

# DECONSTRUCTING UNDERLYING PRACTICES OF SHORT-TERM STUDY ABROAD:

EXPLORING ISSUES OF CONSUMERISM, POSTCOLONIALISM, CULTURAL TOURISM, AND COMMODIFICATION OF EXPERIENCE

CARRIE KORTEGAST  
NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
V. LEILANI KUPO  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS

---

## *Abstract*

Short-term study abroad experiences are thought to provide students with opportunities to develop the skills needed to participate in an increasingly global world. However, what is often ignored are the ways short-term programs promote consumerism, postcolonialism, cultural tourism, and commodification of experiences. In this article, we trouble the celebratory discourse of short-term study abroad and provide suggestions on how to promote more socially just short-term study abroad practices.

Keywords: Cultural tourism, study abroad practices, short-term study abroad

## Deconstructing Underlying Practices of Short-term Study Abroad: Exploring Issues of Consumerism, Postcolonialism, Cultural Tourism, and Commodification of Experience

Over the past two decades, U.S. student participation in study abroad has tripled with 62.1% students participating in short-term programs that span eight weeks or less (Institute of International Education, 2015). Students and educators are looking to study abroad programs to provide students with the international experiences, awareness, and competencies needed to participate in an increasingly interdependent, global world (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Short-term study abroad programs are perceived to be an efficient way to offer students an experience that helps them develop as global citizens through experiential cultural interactions and provides them with a space to develop cultural knowledge, foreign language skills, and international awareness (Talbur & Stewart, 1999).

With institutions' of higher education continued dependency on short-term study abroad programs to provide immersion experiences, researchers and faculty have begun to challenge assumptions that immersion creates "automatic cultural and language learning" (Talbur & Stewart, 1999, p. 163) and meaningful experiences for participants. Though attention has been given to integrating course work with students' out-of-class experience (Laubscher, 1994; Roberts, 1994; Wagner & Magistrale, 1995), more recent documentation of such curricular integration has been inadequate. Moreover, the underlying practices of obtaining these skills (e.g., language learning, intercultural competency/awareness, and personal growth) are under-examined and potentially problematic. The purpose of this article is to deconstruct underlying practices of consumerism, postcolonialism, cultural tourism, and the commodification of experience embedded within the practice of short-term study abroad. We also offer suggestions on how to promote more socially just short-term study abroad practices.

## CONTEXT FOR CRITIQUE

Our examination is rooted in critical theory with attention to how knowledge creation is “mediated by power relations that are social and historically constituted” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994, p. 304). Critical theorists are concerned with how issues of power interact with ideologies, discourse, education, social positionality, cultural dynamics, and other social institutions in order to construct a social system (Kincheloe, 2005). With that, we will trouble the celebratory discourse often attached to short-term study abroad by deconstructing and problematizing the underlying practices.

We provide vignettes from our experiences with two different short-term study abroad programs in order to explore these issues. Each of us participated in a short-term study abroad experience with undergraduate students. From these experiences, we began to question the underlying practices of short-term study abroad as it relates to issues of consumerism, postcolonial practices, cultural tourism, and commodification of experiences. We noted that while the study abroad programs can offer students a phenomenal educational experience, opportunities for reflexivity that examine issues of power and privilege are often overlooked or minimized when discussing student learning during a short-term study abroad experience.

Carrie participated in a six-week study abroad program in Valencia, Spain as a researcher conducting an ethnographic study exploring how social participation contributes to student learning during a short-term study abroad experience (Kortegast & Boisfontaine, 2015). A Midwest research university sponsored this interdisciplinary study-abroad program. While in Valencia, all 54 students involved had to take at least one Spanish language course and could also take a university-sponsored business, biology, or engineering course. Leilani was a coordinating faculty member of a six-week program in Buea, Cameroon and Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. A Mid-Atlantic university sponsored this interdisciplinary program in which 21 participants attended university-sponsored environmental science, women’s studies, literature, and education courses. Some students also completed their student teaching practicum requirements at local

elementary schools. These experiences allowed us to explore and better understand the importance of developing and implementing study abroad programs that promote global citizenry through cross cultural learning, intentional self-reflection, and meaning making.

