this course. Increased self-worth and confidence would have never been an expected outcome we intended to find through this course since it is a difficult construct to measure or even define. However, there is no denying the way that students articulate they ways in which the feel greater confidence, and how that confidence has renewed their sense of purpose and positionality in various contexts.

> Ashton: I also learned that I had a lot more to give and to admire than I had thought. If these kids can admire something as simple as my name on a piece of paper, what else was I not seeing? The things that are innate and unordinary, someone thinks they are extraordinary. I've also been a lot more feminist and a lot more unapologetic about what I'm trying to say. And I don't know what is about China that made me feel that way, but it's kind of like, whatever, I'm just going to say it. I'm not going to shy away or be sorry anymore.

> Yessica: I feel like it (StrengthsFinder) helped me in some ways figure out that I had more skills than I realized and also maybe worth more than I realized. When I came back

> from the trip, one of my friends said, "you're the most Yessica I've ever seen you," which I think was true. I think I grew into myself on that trip, and was more confident, not like I'm prettier or smarter now, but like more sure of myself and more sure that I deserved to be in places because a lot of times I would be in places but I would feel unworthy or that I didn't necessarily I belong there. I'm not exactly sure how to say it, but after that I was just sure that I deserved to say things and I deserved to be okay and those sorts of things. Before, I viewed myself and my life as a sad and strange story and after we came back, I still see those things as sad and strange things, but no longer was it my life that was sad – it's still strange, but not necessarily sad.
>
> Evie: I just a very damp mess before the trip. I think that I am so much more capable now, and I am so much more aware of what I can do as a single person and I'm continuing to learn. Growing up I was told to hide everything, and you had to be perfect, southern belle, and that's just not me, and that's okay. I think that I've learned to embrace my weirdness, and I'm no longer just unsure about life. My Chinese name, Le You You, roughly means "happy all the time," and it's something never saw about myself, and it just felt like I never had anything in control, and now I still don't have much more in control than I did, but it's okay, and everyday there's something that makes me happy. I feel like I really learned that on the trip because there was so much about learning who you are, and learning how to be a better you instead of just going to class to learn about the revolutions of Mexico. We learned a lot of content honestly, but there was just so much more of a personal component, so I think I have higher self-esteem now. And that's really nice, because I have notoriously low self-esteem, so that's a big difference.

Hearing students describe their renewed sense of self-worth and confidence was extremely fulfilling and rewarding. It meant that even if the efforts we put into the course as faculty day in and day out regardless of exhaustion or the sense that we should just give up and come home early, that something about our efforts were not in vain. If it is a worthy outcome that is sought, then it must be sought after with a relentless spirit, because students themselves are worth it.

3. Difficulty in Telling Their Stories Back Home

Vande berg, Paige, and Lou (2012) began their book *Student Learning Abraod* by sharing the chief complaint and misunderstanding among stakeholders about study abroad courses is that students, families, institutions, and the general public assume that it is a life changing, transformational experience, yet students are commonly unable to explain in specific language

what this means. If students are unable to explain what they experienced, what they learned, and how their lives proceed differently from that point on, proving the case for why funding, support, or resources should go towards study abroad efforts is an empty-handed plea.

During the last class, students discussed how they planned to share what they experienced with others. Some were hopeful and excited about the task while others were already apprehensive and uncertain about how they would go about truly sharing what they learned. The task seemed unsurmountable and the discussion even turned a bit emotional. Ten months after the trip, students were asked if they had been able to share what they experienced with others and if they felt others were truly able to grasp what they were trying to convey, resulting in a very lonely feeling. They had been through something truly wonderful and transformational, but had very few people with whom to share this experience. By and large, even though students considered themselves very different people than who they were when they first signed up for the course, they explain these concerns and difficulties with trying to share their stories and newfound perspectives:

> Yessica: Trying to explain these things to people that I had experienced and seen was literally impossible. And in a lot of ways it felt really lonely, because I had all these things I wanted to convey and wanted to communicate with others about, but because they literally had never done this, we just couldn't. We just couldn't. So I didn't really go in depth with a lot of people over those things. They'd be like 'how was your trip to China,' and I would say 'great,' and they would say 'cool, saw the pictures, cool, now can I tell you what this guy said to me?' and not really go very much deeper than that.

> Ashton: I work at a clothing boutique, and when I told my two owners that I was going to China… this is literally what happened.. they go "oh I thought you were going to Japan." I said, "No China." And she goes, "They're all the same to me." So trying to explain to them the trip was difficult because you know, there were children peeing on and the streets and it was just like whatever, that happens. It's cool – well it's not cool to see kids peeing in the streets, but I mean, being there in that moment was cool. Trying to explain it in a way that makes their closed mind open to that kind of lifestyle has been difficult. So I usually just focus on the positives, I don't really talk about the negatives.

> Isobel: We have been so lucky to have had the opportunity of going and visit other cultures, though I really could not share my experience with anyone here in Denton or Iran. It was like the whole experience was too personal and it was either boring or non-sense for others. For people around me, my trip to china was only a trip to another country, so normally I don't share these type of experiences with others as my personal experience, but I can see their effect on my other writings.

Moreover, students find themselves having to censor what parts of their cherished stories they tell to others, for fear that others may negatively misinterpret the reality behind their story with a xenophobic or Western-centric lens. In order to protect and preserve the dignity of those they came to know and befriend, students may choose to not share all parts of the story they believe listeners back home may not understand.

> Yessica: But it's hard – it's really hard – to try to convey those things to people who didn't go because it just doesn't make sense to them. And when you're on a sweaty bus for a really long time, and everyone was standing really close together, they're just like 'well why didn't they move?' Whereas when I talk to [past student] or Evie about it, they're like 'yeah you know how they're friggin' no lines in China, and they don't exist, so it's like gladiator battle to get on the bus?!' Whereas I risk miscommunicating things about Chinese culture to those who didn't go on the trip, because I'm like yeah it's like a gladiator battle in McDonald's, and they go, "how rude! They're really rude people," but that's not at all what I'm trying to say, I'm just trying to say that this is what happened, you know? So it's hard; it's really hard to try to communicate that to other people. Part of it is not being able to communicate it properly because, but like that also leaves you the option of misinterpreting what I think I'm communicating, like the example of standing in line. They could think that I'm trying to convey that it's crappy and all Chinese people are crappy, when instead I'm just trying to convey this thing that's kind of funny and different over there, so I think it's like a mixture of the two with that one.

