Ethical Guidelines for Study Abroad: Can We Transform Ugly Americans into Engaged Global Citizens?

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Summary

Study abroad has become a common experience for American social work students. However, there is little guidance for facilitation of such courses in an international context. As a result, there is a risk that students and facilitators can perpetuate the privileged and 'Ugly American' image. Providing guidance for prevention of such mistakes, the authors present a conceptual model for international learning, based on an ethical framework founded on personal values and supported by traditional ethical principles and values. Included are the pillars of social justice and human rights, community capacity, dignity and worth of the person, self-determination, boundaries, competence, facilitated learning in a safe environment and integrity. Finally, consciousness-raising as professionals, respectful engagement in context, and intercultural competence are discussed.

Keywords: ethics, social work values, intercultural competence

Introduction

Study abroad among social work students in the USA is a natural outgrowth from our tradition of adventurous exploration and our history as colonists

(Twain, 1971). Historically, as travellers and exporters of our cultural and militaristic values, we have been dubbed 'The Ugly American' (Lederer and Burdick, 1958). In lesser developed nations, our material wealth makes us particularly vulnerable to being out of touch with the realities of poor peoples, where we may appear lacking in compassion, arrogant and ego-centric. Alternatively, as Americans[1] studying abroad, we may over-compensate by becoming paternalistic and offering our resources or advice as 'experts', potentially alienating colleagues and the communities from whom we seek to learn (Midgley, 1981; Chambers, 1983, 1997). In the best-case scenario, social work students travel abroad prepared for an intercultural exchange where knowledge transfer is undertaken in an equitable and respectful manner, which encourages mutual understandings of multiple realities (Healy, 2003).

During this time of international conflict and war, Americans are increasingly vulnerable to nationalism, even with our pluralistic societal foundations. It is important to remember, that the seal of the United States says '*E pluribus unum*' which means 'from many, come one' (Walzer, 1990). However, the definition of 'one', at this time, has become a source of great discussion with rapid immigration, particularly from Latin-America (Rotabi *et al.*, 2004; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2004). This is further complicated by the realities of living in a time of war and global terror with nationalism currently under-girding US foreign policy. Finally, globalization brings forth new economic pressures with outsourcing of industrial jobs in the face of influxes of new populations and world influences bringing forth new questions of international social welfare (Rotabi *et al.*, 2004; Teeple, 2000).

These forces take us back to Midgley's (1981) original discussion of the American social work export model and its quandary about international relationships being imperialistic or altruistic in nature (Healy, 2003). Notions of imperialism and altruism provide an approach with which to re-assess the ethical foundations of the study abroad curricula. Study abroad grounded in imperialistic values can be characterized as an oppressive practice. Study tours minimizing opportunities for informal interaction with indigenous representatives of the community, those making exclusive or primary use of tour buses or trips to US-based fast-food outlets, and those emphasizing site visits that just compare and contrast the provision of formal social care services between the USA and a developing country represent this perspective. Conceptualizing short-term study abroad as an altruistic approach to learning about a developing nation may seem more benign with its attendant values of benevolence, humanitarianism and selflessness. Study abroad courses with this emphasis may provide medical or school supplies, or offer educational interventions to individuals, along with site visits to observe the provision of social care.

Students in the USA may be enticed into study abroad in 'exotic' lands after being impressed with the view of altruism in action through mainstream media images of the services provided by humanitarian aid groups in far away lands. Many US citizens are now taking part in medical and service mission trips by local civic groups, non-governmental organizations and faith-based organizations.

Student participation in these groups further enhances interest in study abroad as a strategy to learn to 'do good' in the world. Grennan (2003) has cautioned that the downside of seemingly altruistic service trips is that they run the risk of becoming exploitative forms of imperialistic intervention. Humanitarian aid itself has come under attack by some for similar concerns, along with other numerous political and financial reasons (Ottaway and Lacina, 2003; Jamieson, 2005). Many US students come to a short-term study abroad in a developing nation motivated primarily by altruism. This makes it incumbent upon social work faculty to carefully link the aims and methods of study abroad with some of the broader purposes of international education—to develop an awareness of self outside one's own culture, to promote intercultural communication, and to encourage flexibility in adapting to a rapidly changing world (Gacel-Avila, 2005).