## **RISE OF U.S. STUDY ABROAD**

Consumer and capitalistic practices can be historically linked to the institution of study abroad. Historically, privileged European families would provide their children with Grand Tours of Europe in the pursuit of high culture (Goodwin & Nacht, 1988; Lewin, 2009). The belief was that in order for their children to be “cultured citizens” they must “have some acquaintance with and understanding of the arts, sights, and sounds of other peoples” (Goodwin & Nacht, 1988, p. 10). By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, wealthy Americans were sending their children to Europe in order to “absorb and assimilate” into European high culture (Lewin, 2009). The purpose being to accumulate the cultural attributes associated with a particular social class and station (Goodwin & Nacht, 1988). Social class was tied not just to wealth but also to knowledge and experience with activities that would be considered “high culture.”

Towards the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, education abroad expanded to the “intellectual elite” in which young American men would enroll in German universities (Goodwin Nacht, 1988). Studying abroad was linked with academic rigor and the preparation of students for professional life (Brewer & Cunningham, 2009; Gore, 2005). However, the number of study abroad programs and study abroad participation remained very limited with the “economic or intellectual elites dominat[ing] American study aboard populations” (Bolen, 2001, p. 185). With the rise of the American university, Americans began to believe U.S. higher education was superior to the once admired European universities (Gore, 2005), thus beginning a decline in American men going to study abroad for intellectual pursuits, a trend that continued with the rise of graduate programs in the United States. After World War I, studying abroad became predominately an activity for undergraduate women, often attending private women’s colleges, assumed to be wealthy, and pursuing a “purposeless” liberal arts education (Gore, 2005).

Following World War II, leaders in American higher education began proposing that they “internationalize” their institutions (Goodwin & Nacht, 1988, p. 117). Starting with the National Conference on Study Abroad Programs in the 1960s, there have been increased calls for policy statements supporting the growth in American study abroad (Gore, 2005). This growth is attributed to the need for the internationalization of the educated citizenry (Goodwin & Nacht, 1988). The notion of an increasingly interdependent world served as a driving force behind the call for more globally competent Americans (Brewer & Cunningham, 2009).

While there is a push for U.S. students to study abroad by members of government, educators, parents, students, and employers, these desires are at times in contrast with “the realities of institutional and student resources and capacities” (Brewer & Cunningham, 2009, p. xi). The practice of studying abroad has to some degree been democratized and expanded to the middle class (Goodwin & Nacht, 1988), however it still reminds an activity of privilege. It continues to be a predominately White, female activity as demonstrated by the participation patterns. For the 2013-2014 academic year, women accounted for 65.3 percent of student abroad participants and 74.3 percent of study abroad students identified as White (Institute of International Education, 2015). Over the past decade, the percentage of students of color participating in a study abroad experience has increased (16.3% 2003-2004 to 25.7% 2013-2014), while the percentage of women participating in a study abroad experience has remained fairly constant (65.6% 2003-2004 to 65.3% 2013-2014; Institute of International Education).

Vestiges of the “Grand Tour” still continue today with the social practice of American college students backpacking through Europe and the vast majority of undergraduates continuing to study abroad in European cultural capitals. For the 2013/2014 academic year, the leading destinations for U.S. students to study abroad, in order, were: United Kingdom (12.6%), Italy (10.2%), Spain (8.9%), France (5.8%), and China (4.3%) (Institute of International Education, 2015). While 14 of the top 25 destinations are outside of Europe, 47.1 percent of

students study in a European country and the top four destinations are European countries (Institute of International Education).

## **PRACTICES IN CONSUMERISM**

“The world is our classroom... It’s time to break the routine. Time to explore, engage with, and embrace the unknown. It’s time to challenge your perspectives, indulge your passions and discover new ones with CIEE.” (CIEE)

“Your world [redefined] [sic]. Do you want to explore a new country or learn a new language? Make lifelong friends and memories in an exciting destination? Well, what are you waiting for?! Study abroad!” (IES Abroad)

The slogans above from different study abroad providers promote the idea that studying abroad is fun and exciting. At the same time, students will gain skills that increase their knowledge bases. Certainly, this is true for many programs; however, by marketing the practice in this way, providers’ present study abroad as a consumer product in which students purchase particular experiences and knowledge bases. Moreover, higher education administrators, faculty, and study abroad providers are pushing for greater study abroad participation. Program sessions at national conferences discuss how to increase participation in study abroad and share new ways to market programs. Implicit in these discussions are the positive learning opportunities a study abroad experience provides; yet, these programs explicitly sell travel, adventure, and exotic locations rather than an educational experience. While the objective is for students to develop increased cultural competencies and language skills, the design and structure of many short-term programs promote cultural consumerism rather than cultural engagement.