> Dominic: It all depends on who it is I'm talking to. If it's a close friend or someone at home then I can definitely express my emotions and feelings in depth about my experiences in China. But if I'm only talking to a coworker for example or even someone at school I am not able to go in details as to how I truly feel about my experiences abroad just because we don't share that close of a connection. I feel that if I went into detail as to how I felt about my experiences, they wouldn't be able to fully understand me.

Luckily, there are some people who students believe they can share their stories with who would most likely appreciate explanations of their transformational experiences. Those who have

traveled to rural or developing areas may be able to understand similar plights through shared experiences, but larger than this, are those who are open minded and interested in learning about other cultures with an appreciative perspective are those that pose the least amount of threat to making negative conclusions about members of other cultures included in students' stories. Students tended to believe that just because a person has traveled does not necessarily make them open minded; instead, if given the choice, they would rather share their stories with those who are open minded and had never traveled, rather than with those who had travelled but were not open minded. A few students explain this perspective from their own personal examples.

> Yessica: When me Ashton and Evie get together, there is always talk about all that. And then I met up with [student from last year's course] afterwards and she was able to share all these things that they were able to experience too. I feel like if you've traveled to a place that's developing, it's easier for you to connect even if it's not necessarily the same exact thing, like with one of my friends volunteered in the Peace Corps in Africa.

> Ashton: My sister went to Japan, so she kind of understands that Asia is just kind of weird in general in a really charming way and was really open to hearing about all the weird stuff and all the different things in more of an appreciative way than some of the other people who I would tell things to. It was more of a spectator sport for them I guess. You just have to cater to your audience. Neither of my owners are educated past a high school diploma; they live within their own world, and I find the people who are more open to other cultures or interested in other cultures want to hear all the quirks, whereas my owners were like, oh you just went on vacation, that's cool. It's just another place to them. I've met people who have traveled, like my dad, who doesn't think he's racist, but then says some really terrible things. They've lived in Germany, Iraq, Cuba, Guam, just all over the world, and I wouldn't even tell my family a lot of this stuff.

Overall, students found difficulty in sharing their stories after returning from the course whether that was because they felt they couldn't find the adequate words to accurately describe something, or whether they felt that they could not fully trust their audiences to accurately interpret the reality of the story over what they wanted to hear or perhaps could only hear from their ethnocentric perspectives. Given the transformative experience students truly did have during this course, it is a shame that their stories are ones that cannot be shared widely but rather

leave them feeling a sense of loneliness because they feel that no one else may truly be able to grasp what they went through.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study explored student learning and experience during a short-term, faculty-led study abroad course through a student development lens. Qualitative methods were used to examine a variety of data sources including students' pre and post assessment on course constructs, student journals, photos accompanied by DIE journal entries, final paper, faculty journals, as well as a follow-up interview 10 months after the course's completion. Six students took this course, and all data sources included information for all six students. These students ranged in age from 19 to 31, five were female, and one was male. One student was a sophomore, one student was a junior, two were seniors, and two were master's students. Three students were Caucasian, one was African-American, one international student was from Mexico, and one international student was from Iran. This course was interdisciplinary in nature, and the majors of the students included sociology, international studies, studio art, journalism, and public administration.

The conceptual framework used to analyze all data sources included Kolb's (1984) Learning Cycle Theory, Schlossberg's (1984) Transitions Theory, and Perry's (1970) Intellectual Development Theory. Student journals, faculty observations, student course performance, and follow-up interviews each confirmed the presence of engagement in experiential learning cycle process, use of historical, personal events as transitional points that helped to interpret specific encounters on the course, as well as evidence of personal growth and development.

This final chapter includes four sections including a summary of the study's findings which can help to shed light on the study's initial research questions along with a discussion of the conclusions regarding the study's findings which can help to shed light on the study's initial

research questions. The second half of the chapter includes the implications that have been drawn from the study that can inform current and future policy and practice, and finally concludes with recommendations for further possible study.

Summary of Study Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore student learning and experience during a short-term, faculty-led study abroad course through a student development lens. Faculty in this study used both personal inventories and a mentoring approach to both challenge and support students through various roles during the course as a means to develop students both academically and personally. The focus of the study was to provide answers to the following research questions:

1) What are self-perceived and observed learning experiences of students enrolled in a faculty-led, short-term student abroad course?

2) How does student affairs theory inform and enhance the learning experience of these students?

The conceptual framework that was used to interpret results of course data were Kolb's (1984) Learning Cycle Theory, Schlossberg's (1984) Transitions Theory, and Perry's (1970) Intellectual Development Theory.

Kolb's (1984) Learning Cycle Theory contained four major components, which function in a continuous cyclical fashion to create an engaged learning process. Additionally, Schlossberg's (1984) Transitions Theory created a platform wherein personally significant, historical events can be transformational in nature if the person assigns value and meaning to it, which creates room for unique, personalized interpretation of shared, common experiences encountered abroad. Finally, Perry's (1970) Theory of Intellectual Development was a

paramount approach that faculty took while teaching and leading students on this course. Ultimately, the goal was to intentionally create a safe space for students to demonstrate critical thinking to inform a newer, well-rounded opinion, to be able to see a scenario from a new perspective, recognize personal development, or even to be able to consider or implement a change in beliefs or behavior. Each of these was achieved in various levels by different means with each student on the course.

Students' Perceptions during Course and How They Changed Throughout

Given that this course was not non-traditional, taken in a foreign country with an island format of learning, living, and serving with the same class members and instructors for several weeks, students had the unique opportunity to encounter several scenarios and challenges that may have seemed out of the ordinary for their daily lives, which provides a rich environment for the cultivation of change. Students drew upon historical events to help shape their understanding of present scenarios, and also allowed new perspectives from their Chinese partners, classmates, faculty, and reading to create new conclusions in combination with knowledge or beliefs they may have previously harbored.