Without careful design and implementation, short-term study abroad in social work can limit opportunities to promote the acquisition of knowledge, values and skills necessary for truly engaged global citizenship. The constructivist curriculum philosophy proposed by Neuman and Blundo (2000), with its emphasis on the dynamic nature of learner–environment interactions and unique personal reflections, is an approach we have found useful in our study abroad courses. A constructivist-oriented curriculum value base may help short-term study abroad courses contribute to achievement of the contextually oriented 'universal' form of social work practice offered by Gray and Fook (2004). Thoughtful consideration of ethical values will help study abroad facilitators integrate a constructivist perspective while avoiding oppressive practice and benevolent intentions that fail to respect international relationships and pluralistic cultural values. Short-term study abroad can provide a brief introduction to indigenous and multicultural realities and issues of privilege and power. It can provide opportunities for respectful engagement with colleagues and communities. With ethically grounded planning and implementation, study abroad can be a foundation for life-long learning as an engaged global citizen.

The authors bring over a decade of work experience as facilitators of study abroad programmes and personal experiences of living and working in developing nations. As social workers, our common value base is about social justice, human rights and a belief in the capacity of individuals, groups and communities to determine their own pathways to change. We have worked in communities in South America, Central America, Mexico, South Africa and Eastern Europe, with a commitment to honouring the Friereian tradition of non-formal education and mindful consciousness raising (Friere, 1998). We bring this value system to our conceptualization of international learning which provides the foundation for our model of ethical engagement in study abroad.

What we have learned about our students through the years is their commitment to helping and their overwhelming belief in altruism as an essential element of ethical social work engagement. However, we recognize that this underlying value system is incomplete without appropriate ethical expectations for cross-cultural engagement and social care in cross-cultural contexts. Our broad goal for study abroad programmes has been to challenge well intentioned

American students and their perceptions of poverty, social class, privilege, conceptions of health, social justice and comparative analysis of social care systems.

A model for ethical study abroad

The purpose of this paper is to explore intercultural exchanges occurring in international short-term study abroad contexts, focusing on developing nations. We have developed a model by which to explain our philosophy for ethical study abroad engagement (see Figure 1).

Our model is based on a literal structural building which has a foundation of facilitator and student values as discussed above. Then, the main structural supports are principles that serve as pillars, like those of the great Parthenon. These pillars support an over-arching roof of professionalism that leads to student growth in respectful engagement in context and higher levels of intercultural competence.
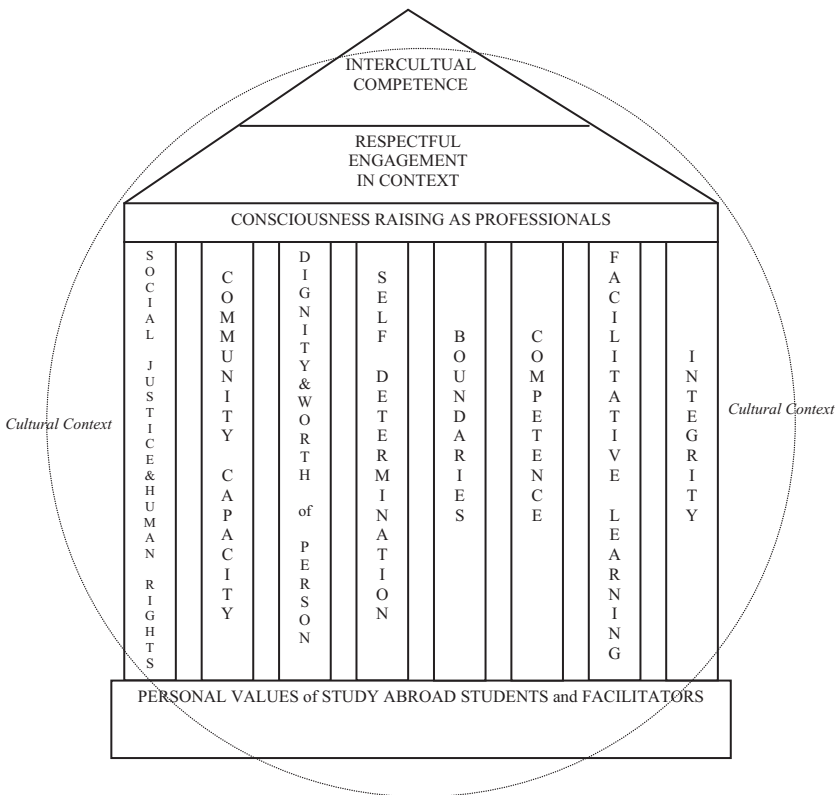