Advertisement and promotion of study abroad is often done by putting culture and cultural practices on display, to be consumed by the student and legitimize the educational experience. The process of putting culture on display starts with recruitment materials that display representations of cultural Others and continues through programmatic structures such as organized tours and attending cultural events.

A growing concern is that study abroad is becoming a consumer product in which destinations are chosen because of their appeal (Lewin, 2009) as opposed to their educative opportunities. Anderson's (2007) study found that students' choice in study abroad programs were influenced by many factors including travel and location, institutional climate and characteristics, social environment, and cultural exposure. Such factors are important considerations. However, it is not clear how these experiences are framed to encourage meaningful cultural learning and understanding. Rather, such factors are used to attract students to global experiences that exotify and validate commodification of culture as an essential way of obtaining cultural competency and legitimacy as a global citizen. These locations can become "nothing more than a playground to chalk up 'fun' experiences and a shopping mall to fill their suitcases with 'exotic' products," and with such a focus, "study abroad is nothing more than commercial travel masquerading as academic experience" (Lewin, 2009, p. xv).

Recruitment materials for short-term study abroad experiences often mirror advertisements for travel packages and tours with promises of adventure and opportunities to experience new cultures. In a review of study abroad brochures, Bolen (2001) found that they utilize "hip consumerism" in their marketing materials which communicates the message that "young people will do cool things in exotic locations while studying abroad" (p. 194). These programs are selling students an idea—that it is cool, fun, and easy to travel to another country, learn a new culture, and make friends. These messages are present in the IES Abroad slogan above. Moreover, students expect that they should have access to these experiences and this cultural knowledge.

Skelly (2009) states that "most providers [of study abroad], as reflected in their marketing, see students as narcissistic consumers" (p. 24), in other words, "many of our students come to think that the world is somehow really about them" (p. 23). For instance, CIEE, a third-party provider of study abroad experiences for students, uses the tagline "The world is our classroom." Similarly, IES Abroad, also a third-party provider, uses the tagline "Your world [redefined]"

on its website. Messages like these communicate that students who participate in these types of experiences should have the ability and power to define, and re-define, their world. This implied ownership of the world sets up unrealistic expectations of what the student can expect and places the student in a position to believe that they will have the power to change the world they are exploring or that it is their right to mold the world for their personal use and gain. These assumptions are problematic as they assume both that the world, in and of itself, is in need of the change American college students can bring and that it is the right of the American college student to use the world to his or her advantage.

Caton and Santos' (2009) analysis of the marketing materials of Semester at Sea (SAS) found that despite SAS's mission of promoting cross-cultural interaction and global citizenship, the program:

continues to (re)produce hegemonic depictions of non-Westerners, asserting a Western superiority ideology by polarizing the West and the Rest into binaries of modern-traditional, technologically advanced-backward, and master-servant and decomplexifying the globalization process by presenting the non-West as exotic, culturally pristine, and filled with happy natives. (p. 191)

For instance, several images portray SAS demonstrating how to use equipment such as cameras to host cultures as well as images of the host culture that imply an absence of modernity in contrast to the cruise ship, which displayed advanced technologies. Marketing materials contribute and reinforce U.S. superiority and frame the experience as an opportunity to disengage and judge other cultures through a lens of U.S. dominance.

## **PRACTICES IN POSTCOLONIALISM**

During pre-orientation, students were taught about the local Cameroonian custom of bargaining. Emphasis was placed on driving a "hard bargain" and getting the best deal possible. As the discussion occurred, it was made clear that the vendors would most likely increase the prices significantly because they believed the students were wealthy and could afford high prices. Little attention was paid to the culture of bargaining and the economic impact the students would



have on the area. The students were encouraged to practice these skills at local markets. After a day at a local Cameroonian craft marketplace, a student shared, “I was able to bargain them [the merchant] down to next to nothing. I got a lot of African stuff to give as gifts. I was good at making a hard bargain and got so much stuff to give away.”

Given the historical legacy of colonialism, it is not surprising that colonial and capitalistic perspectives are embedded in the practice of short-term study abroad. Study abroad programs, particularly programs in non-Western locations, run the “risk of perpetuating highly inequitable practices and relationships rooted in the earliest West/non-West interactions and continued to this day” (Che, Spearman, & Manizade, 2009, p. 110). Postcolonialism provides a framework to understand and address the persistent political, ideological, cultural, psychological, and social dominance of the “West” (Prasad, 2005; Young, 2001) that creates “global system of hegemonic economic power” (Young, 2001, p. 57). Globalization and internationalization are often celebrated within the U.S. and within higher education. However, postcolonialism provides “valuable insights into the darker side of globalization” (Prasad, 2005, p. 263).