Use of historical events to interpret current scenarios

Consistent with the theoretical position Schlossberg (1984) took to form her Transitions Theory, students rely upon personal events that occurred in their history to help interpret scenarios encountered during the course. Schlossberg posited that events can only be transitional and transformational in nature if the person experiencing the event assigns meaning to the event as something that significant affected their lives moving forward. Throughout their journal entries, students consistently wrote about situations from their past that a current situation caused them to reflect upon, which consequently affected the way in which they perceived the current

situation. Examples of these historical event memories appeared several times when students were asked to reflect upon their StrengthsFinder results and also when one of our female students was inappropriately groped by a stranger outside their hotel.

In the case of the StrengthsFinder results, the students were able to recall specific memories where believed their strengths were originally created, or memories in which they recalled having been criticized harshly for a result which StrengthsFinder listed as a positive quality. The dissonance involved with receiving the results of what their top strengths were immediately sent students down memory lane in hopes of making sense of how their strengths truly played out in their lives or whether they believed the results of the assessment. In the case of the students' reaction to one female student being groped by a strange man on the street, several female students were a mixture of frightened and angry at the incident. Their journals soon revealed the reasons for their fear or anger was closely linked to memories they had previously encountered that too involved having been abused or sexually assaulted in their past. Students seemed to bring these linked memories forward to make sense of their emotional reactions and to ultimately cope with the situation in the best possible way.

These few instances make a valid case for why taking a new approach to traditional pedagogy is important. We are not simply teaching "learners" in a classroom, but rather teaching "people who are learning." If we begin to see learners as people, then we can begin to understand how historical events may be streaming through the minds of each individual even as one single lesson is being discussed and that what is learned by each person will be a unique learning outcome based on personal experiences and capacity to integrate new knowledge formation. To create an intentional learning space for this activity is both bold and requires significant effort and creativity on the part of the faculty (Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Stevens, & Cooper,

2009; Zull, 2012). As Zull (2002; 2011) writes, human brains are extremely complex. He also explains how studying abroad can provide opportunities for students to encounter "disruptions" in their brain network of memories, emotions, behaviors, and knowledge. These disruptions, if handled well, do not necessarily mean an outcome must be negative, but instead may have the potential to have "transformational" effects on students in which we hope study abroad opportunities may result (Vande Berg, Paige & Lou, 2012).

Intellectual Development through Critical Thinking Opportunities

Perry's (1970) Theory of Intellectual Development posits that as individuals mature intellectually, they are able to move from a position of a two-sided duality to a more a complex understanding of multiple perspectives in various contexts. Students were presented with multiple forms of opportunities to develop in this capacity through everyday encounters that challenged them to think critically. These opportunities challenged their previously set perspectives, helped them to form the new habit of critical thinking during daily activity after the course and even to begin forming new habits as a result of new considerations.

Accepting new information to challenge set perspectives

Paige and Vande Berg (2012) believed that cultural mentors can greatly assist students to adjust to new and foreign settings and ultimately can act as key intervention tools. In this case, cultural mentors came in various forms whether it was from students' own course peers, faculty offering insight from previous trips, Chinese partners sharing information on their own traditions and habits, as well as university and non-profit partners who acted as activity guides for our students. Within students' journal writing, they often wrote about shared stories they learned from their classmates, or new information they were able to gain from their Chinese partners when trying to understand the nuances of a new cultural phenomenon. Readiness also plays

important factor in whether students will be able to adequately cope with challenges abroad and develop in positive ways, or whether students will buckle with negative reactions and continue harboring negative beliefs about another country, culture or otherwise (Hunter, 2008; Savicki, Cooley, & Donnelly, 2008; Savicki & Selby, 2008).

During the course, students were surrounded by the influences of other classmates, faculty, Chinese partners and situational circumstances. In most cases, the perspectives that were presented to them added to, challenged, or directly opposed beliefs students' previous perspectives, which gave them the opportunity to either reject all new information or attempt to navigate the dissonance in order to formulate a completely new perspective. This acceptance of new perspectives was facilitated through groundwork set in the syllabus stating that all viewpoints of others were to be respected by all class members, thus allowing for amiable, respectful discussion to be had with those who harbored different beliefs, values or traditions. Multiple examples were shared through student journals, final presentation and follow up interviews about how their beliefs changed regarding a particular topic after they were able to discuss their differences in perspectives, reasonably accept new perspectives that ultimately altered their entire outlook on the situation.

Employing new critical thinking skills in everyday life

The enforced use of critical thinking throughout the entire course was something that was pushed on a daily basis, whether during group course activities, classroom discussion or faculty responses to student journals. Students admitted after looking back on their entire course experience that before the course they did not believe themselves to have been judgmental or closed minded, but afterwards understood that without the use of critical thinking on a daily basis, they may have been risking making a judgment too early without attempting to find more

information. Through the practice of DIE journal activities and having to think through and discuss difficult questions during class, students were able to create a new habit of utilizing critical thinking when exploring a new idea.

Specifically focusing on the DIE journaling intervention, students were finally able to come to a realization of the validity this method had on changing their negative assumptions about scenarios encountered in a new culture in order to better understand why certain behaviors or situations may be occurring in context (Bennett, Bennett & Stillings, 1977). All students shared complaints about having to use this method during the first few weeks of class claiming that it was too difficult or even that the tool was intentionally making them feel judgmental by intentionally seeking out strange things about another culture. Faculty continued to push in this area, reminding students about the assignment's requirements and intentions, and towards the second half of the course students' DIE entries began to gain maturity and new perspective. Consistent with Arrue's (2008) conclusion, adequately explaining this method and training students on how to appropriately utilize it takes time, trial and error with a significant learning curve.

Although given the opportunity to have left the DIE method by the wayside, eventually this form of intervention became something that students fully understood and began to add into their everyday language with comments such as "I saw the perfect DIE scenario today," or "I need to get this picture because it would be a great DIE for my journal today." When asked about whether students believed they have been able to mentally encounter similar DIE scenarios back home since the course, all students were able to name specific examples where they encountered something seemingly strange, but instead of jumping to an uninformed conclusion, forced themselves to keep asking questions about the scenario in order to reach a more well-rounded,

informed conclusion. These examples ranged from reading material in textbooks and course lectures, hearing news clips through media, to statements that friends or family may share and situations with workplace employees and coworkers.

Changing personal habits and behaviors after course

Recording exactly how a study abroad experience can be transformation in a student's life has been a difficult result to capture for most researchers of international education, yet highly sought after by stakeholders. Typically, quantitative studies attempt to capture employment ventures, language acquisition or cultural competencies through various pre and post assessment tools (Dwyer, 2008; Vande Berg, Paige & Lou, 2012). Contrary to this approach, students were able to relay in their own words through open-ended answers how they felt they were affected by this course and more importantly, if they recognized any changes in their own behaviors, habits, or beliefs. As expected, each of their answers differed greatly, taking on a unique form based on their backgrounds, stories, memories, beliefs, emotions, and encounters.

Changes in habits or behaviors that students were still able to recognize 10 months after returning added significant value to the long-term outcomes of this course. Many of the expectations set forth for themselves during their final presentations were only the beginning of what changes students actually found themselves making in the subsequent months to follow. Some of these examples are as follows: finding new means of serving and volunteering in their communities at home and inviting others to participate with them, cutting back on spending habits that were leading to blind consumerism, paying more attention to water conservation, making attempts to sleep more and keep a healthier diet, question the return on investment of personal spending, granting grace to others who make closed-minded comments by offering

information in attempts to help them arrive at new conclusions, applying their newfound strengths and talents in new ways whether in the classroom, in an organization or at the workplace.

The last three sections mentioned as responses to the first research question (accepting new information that will challenge set perspectives, employing new means of critical thinking to everyday life, and the creation of new habits after course completion) all lend to the personal growth and development that is the aim of Perry's (1970) Intellectual Development Theory. In his theory, students move from stages of duality, multiplicity, relativism, and finally a more evolved level of commitment through contextual understanding. Of course theories may commonly end at a final stage that may never be fully realized in a reality, however, students in the course did demonstrate movement in positions, mostly frequently from dualistic to multiplicity, and in more isolated situations students were able to see the validity in taking a more relativistic approach when formulating new conclusions and certainly seeing the value in accepting that truth is more of a fluid concept with ever changing variables. The rejection of dualism and even multiplicity is easily seen through students' journals, final presentation transcription, or follow-up interview with commentary such as, "I realized I was wrong," "I realized parents and faculty are humans too who do not have all the answers and that I may need to problem solve on my own," "I used to just take anything my professor, text book, or media said at absolute face value, and now I find myself looking for more information that may confirm or challenge those statements in order to arrive at my own conclusions."

Learning About the Self and Others

The Kolb's Learning Styles Inventory (LSI) based on his Experiential Learning Theory and Clifton's StrengthsFinder (CSF) based on positive psychology and strengths-based

performance (Clifton & Anderson, 2004; Kolb, 1985; Kolb, 1999) were both used as personal assessment tools which students took during the first two days of this course. Journals were turned in every other day and for each journal entry, a prompt related to either the application of their StrengthsFinder or Learning Style Inventory results was given. Although both were included in discussion and course activities, the results of StrengthsFinder was used in discussion much more often than the results of the Learning Styles Inventory as well as applied more often in various situations after the course was completed.

Prompts and classroom discussion surrounding students' StrengthsFinder results were geared toward the individual understanding their own strengths in the beginning of the course. Not until the middle of the course were students asked to reflect up on the strengths of others and share with each other how they each leverage their personal attributes in daily activity. By the end of the course, StrengthsFinder results were being used in any means that would enhance team efforts and even in attempts to mediate conflict within the group.

Understanding and leveraging personal attributes

As reflected in student journals, pre and post constructs assessment, final presentation and follow up interview, students were able to integrate their understanding of their own personal attributes as found in their StrengthsFinder results to make connections to their personal history, to their reactions and emotions to encounters on the course, to what they were able to contribute to team goals during the course and even how they have been able to continue applying them after the course. Ways in which students have continued to apply them after the course range from giving advice to friends, becoming better managers at work, contributing to student organizations through leadership roles, discussing strengths on a resume or during job

interviews, persevering in future academic endeavors, and by even giving them a boost in confidence and self-worth that was not previously present.

Understanding and leveraging the personal attributes of others

As an extension of learning about their own strengths, students began to affirm one another by giving praise and compliments to one another in the form of "strengths language." This may look something like, "I really liked how you used your *Developer* today," "I appreciate your *Includer*; the world could use more people like you," or "thanks for encouraging me today with your *Positivity*." By exercising this practice, students began to not only understand their own top 5 strengths out of 34 possible outcomes, they began to recognize the contributions of others and that a well-rounded team must be comprised of all kinds of people in order to be most effective. In this manner, students were also able to mitigate their own group conflicts by utilizing similar "strengths language" by being more understanding of an approach someone might have taken that would have not been the preferred approach of someone else. These comments looked more like, "She is giving so many analogies because she is *Communication*," "Her *Empathy* is really having a hard time dealing with this right now; let's just give her some space and ask her if she wants to talk about it later," "She may take a bit more time to get through the museum because she is a *Learner* and will want to read all the placards," or, "He automatically assumed leadership of the class because he is *Command*; why don't you just ask him if you can lead next time?"

Strengths language came up frequently in the course, and was first modeled by the faculty during class discussion, daily activity, or used as a tool of positive affirmation and reinforcement to entries in student journals. Within a week or two, students soon took over this behavior as a means to praise each other and also talk through difficult situations, and although

others outside the course are not familiar with StrengthsFinder or related terms, they still use common language with others to achieve the same outcome.

The utilization of the StrengthsFinder results over the Learning Style Inventory results should necessarily be seen as a finding in and of itself, as the faculty prompts and directed discussion could have had a biasing effect on this outcome. Both have been used countless times in positive ways in various educational settings; however for the use of this course design, StrengthsFinder provided more relevant discussion points for our students to not only understand their own personal attributes, but also the importance in understanding the personal attributes of others so that team efforts were enhanced and their efforts could be as effective as possible.

Faculty Role in Developing Students

Student learning abroad is a paramount expectation, yet providing evidence for the many areas that students are learning, even beyond specific syllable outlines are very difficult. Applying different forms of interventions have proven to aid in benefits and gains students can make during a study abroad, and here, the case for faculty serving as a specific means of intervention is made. Approaching opportunities for student learning must be made with sincere intentionality which was applying through alertly observing students, applying necessary challenge and support, and making an effort to build trust and rapport with students in order to make overall gains in students' intellectual development, as described through Perry's (1970) model.