Institutional practices, cultural discourses, and economic conditions often perpetuate colonial relationships (Prasad, 2005, p. 270), including student interactions during study abroad. Whether intentional or not, study abroad methods used to teach about culture can create a framework that promotes exploitation and positions the students as the consumer with limited benefit to the community visited. In the vignette above, the student was taught to focus on bargaining “hard.” In doing so, the value of the experience was placed in the number of items acquired by the student for a low cost rather than understanding and engaging in a cultural and social activity. The student most likely did not construct this as an example of domination or imperialism. However, the student’s perspective highlights a colonial discourse in which his structures of thinking created a hierarchical and oppositional position (Said, 1994; Young, 2001) in which he was constructed as superior to the merchant. By focusing on warning students against being “ripped off,” the program, in part, creates this oppositional and hierarchical dynamic.

Many existing education systems still bear markers of the colonial encounter in that they remain elitist, lack relevance to local realities, and are often at odds with non-Western/Indigenous knowledge systems, values, and beliefs (Crossley & Tikly, 2004). Postcolonial subjects often become objects of knowledge rather than subjects of knowledge, essentially objectifying individuals (Young, 2001). This objectification, can result in Othering, the process in which groups of individuals are “ignored, trivialized, rendered invisible and unheard, and perceived as inconsequential, de-authorized, ‘Other’, or threatening” (Tucker, 1990, p. 7) by groups in dominate positions. In this tradition, study abroad students might interact with host cultures in ways that promote U.S. superiority, fail to examine their own culture bias, and devalue the knowledge of cultural Others.

Again, in the vignette above, the student identified the items as “African” rather than by their culture of origin is problematic and Othering. The student’s use of “African” demonstrates an unchanged (by the study abroad experience) understanding of Africa as a monolithic culture instead of the diverse set of cultures with varied values, languages, practices, histories, and beliefs that comprises the continent. Rather than focusing on the process of bargaining and its cultural significance, the student seemed proud to have bargained the merchant down to “next to nothing.” Representations of the “Other” often focus on its cultures being primitive, savage, and wild (Coombes, 1994). An unflattering reading of this interaction implies that the student was proud that he outsmarted the merchant, who he perceived as “primitive.” Examining practices of postcolonialism within short-term study abroad “becomes particularly important in understanding some of its less visible and more unsavory facets” of the “relentless march of globalization” (Prasad, 2005, p. 263).

## **PRACTICES IN CULTURAL TOURISM**

Students traveled to the rain forest area in northern Cameroon as part of the cultural tour. On the way, the group stopped for a break and had the opportunity to meet with a very prestigious and important local leader. During the visit, they were welcomed with a reception and a short talk provided by the host. Prior to departure, students had

the opportunity to tour the grounds and take pictures with the honored host. When asked about the most memorable event during the visit, a student stated: “Having my picture taken with the guy who hosted us. I am going to show that picture to my family because they have never seen anyone like him before.”

The vignette above highlights the notion of students becoming watchers of difference (Desmond, 1999) in which they attempt to capture images of cultural Others to show to family back home. The student shared that the most “memorable” event was taking a picture with “the guy who hosted us” not because of his status in the community or because of the information he shared with the student but because he looked different. Additionally, the photograph became evidence to show the student’s family who “have never seen anyone like him before” that the student went somewhere exotic and met exotic people. This souvenir postcard of the student’s exotic vacation legitimized the experience.

Short-term study abroad programs often include opportunities for students to experience cultural interactions, including taking tours of popular and signification locations, attending cultural performances, and requiring students to live with host families. However, study abroad students, much like tourists, exchange money for cultural knowledge that is often stereotyped, idealized, and exoticized; hence, the power dynamics within these cultural interactions are often unequal (McLaren, 1997). Students pay to have authentic, cultural experiences and, in return, expect to have access to cultural knowledge. Instead of developing skills, knowledge, and competencies to enhance their cultural understandings, students are instead engaging in capitalistic practices of buying culture.