How faculty can intentionally challenge and support students abroad

Stemming from the work of Daloz (1986; 1999) wherein the role of a mentor was seen as a useful role in guiding college students, though not typically one found in the classroom, was the birth Sanford's (1962) Challenge and Support Model. Again, the application of actively

challenging and supporting students in order to assist them in arriving at a newfound stage of personal development has historically only been relegated to out of the classroom activity. A loose case may be justified for why applying challenge and support in a traditional classroom may be appropriate; however, when considering a course setting in a completely foreign environment that is far away from any means of support systems students may be accustomed to, it should rest on the shoulders of someone to take on a role slightly different than simply a teacher imparting knowledge and information, and this most directly applies to the faculty-lead of the course. Within Sanford's model the risks of allowing too much or too little challenge or support can result in unwanted outcomes. Too much support and too little challenge may lead to debilitating reliance upon the faculty to problem solve with little learning involved. Too much challenge with too little support may lead students to burnout, stress, anxiety, or failure (Sanford, 1962; 1966).

As shown in the results section, faculty observation of students occur daily and on an ongoing basis simply to consistently assess how students are doing, how they are interacting, how they are coping, how they performing in the class, and everything in between. Two sections of evidence are shared in this study that can shed light on the role faculty activity take in intentionally challenging and supporting students throughout the course. One is through their own journal keeping and the other is through their direct feedback to students either in person or as written responses to student journal entries.

Faculty observations of students

Observations and note keeping regarding student activity, behavior and general fare are noted extensively in the results of this study. Whether students were creating positive relationship with group members, reacting emotionally to an incident, engaging in conflict with

one another, performing well in the class, achieving new levels of personal growth, or retreating emotionally or physically, no observation was too small to note. Again, if students are to be seen as "people who are learning" rather than just simply as "learners," then every attempt to understand the student as a person should be an expectation in order to adequately attempt to teach a student, guide them through meaningful learning experiences, and help them take control of their own learning space. If interventions such as a side private conversation regarding feedback, praising a student in class, a difficult conversation, or group member mediation, were deemed necessary based on observable material and field notes the intervention was much simpler to approach since the complexity of the scenario had already been worked through within the faculty journal entry.

While verbal or written information or feedback was given to students in the most positive, encouraging package possible, notes in the faculty journal were often very raw and just as emotionally charged as entries in the student journals. If this level of faculty invention in student learning is to be had, one can expect for students to affect faculty just as much as faculty affect students. In the event that faculty are being affected negatively, they too, can serve as their own "inner mentor" to work through difficult scenarios, be honest about their own motivation or perceptions of student performance, or use the journal as a sounding board in order come to a sound conclusion or approach for the next round of student interaction (Stevens, Cooper, & Lasater, 2006).

Faculty intentionally applying challenge and support to student interaction

Aside from the use of student observations and written field notes through the faculty journals, faculty on island programs are in the position to interact with students on a daily basis, not just in a classroom setting, but often during group activities, meals, transportation, or even

leisure time. Each interaction with a student is an opportunity to either apply levels of challenge or support, and wisdom must be used when deciding which is appropriate to use at any given time. Observations shared in the results section reveal that students encounter many hardships while abroad, whether because of personal, painful memories, worrying about a new developing relationship with group members, or coming to terms with a new conclusion about other cultures, which in some cases require an extension of grace while also balancing the need to press on with course progression. Employing a healthy balance of knowing when it is most appropriate to share one application or another is greatly dependent upon student observations, constant communication and careful discernment.

This section is particularly important in that, it will always be the easier route to choose to skip a much needed conversation or to facilitate a learning opportunity with a student in hopes that the situation will simply work itself out, and certainly in lieu of something more enjoyable like a rest, a leisurely activity, or a phone call home to a familiar voice. As much as students are expected to live outside their comfort zones on a course with rigor pressing from both the academic side as well as the personal development side, faculty should expect an equally challenging venture. The position has been taken and widely agreed upon that a long-term study abroad experience has much more expected and lasting outcomes than a short-term option (Dwyer, 2007; Gillan, 1996); however if intentionally planned, faculty intervention and unique course design can create the same level of lasting and impactful outcomes (Savicki, 2008).

Earning the privilege of being able challenge and support students

While Daloz (1986; 1999) and Sanford (1962; 1966) have toyed with similar concepts of reaching a careful balance between the ebb and flow helping students find their own balanced approach to learning or personal growth, none of these have discussed the matter of earning the

privilege to do so. Being able to have any sort of positive affect on students is not something to be taken lightly or for granted. Instead, this requires a level of rapport that can only be created over space, time, and through mutual respect. In more difficult cases, this may even require the opportunity of proving one's self to a student as being worthy of such a role after a difficult incident that puts true intention to the test.

In the instructor's journals and in follow-in interviews, these difficult incidents were referred to as "breakdowns." If the group encountered a shared experience that particularly difficult such as being lost in the airport or responding to the group's fear of our hotel surroundings after a student was groped by a stranger in the street, or if a more personal story was shared by a student requiring extreme vulnerability or a panic attack, or how faculty respond to students enduring hardships outside their comfort zones, these instances are such opportunities to put those true intentions to the test and ultimately what students will remember when deciding whether to grant someone the privilege of being able to challenge or support them in the future. How faculty handle these scenarios have the unique and unplanned opportunity to build trust bridges that cannot be created by any level of planning.

Simply by being in same island environment together over a period of time, and utilizing every opportunity to talk through a matter or give feedback can create the grounds of rapport which can lead to being given such a privilege. If this is not created, no amount of feedback whether positive or negative, will be taken with meaning by the student, which in effect leaves the opportunity for faculty to play a significant role in student learning or personal development rendered powerless as a means of intervention. Being able to effectively utilize a faculty role to challenge or a support a student is an earned privilege rather than a right based on class roster or course fees.

Difficulty in Sharing Stories with Others Back Home

Vande berg, Paige, and Lou (2012) begin their book *Student Learning Abroad* by sharing the chief complaint and misunderstanding among stakeholders about study abroad courses is that students, families, institutions, and the general public assume that it is a life changing, transformational experience, yet students are commonly unable to explain in specific language what this means. Ten months after the trip, students knew they had been through something truly wonderful and transformational, but had very few people with whom to share this experience, even describing their failed attempts as very lonely.

By and large, even though students considered themselves very different people than who they were when they first signed up for the course, they found it difficult to put their experiences in words or were not pleased with how their listeners interpreted their stories. Moreover, students find themselves having to censor what parts of their cherished stories they tell to others, for fear that others may negatively misinterpret the reality behind their story with a xenophobic or Western-centric lens. In order to protect and preserve the dignity of those they came to know and befriend, students may choose to not share all parts of the story they believe listeners back home may not understand.

They agreed that those who have traveled to rural or developing areas may be able to understand similar plights through shared experiences, but more importantly are those who are open minded and interested in learning about other cultures. Students tended to believe that just because a person has traveled does not necessarily make them open minded; instead, if given the choice, they would rather share their stories with those who are open minded and had never traveled, rather than with those who had travelled but were not open minded. Given the transformative experience students truly did have during this course, it is a shame that their

stories are ones that cannot be shared widely but rather leave them feeling a sense of loneliness because they feel that no one else may truly be able to grasp what they went through.

Conclusion

Study abroad experiences create rich learning spaces in which students can learn new content as well as develop personally. An island experience, specifically in the form of a short-term, faculty-led study abroad creates an environment where students and faculty face encounters abroad as a unit, and consequently facilitate scenarios in ways that can intentionally develop students in different ways in a short amount of time.

Rather than seeing students as simply learners who can receive the same level of treatment and returned expectation, students must be seen as people who are learning, each with unique personalities, motivations, histories, memories, reactions knowledge, and capacity to grapple with new and potentially challenging information and scenarios. Students rely upon their personal repertoire of knowledge and skills to create meaning of the same shared experience, which leads to different interpretations and learning outcomes, which makes the very act of learning a highly personal engagement.

The ability to incorporate a personal assessment to allow students to learn more about their own personal strengths and attributes as well as those of others was an effective means of students being able to understand why they behave the way they do and to see those behaviors as strengths that can be leveraged in a number of settings. Conversely, this also helped them to better understand each other's behaviors and by extension, understand what different teammates could contribute to the group as well as understand how to mediate their own group conflicts.

The roles of faculty were demonstrated in different ways depending on the situation, and were perceived by students to be necessary transitions. Where sometimes they needed the faculty to be their teachers, they also admitted needing the faculty to play roles such as mediator, mentor, sounding board, deliverer of tough messages or even simply a listening ear. Once a level of trust and rapport was built with each student, the ability to truly assist their learning and personal growth grew exponentially, as being able to apply challenge or support as a student intervention is a privilege that can only be granted by the student.

Although students may have a difficult time sharing their stories about how they were transformed while abroad out of fear of miscommunicating the true message to those who did not share similar experiences, their transformations can be explained and observed in terms of the changes they each adopted and were able to apply in the months following the course completion. Outlook, habits, critical thinking, problem solving, and behaviors were numerous and unique to each student.

Implications for Policy

Whereas the push to increase the number of students studying abroad across the country is parallel with the mission statements of universities who have study abroad departments (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 1997; Fischer, 2011; Mowry & Sampat, 2005; U.S. Campus Report, 2013; U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, 2012), numbers continue to be low with only 1.35% of enrolled students studying abroad (NAFSA, 2013). Funding continues to be a barrier to students despite the national scholarships available, Gilman, Fulbright, Boren, and Freeman, as well as individual campus scholarships. Despite the interest in sending more students abroad for the transferable private and public benefits, stakeholders are consistently left

questioning what benefits come of financing such an expensive venture. The inclusive efforts of many will be required to turn this trend around.

Role of Faculty

Requiring faculty to explicitly outline the course's expected and learning outcomes on the course syllabus and to ensure students understand what they will be expected to reach by the close of the course is an important first step. Further, however, is to keep this list of outcomes at the heart of daily activity and course discussion. Giving students frequent feedback as to whether their current performance is on par with meeting the outcomes by the key points during the course should be shared through transparent feedback. A report should be delivered to the study abroad office outlining what outcomes were reached, how and through what evidence.

Role of Study Abroad Office

Once study abroad offices receive various reports on individual faculty-led programs, a compilation should be created that can be provided that is shared with departments, colleges and administrators so that those who were outsiders to the process can be informed on exactly what was achieved by embarking on the study abroad courses. How the university chooses to use this information should leverage further funding, recruitment, rankings of the university, and other creative ventures.

Role of Students

If faculty are doing their part of sharing students' expectations before, during, and after the course, students should be able to provide an account of how they were able to meet each expected and learning outcome giving specific examples as evidence. Beyond simply a course final paper or exam, these outcomes should be crafted in such a way that can be used as talking points that may be adjusted for any level of audience. No longer should students find themselves

in a situations where it is difficult to explain how they were transformed through their experiences abroad, but be guided and trained on how to craft this important message for those who are interested in understanding what outcomes study abroad can truly deliver if designed well.

Role of University Administration and State and Federal Government

If increasing numbers is a goal for our universities and country, and the efforts of faculty, students and study abroad offices are providing evidentiary support of benefits reaped by students studying abroad, then efforts should be apparent that commitment for support, funding and resources is on the forefront of priorities. Rather than asking for increases in study abroad numbers with little support, the effort should be a joint commitment on the part of all involved. While studying abroad can be seen as simply a private good for one single individual, the extended benefits that one individual can potentially come home with can extend its transformational effects in the form of a more educated people and democracy, in the words of John Dewey (1916).

Implications for Practice

While changes in policy may be out of the hands and control of many involved at the lowest levels of study abroad efforts, the implications for practice are much more achievable yet also require a considerable commitment towards the cause.

Assessment of Student Readiness Prior to Course

For this course, students were required to apply for the course then schedule an interview with faculty members. Through the interview, faculty were able to gain a sense of student maturity level, reasons for wishing to study abroad, and future goals which ultimately informed

faculty on student readiness, which is a key factor in how students will be able to cope with stressors and unfamiliar, sometimes uncomfortable encounters abroad. Student readiness is mentioned several times in research and writings related to international education, but thus far, no actual means of assessment has been created that adequately measures student readiness nor has it been clearly defined. In the absence of such a tool, a minimal standard to assessing student readiness can be achieved through interviews or open-ended questions on an application; however, further steps should be taken to create such a tool that could help avoid negative situations abroad, or can require a student to spend another semester or year on campus prior to embarking on a study abroad course.