Buying culture often includes attending cultural performances and activities (e.g., attending a luau in Hawaii). The issue is not that students are participating in these activities, but rather these experiences promote the passive consumption of culture as simplified entertainment. Cultural performances center on “performing bodies” in which people are displayed doing something (Desmond, 1999). For instance, many of the students in Carrie’s study attended a bullfight during their study abroad experience in Spain. One of the students

shared that “regardless of how you feel [about bullfighting], it is just something you have to go see” because it is a “hallmark” of Spanish culture. Through the witnessing of the event, students are presumably able to witness culture. However, the “nonverbal” and “non-narrative” aspects of the passive culture-as-entertainment bind notions of “facticity, presence, naturalism, and authenticity together under the sign of spectacular corporeality” (Desmond, 1999, p. xv). These performances allow differences to be on display and consumed, but not negotiated or understood. Through this display, assumptions about culture and people are made or reinforced. These staged cultural experiences create a false sense of cultural interactions and cultural understanding.

## **PRACTICES IN THE COMMODIFICATION OF EXPERIENCE**

During the last week of a study abroad program in Valencia, Spain, students had the opportunity to participate in a Sunset Cruise on the Mediterranean Sea. In sharing this experience, one student stated:

Just because you can go back [home] and have these pictures and it’s like, “What did you do in the summer?” “Boat on the Mediterranean. Sailboat, Mediterranean, champagne, and friends—Be Jealous”

Similarly another student shared, “being able to be out on a boat in the ocean, it was kind of like another part of whole living the European dream” and “especially when you talk to people about like, ‘I was on a sail boat cruise in the Mediterranean,’ its kind of those ‘Oh’ factors.”

Embedded in the examples above are the notions of social and cultural capital. The experience of the sunset cruise was valued because it held social status. Moreover, these individual examples are attached to larger systems of consumption practices. During study abroad experiences, students participate in consumeristic behavior in which they purchase goods, services, and activities that enhance their experience. This enrichment occurs not because these actions offer deep insights into the host cultures or challenge students’ previously held notions about value, but because they represent the accumulation

of social and cultural capital already valued within their home culture's framework.

Consumption is more than the purchase of goods and experiences; it symbolizes what these goods and experiences represent on a larger scale (Usher, 2010). That is:

consumption always involves the giving and taking of meaning and is the means by which meanings are shared. What is consumed—be it goods, objects, or images—are signs that communicate something to others, that code behavior by structuring actions and interactions and that bring forth individuals. (p. 37)

Therefore, consumption is not simply buying or experiencing. Rather, it is a complex system of symbols; these symbols hold great significance and represent social, economic, and educational capital. Again, using the example above, the activity of going for a sunset cruise is connected to a larger system in which students receive social, economic, and educational capital for participating in this activity. There is value in participating in the activity regardless of whether or not this activity has any relationship to the educative goals of the study abroad experience.

Within a critical pedagogy of consumption framework, aspects of consumption and consumerism cannot be separated from learning and reproducing oppression; therefore, educators need to make connections between consumption, education, and learning (Sandlin & McLaren, 2010). It is argued that schools teach students how to be consumers (Martens, 2005). Therefore, it is fair to infer that study abroad programs are sites that teach students how to be consumers of culture and experiences during a study abroad experience. This understanding of consumption and education has great consequences for study abroad since the structure and design of programs often do not challenge students' understanding of self and place in a global society. Rather, the experiences teach students that cultural knowledge has a price tag. If they are able to pay the price, they will be legitimate global citizens. Short-term study abroad, like education as a whole, "has become one

of the prepackaged experiences that consumers could buy” (Bolen, 2001, p. 184).

Prepackaged experiences promote and teach students to become “watchers of difference” (Desmond, 1999) through the programmatic design such as tours of significant sites and views of cultural performances. For instance, the short-term study abroad program that Carrie researched began and ended with tours of cities around Madrid. The tours started early in the morning with students getting on a bus, driving to a city, going on a tour of the city lead by a Spanish tour guide, then the students got back on the bus and headed back to the hotel. During these tours, information was presented to students in a way that encouraged consumption of information. There was no follow up discussion about what the students learned during the tours. Through the tours, the program set forth a model of participating in study abroad. This model focused on the passively consuming the experiences, but did not provide opportunities for reflection or meaning making. Learning was merely assumed; learning was not discussed or articulated.

This model of “learning” follows the banking model of education in which students are vessels that educators fill with knowledge (Freire, 2006). Freire (2006) states, “The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness” (p. 73). The goal of study abroad is for students to increase their “critical consciousness;” however, many of the programmatic structures promote banking of information without promoting critical reflection. Without this critical reflection or critical consciousness, students engage in consumeristic practices in which knowledge and culture are commodities.