Use of a Personal Assessment Tool to Create Common Language

In the absence of many familiar or comforts that students may be accustomed to relying upon during typical, traditional terms on campus, the use of a common language can form a temporary familiarity while abroad that students mutually understand and utilize on a daily basis. In this case, each student took the StrengthsFinder assessment and Kolb Learning Style Inventory, yet StrengthsFinder prevailed as the tool that students were able to utilize in many different ways. These included the ability to understand more about their own strengths, how to leverage their strengths in various settings, understanding the strengths of others, understanding how the strengths of others could contribute to team goals, and how to mitigate conflict among the team. Students soon adopted a shared language in which they referred to each other's strengths in endearing, encouraging and understanding ways. Adding this assessment and shared language to any course regardless of location or topic is a simple intervention that can add value and exponential benefits to basic course outcomes.

Training for Faculty

If student learning and expected outcomes are heavily reliant upon the navigation of experiences abroad, and the role of faculty be an integral intervention tool, concerted efforts must be made to train faculty before embarking on a faculty-led study abroad course so that they are best prepared for what they may encounter with each student. Since students are each different with unique personalities, expectations and needs, the blanket treatment of all learners as one unit will likely not result in the same levels of individual transformation that could be possible if students are treated instead as individual people who are learning. Since unforeseen scenarios may adversely affect students or they may need a means to process something emotionally taxing, training should include an introduction into student development theory and appropriate approaches to various scenarios. This may come in handy if crisis intervention is necessary until additional professional assistance is provided to better assist the student and relieve the faculty member. This study did not include risk assessments or policy for following university protocol for emergency situations, but the inclusion of that information should certainly supersede development interventions abroad and included as a separate training.

Use of Interventions in All Types of Study Abroad Courses

Regardless of study abroad type (exchange program, affiliated, faculty-led, island) or duration (short, medium or long) the attempts at integrating some forms of interventions to help students drive home the point of studying abroad, both academically related as well as the gains in personal growth. Several intervention tools were discussed in the literature review that were not used in this study, and only a select few were used in this study. It would seem that attempting to apply some intervention method to student learning outcomes on such a rich opportunity as studying abroad can only result in positive outcomes, even if some are more effective than others. The costs that can accumulate by studying abroad are great and such a

venture should come with maximum returns on the investment of time, money, and resources. If tremendous gains are to be had by studying abroad, the results should not be left to chance. Making concerted efforts at all possible points is necessary, whether through the use of cultural mentors, reflective journaling with instructor responses, personal assessment tools, online discussion, or other creative tools should be incorporated into all types of study abroad courses.

Recommendations for Future Research

Since this study was qualitative and only included six students, replication of this study should certainly be a first step in future research in order to compare, verify, or challenge results and findings. The course title and topic could serve as the replicated course; however, stronger comparisons would arise if replications with similar interventions were performed in different locations, led by different faculty, with different students and over a different course topic. If findings from this study are to truly hold ground and weight, the transferability to any course should hold steady.

The gender distribution on this course was heavily weighted on the female side. Five of the six students were females, both faculty leaders were female, as well as our non-profit partners. Chinese faculty and student partners were relatively even distribution of male to female. The single male student on this course shared that being the only male was a significant challenge for him throughout the course with no one to share his perspective from a gender standpoint. Additionally, with both faculty members being females, this likely created a bias in the kinds of stories students were able to share, each with different comfort levels of sharing a story with a female faculty member or even in receiving feedback from a female faculty member. If the study were replicated with a different gender distribution, findings may be altered.

As mentioned in implications for practice, there is a strong need to create a means of assessment that can measure student readiness so that faculty can make more informed decisions when accepting students into the program. As relayed through research, if students are not ready to encounter a variety of challenging scenarios abroad and feel an absence of support systems, adverse reactions may result in negative feelings, stereotypes, emotions, or crises that were unintended and could prove very difficult for a faculty member to deal with abroad in balance with teaching the rest of the course and the students.

Finally, international educators and stakeholders share a common concern that though students may be embarking on truly transformational experiences that are life altering, they are largely unable to explain what this means in measurable and understandable language to those who did not go on the course with them. While it is to be expected that they would tend to only share their personal stories from abroad from others they believe will be open to the story and interested in intercultural learning, a way must be provided for students through training or exercises that can help them mold their experiences into varying levels of messages that are appropriate for different audiences, whether for donors, administrators, parents, children, and even those who are uninterested in the abyss of the unknown world beyond the borders of their own country.

Closing

Choosing to embark on a study abroad course is an exciting and costly venture for students, and in addition to what they may have previous regarded as a vacation with a little coursework thrown in can soon become a transformational experience if interventions and faculty roles are intentionally applied to increase student learning, experiences, and personal

development. Traditionally, applying a student development approach to student interactions was something that could only be found in extra-curricular activity outside the classroom, but this study sought to boldly apply this approach to a classroom setting during a faculty-led, short-term study abroad course. Based on findings, this attempt has been successful on many fronts, has resulted in a variety of positive outcomes for students both academically and personally, and has even had lasting effects long after the completion of their course. Further, these findings also suggest that with concerted and intentional interventions, a short-term, faculty-led course can be truly transformational for students and create comparable or even competitive gains as a long-term study abroad course.

This qualitative study sought to understand more about the experiences of students abroad and what sorts of changes they go through as a result of their experiences, how a personal assessment could shed light on students own strengths as well as the strengths of others in order to bolster outcomes of teamwork, as well as to understand how the role of faculty can affect student learning and personal growth. While the experiences of students abroad and outcomes are something that are commonly sought after, accounting for these are often difficult and the unique use of personal assessments and application of student development approach is not a commonplace practice in an academic course setting on campus or abroad. Thus, the blending of these efforts and interventions can be used to inform future implementation of similar courses reaching for similar outcomes.

Appendix A

Interview Protocol Questions

1) Can you describe specific moments/experiences you can recall from the trip that caused you to see the world differently or reevaluation a prior conception?

2) Now that you have been back from our course trip for X months, do you find yourself referring back to experiences from the course trip to analyze or evaluate current situations in new ways – can you walk me through an example or two?