By engaging in the consumeristic practice of study abroad, students treat culture as a “product rather than a process, and it is viewed as unchanging and unchangeable” (Nieto & Bode, 2008, p. 172). Culture being “treated as a product rather than a process” leads to students “essentializing culture, that is, ascribing particular immutable characteristics to it” (p. 172). This treatment of culture as a product teaches students that culture is something that can be bought, sold, and commodified. Moreover, “consumerism’s message

of instant gratification leads participants to expect that a culture that took thousands of years to form will be quickly and easily available to them” (Bolen, 2001, p. 186). Furthermore, students might blame the program rather than their own engagement “if cultural understandings remains elusive” (p. 186).

## CREATING MORE SOCIALLY JUST PRACTICES

In discussing her experience during one of the guided tours in Madrid, Stacey stated, “[I] remember when we went to the castle... I saw a painting of Christopher Columbus bringing natives or indigenous people he had stolen [to present to Isabella and Ferdinand] and I think it was like in there and I was just like, ‘Oh my god,’ you know? And then, I mean [the room] looked like the same and I just thought like, ‘that’s so awesome.’ It gives me almost chills to think like ‘I’m in the same room [as Christopher Columbus, Isabella, and Fernando].’ I mean, I think Christopher Columbus is a douche bag but still, you know, he’s famous... [but then] I’m like ‘Are we kidding?’ We should be like spitting on the ground every time we say his name.” Carrie: “There’s not a real critical discussion about Christopher Columbus and what he did.”

Short-term study abroad and cultural immersion experiences can provide students with opportunities for consciousness-raising and learning experiences difficult to replicate or access through traditional classroom pedagogy and environment (Sue & Sue, 2008). Cultural immersion affords students the opportunity to have direct interaction with individuals from cultures different from their own (Ridley, Mendoza, & Kanitz, 1994). These immersion opportunities engage “individuals in meaningful, direct cross-cultural interactions, thereby increasing the likelihood of developing cultural understanding and empathy” (Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010, p. 167). However, cultural learning does not occur over night and involves sustained on-going contact and engagement (Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010). Therefore, educators and administrators need to mediate students’ experiences in order to minimize practices of consumerism, postcolonialism, cultural tourism, and the commodification of experience.

Practices of consumerism, postcolonialism, cultural tourism, and the commodification of experience ultimately limit understanding of global citizenry and cross-cultural learning for students. Rather than providing opportunities for students to reflect on and make meaning of encounters and learning while abroad, students are taught to experience their time as a commodity; the more they do and see, strengthens their claims of global competency. The gifts they purchase, the cultural events they attend, and the sights they see add to their legitimacy as global citizens. These experiences have value but are often used to validate their claim to be a global citizen, simply because they spent time in another country. Without structured opportunities for reflection, development, and meaning making, students might be “left to their own devices” (Kortegast & Boisfontaine, 2015) and may be unable to discuss their experiences beyond that of a commodity.

When developing more socially just study abroad practices, it is critical to promote cultural sensitivity, cultural competency, reflection, and meaning making. Moreover, developing activities that promote these goals must be interwoven throughout the program development from the inception to final assessment. One could argue simply inserting time for conversation is enough to promote reflection and dialogue. However, we argue inserting one or two opportunities for dialogue is not enough and can be a great disservice to the participants and host culture. Intentional opportunities that promote critical thinking, reflection, and meaning making are essential in students developing complex understandings of global citizenry.

There is no “right” way to create a socially just short-term study abroad experience. Tasks and activities need to be relevant to the country context and reflect institutional values and learning outcomes. Activities and interventions also need to reflect and respect the academic discipline as well as take into consideration other factors such as requirements set forth by governmental agencies and partnerships. Drawing from our experiences as researchers, social justice educators, and higher education administrators coupled with the study abroad literature, we believe it is important to ask the following questions throughout the development and implementation processes of a short-term study abroad program.



## POINTS FOR CRITICAL REFLECTION

- How will cultural competency be taught?
- What and how should students learn?
- What pedagogical practices are being used to disrupt postcolonial practices?
- What are the philosophies underlying the development of the program, pedagogy, and educational experiences?
- What are the guiding practices and how do these practices interrupt issues of practices of consumerism, postcolonialism, cultural tourism, and the commodification of experience?
- What opportunities does the program provide for students to critically reflect on their experiences?
- What opportunities are provided for students to make meaning of these experiences (during and post-study abroad)?
- How are issues of power and privilege interrupted and addressed?
- What opportunities do students have to reflect on issues of American superiority, Western domination, and cultural Othering?