3) What are some positive memories from the course trip you find yourself looking back on?
   - What is it about your personal history or identity that influenced you to interpret those memories as positive?

4) What are some negative memories from the course trip you find yourself looking back on?
   - What is it about your personal history or identity that influenced you to interpret those memories as negative?

5) Knowing what you learned about yourself through the self-assessments (StrengthsFinder and Kolb's Learning Styles) or otherwise during the course trip, have you found yourself leveraging your strengths or talents in different ways than you would have before the course?
6) Part of the course curriculum talked about social problems (how to identify social problems and how to address social problems). Since the course have you found yourself thinking on, identifying, or addressing social problems in ways you may not have prior to the trip?

7) Think about how you view yourself – your opinions of yourself – how you would describe yourself. As a function of the course, do you think you view yourself any differently than you did before the trip? How did you view/describe yourself before, versus how do you view/describe yourself now?

8) Based on your personal opinion or perspective, what is your idea of the role/roles your two faculty members were there to fill?
   - How do you think those roles affected your experience or learning during the course?

9) The purpose of the DIE (Describe, Interpret, Evaluate) journal entries were to purposefully attempt to slow down the jumping to conclusions based on scenes/scenarios

that seemed out of the ordinary. Similar to that technique, have you found yourself taking the time to critically evaluate new situations since our return in ways you may have previously? Can you think of examples that you can share or expand upon?

10) What do you think you would tell other students who are considering taking this kind of course?

11) What sorts of students should embark on a course like this? What sorts of students shouldn't?

12) What would you tell them to expect in terms of experiences?

13) What would you tell them to expect to gain in terms of getting to know others from a different country or culture?

14) What are some things you've been able to recognize about building those relationships with others from backgrounds different than your own or how should people best go about cultivating new relationships? (What is the opposite of that? What would ensure that someone would not successfully cultivate new relationships of this kind?)

15) What sorts of ways should one prepare themselves personally, physically, or mentally for a course like this?

16) Is there anything you regret about your experience in this course, or something you would now go back and change?

17) When you find yourself telling your friends or family from back home about your experience, what is that like? (Are you able to articulate all the feelings and experiences? Are they able to truly understand what you're trying to express?)

APPENDIX B

Personal Assessment (StrengthsFinder/Learning Style) Journal Prompts

1) Describe each of your Top 5 Strengths in your own words and include how you see each of them play out in your daily life.

2) Of your Top 5 Strengths, which is one you don't quite understand as much or even wish you did not have in lieu of another kind of strength?

3) During our time in China thus far, how have you been able to put your strengths to work to navigate a foreign land, interact with our Chinese partners, and meet the goals of our service project?

4) Find another student in the class who has a strength that you do not have in your Top 5. Explain what this strengths means to them and how it plays out in his/her daily life.

5) For each of your strengths, explain how someone who does not share that particular strength may misinterpret the value of your strength or see it as a negative quality.

6) Describe your Learning Style and how you use it to learn. What learning style is opposite yours and how can you being to practice tactics that belong to the learning style opposite yours. Does this idea make you uncomfortable?

7) Consider Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. When you are not getting the basic level of needs such as food, water, rest, shelter, what do you think this does to your strengths or the quality of your strengths? What can you do to ensure your needs are being met so that your strengths can perform with top quality?

8) Consider all 34 of the Strengths and compare them to what you have learned about Chinese culture, values, and traditions. Which of the strengths do you think may not be valued as highly in Chinese culture and why?

9) If you were to build a successful team (for any goal or project) what Strengths would you want your teammates to possess, considering that you can only bring your own 5 to the table?

10) Think about your Learning Style and how you use it to learn. Thinking back through your own history, where do you think you came to gravitate toward your particular learning style?

APPENDIX C

Journal Entry Instructions

Write your name, top 5 Strengths, and learning style on the front of your journal. This will help us identify your journals and provide a quick reference to your assessment results as we respond to each of your journal entries.

Each journal entry should be reflective in nature rather than a rundown of the day's events. We want to see that you're reflecting on the day's events with writings on how you feel, how you were affected, what you thought about what happened, what role you played in day's situations, how you might change the role you play, what this situation may mean to you or others, etc.

Your journals will be kept confidential and will only be read by your two instructors. Anything you wish to write about in your journal will remain confidential unless you choose to share it yourself. Information about your thoughts, reflections, etc. will not be shared or brought up by your instructors.

Every journal entry should include four distinct parts:

1) Reflection on StrengthsFinder/Kolb prompt
2) Reflection on readings and class discussion
3) Personal reflection
4) DIE entry

Each DIE Entries should have three exact parts and a photo

1) Describe the scene in simple, factual language.
   There is a woman cleaning her baby's diaper in a stream of water. Next to her is another child bathing in the water. Next to them is another person scooping water from the stream and carrying it away in a bowl.
2) Interpret why you think the scene is occurring.
   This stream looks like it is being used for all water needs in the village as though the water itself is clean and ready for all needs
3) Evaluate the bigger picture of this scenario through critical thinking.
   I do not know for sure, but the person talking the water away may intend to use it for drinking or cooking. I wonder if they have a way of cleaning the water before using it since the water was also used to clean a dirty diaper and the bathe in- so it is likely dirty. There are many developing areas that either do not know about the health benefits of clean water, or do not have the means to get it.
4) Provide a photo of this scene and include in your journal.

Journals are due to your instructors before breakfast every other day. Refer to syllabus for schedule.

APPENDIX D

List of Student's Individual StrengthsFinder and Learning Style Results

Ashton –

Top 5 Strengths: Intellection, Responsibility, Futuristic, Relator, Maximizer

Learning Style – Imagining

Dominic –

Top 5 Strengths: Competition, Analytical, Responsibility, Focus, Restorative

Learning Style: Balancing

Evie –

Top 5 Strengths: Empathy, Developer, Includer, Adaptability, Input

Learning Style: Experiencing

Isobel –

Top 5 Strengths: Connectedness, Achiever, Ideation, Communication, Learner

Learning Style – Reflecting

Leslie –

Top 5 Strengths: Belief, Futuristic, Achiever, Responsibility, Discipline

Learning Style – Reflecting

Yessica –

Top 5 Strengths: WOO, Includer, Ideation, Positivity, Empathy

Learning Style – Experiencing

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