These questions may provide a foundation and language to examine the purpose of short-term study abroad and begin to deconstruct understandings of global citizenry and cultural competency.

In addition to overarching critical points of reflection, below are considerations for the planning, pre-departure, in-country, and post-study abroad processes.

## PLANNING

- Identify and employ a pedagogy that disrupts postcolonial practices, commodification, and cultural tourism.
- Create/adopt a framework that acknowledges the impact of power, oppression, tourism, and community on the participant, community members, and overall learning experience.

- Identify opportunities to role model ways to intervene, ask questions, make meaning, and complicate conversations about their experiences.
- Focus learning outcomes on measurable outcomes that include intercultural learning and country appropriate cultural expectations and values.
- Broaden conversations about expectations and experiences to include purpose of the experience, biases, and in-country expectations.

## **IN-COUNTRY EXPERIENCES**

- Build reflection and small group interactions into the curriculum. Provide participants opportunities to engage with their daily experiences and encourage reflection and learning.
- Provide writing and discussion prompts that include opportunities to think about and process personal values, biases, and experiences. These prompts should provide opportunities to engage students in different ways (writing, small group/large group discussions, group projects, etc.)
- Engage in conversations that address issues of power, privilege, consumerism, and representation of knowledge.

## **POST-STUDY ABROAD**

- Create opportunities for participants to develop group projects that will be presented once back in country.
- Provide experiences that go beyond reunion type activities. Structured interactions regarding re-entry issues, sharing experiences (in-country and post-study abroad), and personal interactions should be included.
- Develop opportunities for students to engage in meaning-making opportunities that encourage reflection. Engagement should include articulation of emerging knowledge, skills, and competencies developed during the study abroad experience.
- Support opportunities for presentations to campus and local communities that focus on in-country experiences. These presentations can include photo essays and research projects.

## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- Do activities provide opportunities for participants to explore their learning and work through any emotional or intellectual dissonance they may experience?
- Do activities promote cultural tourism and U.S. imperialism?
- Do activities complicate notions of cultural learning?
- Are photographs used to explore difference or emphasize difference?
- What incentives can be used to encourage program planners to address these issues?

The above are areas in which critical reflection can assist in identifying and disrupting normative study abroad practices and assist in developing more socially just study abroad experiences.

As these issues are examined, it is essential to understand how students are being taught and to intervene when participating in practices that objectify difference, commodify culture, and/or engage in postcolonial activities. These are not easy tasks, hence the importance of providing opportunities for critical reflection and intentional interactions throughout the experiences.

## CONCLUSION

We believe experiences where students are able to meaningfully engage with other cultures and interact with people different from themselves are crucial. Moreover, these opportunities can assist students in transforming their understandings of the world, themselves, and others in profound ways. However, it is imperative that faculty, administrators, and program directors intervene, mediate, and provide programmatic opportunities for students to reflect and make meaning of their learning, practices, and engagements. If left unmediated, short-term study-abroad may result in experiences where students reify American dominance, superiority, and perpetuate a sense of being “good Americans” who help the underprivileged all in the name of becoming “global citizens.” Our goal is to highlight these underlying

practices in order to promote more equitable, socially just, and reflexive short-term study abroad practices.

If programmatic structures are not addressed and students' practices are not challenged on the ways they engage in their study abroad experience, short-term study abroad becomes reduced to cultural tourism masked as an academic experience. Moreover, students are taught that cultural knowledge can be purchased and is only accessible to those who can pay. Experiential learning and meaning making is lost once culture is commodified and is seen as objects that can be bought and sold rather than an opportunity for critical reflection of societal values, practices, and beliefs. Reframing short-term study abroad experiences is an opportunity to challenge notions of cultural learning and create opportunities for critical thinking, reflection, and deeper understanding of what it means to be a global citizen.

## REFERENCES

- Anderson, B. D. (2007). Students in a global village: The nexus of choice, expectation, and experience in study abroad. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Texas, Austin, TX.
- Bolen, M. (2001). Consumerism and U.S. study abroad. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 5(3), 182-200.
- Brewer, E., & Cunningham, K. (2009). Integrating study abroad into the curriculum: Theory and practice across the disciplines. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Caton, K., & Santos, C. A. (2009). Images of the Other: Selling study abroad in a postcolonial world. *Journal of Travel Research*, 48(2), 191-204.
- CIEE (n.d). Study abroad with CIEE. Retrieved from <http://www.ciee.org/study-abroad/>.
- Che, S. M., Spearman, M., & Manizade, A. (2009). Constructive disequilibrium: Cognitive and emotional development through dissonant experiences in less familiar destinations. In R. Lewin (Ed.), *The handbook of practice and research in study abroad: Higher education and the quest for global citizenship* (pp. 99-116). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Coombes, A.E., (1994). *Reinventing Africa: Material culture and the popular imagination in late Victorian and Edwardian England*. New Haven, CT: Yale University.
- Crossely, M., & Tikly, L. (2004). Postcolonial perspectives and comparative and international research in education: A critical introduction. *Comparative Education*, 40(2), 147-156.
- Desmond, J. C. (1999). *Staging tourism: Bodies on display from Waikiki to Sea World*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago.
- Freire, P. (2006). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition). New York, NY: Continuum International.
- Tucker, M. (1990). Director's foreword. In R. Ferguson, M. Gever, T. T. Minh-ha & C. West (Eds.), *Out there: marginalization and contemporary cultures* (pp.7-8). New York, NY: The New Museum of Contemporary Art.

- Goodwin, C. D., & Nacht, M. (1988). *Abroad and beyond: Patterns of American overseas education*. New York, NY: Cambridge University.
- Gore, J. E. (2005). *Dominant beliefs and alternative voices: Discourse, belief, and gender in American study abroad*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Institute of International Education. (2015). *Open Doors*. Retrieved from <http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/Fast-Facts>.
- IES Abroad (n.d.). *Why study abroad?* Retrieved from <http://www.iesabroad.org/study-abroad/why/why-study-abroad>.
- Kincheloe, J. (2005). *Critical pedagogy primer*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Kincheloe, J. L., & McLaren, P. L. (1994). Re-thinking critical theory and qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 138-154). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kortegast, C. A. & Boisfontaine, M. T. (2015). Beyond “it was good”: Students’ post-study abroad practices in negotiating meaning. *Journal of College Student Development*, 56, 812-828.
- Laubscher, M. R. (1994). *Encounters with difference: Student perceptions of the role of out-of-class experiences in education abroad*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Lewin, R. (Ed.). (2009). *The handbook of practice and research in study abroad: Higher education and the quest for global citizenship*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Martens, L. (2005). Learning to consume—consuming to learn: Children at the interface between consumption and education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 26, 343-357.
- McLaren, D. (1997). *Rethinking tourism and ecotravel*. Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian.
- Nieto, S., & Bode, P. (2008) *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

- Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (2005). *How college affects students: A third decade of research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Prasad, P. (2005). *Crafting qualitative research: Working in the postpositivist traditions*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.
- Ridley, C. R., Mendoza, D. W., & Kanitz, B. E. (1994). Multicultural training: Reexamination, operationalization, and integration. *Counseling Psychologist*, 22, 227-289.
- Roberts, C. (1994). Cultural studies and student exchange: Living the ethnographic life. In M. Byram (Ed.), *Culture and language learning in higher education* (pp. 11-17). Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.
- Said, E. (1994). *Culture and imperialism*. New York, NY: Vintage.
- Sandlin, J. A., & McLaren, P. (2010) *Critical pedagogies of consumption: Living and learning in the shadow of the "Shopocalypse"*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Skelly, J. M. (2009). Fostering engagement: The role of international education in the development of global civil society. In R. Lewin (Ed.), *The handbook of practice and research in study abroad: Higher education and the quest for global citizenship* (pp. 21-32). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Sue, D. W. & Sue, D. (2008). *Counseling the culturally diverse: Theory and practice* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.) Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Talbert, S., & Stewart, M. A. (1999). What's the subject of study abroad?: Race, gender, and "living culture." *The Modern Language Journal*, 83(2), 163-175.
- Tomlinson-Clarke, S. M. & Clarke, D. (2010). Culturally focused community service learning: An international cultural immersion experience. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling & Development*, 38(3), 166-175.
- Usher, R. (2010). Consuming learning. In J. A. Sandlin & P. McLaren (Eds.) *Critical pedagogies of consumption: Living and learning in the shadow of the "Shopocalypse"* (pp. 36-46). New York, NY: Routledge.

Wagner, K., & Magistrale, T. (1995). *Writing across culture: An introduction to study abroad and the writing process*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Young, R. (2001) *Postcolonialism: an historical introduction*. Oxford, England: Blackwell.