Figure 1 Structure for building ethical engagement for study abroad students

Pillar: social justice and human rights

The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) has, since 1996, promoted a policy statement on Human Rights, and in 2000 adopted a policy statement for Peace and Social Justice (IFSW, 2005*a*). In their policy on human rights, the IFSW draws upon the charter and covenants and conventions of the United Nations to establish the basis for its position. The policy describes the need for people's 'struggle for dignity and fundamental freedoms' to be supported by civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights (IFSW, 2005*b*, p. 2). Unless our student participants in study abroad courses have themselves suffered the deprivation of human rights, rarely do people from a privileged experience understand the depth of oppression arising from limitations on human rights. While travelling in the new South Africa, for example, our student participants were demoralized to discover the extent of poverty and material needs that still existed for the majority of the population. They asked some of our hosts if they too were not terribly disillusioned by the slow progress of development, even after the fall of apartheid. 'We are impatient,' our hosts replied, 'but life is very different for us now, because now we have our dignity.' That response became one of the important lessons for our course, and provided an insight into the complex nature of human rights.

The IFSW policy statement on social justice focuses on the unequal distribution of resources between and within societies and encourages changing investments from shareholder value to social development. In addition, it deplores the enormous spending on arms and military engagements that could instead be invested in food, water, housing, health and education (IFSW, 2005*a*, p. 2). Finn and Jacobson (2003) have explored in depth the meaning of social justice for social workers, drawing on social theorists, philosophers, psychologists and social workers. Understanding and internalizing social justice so that it actually informs our practice is not a lesson often found in our courses. We honour the words, but rarely honour the meaning or the practice skills. What is fair in terms of redressing inequalities, and how can we question unequal distribution of resources when many of us benefit so mightily from long standing privilege based on colour, gender, age, sexual orientation and chance of birth? In our own country, we often assume inequalities are 'just the way things are', or that they are too intractable to challenge. Lessons in South Africa forced us to explore the complexities of redistribution and redress as we learned of the experiences of a number of different people in this multiethnic society, both before and after apartheid. Citizens formerly labelled 'coloured', and only slightly less humiliated and oppressed than their 'African' neighbours under apartheid, now find themselves relatively less advantaged for some promotions and job opportunities. Again, this opportunity to see the hopefulness of positive change for the majority in the new South Africa also enabled our study abroad students to see the limitations and complexities of social justice in transition.

Pillar: community capacity

Community capacity—an element of social capital that encompasses the development of leadership, community organization and collective action—can be observed in most of the communities we visit in our study abroad courses. While we spend only brief periods of time in any one setting, the power of the stories told by the leaders who have emerged from the historical development of communities is often spellbinding and deeply moving. The opportunity to engage with real grassroots community leaders, who have made a significant difference in their communities, and sometimes in their countries, does not often present itself in our regular social work classrooms. In most of the countries we have visited, we seek out the most prominent grassroots leaders in politics, women's issues, HIV/AIDS, youth work or health to give us the story of their work and development. The ability of people to have the opportunity to learn and make autonomous decisions based on their knowledge, place and experience is a wonder to see. One such example came from a leader of the Treatment Action Campaign—an HIV/AIDS organization in South Africa, that circumvented their own government in order to secure needed generic antiretroviral drugs for HIV/AIDS patients. Another example occurred in Mexico as our blind host led us on a trip through the narrow, broken walkways of a village to describe the development of his organization's ability to find productive activity for blind people. The emotional connection with this kind of experience is often an unforgettable lesson for students in the resilience and entrepreneurial spirit of people, far from the dependency perspective to which we so often succumb in our practice experience.

Community capacity comes full circle when, upon returning to the USA, the student participants rally round a benefit for the HIV/AIDS organization in South Africa, organized by a student from the group who has herself emerged as a leader and organizer. Together with their friends, they raised $5,000, but the real lesson for them is what people who may seem extremely vulnerable can do for themselves when they have the knowledge, hope and opportunity to make a difference.

Pillar: dignity and worth of the person

In study abroad programmes, the concept of the *dignity and worth* of the person can challenge student realities, especially as it applies to personal health. As citizens of a developed nation, students often take for granted sources of the resource base of foods and other resources on which they depend daily. However, when they visit Central American countries, students can quickly see the agricultural base and the basic food sources, including coffee, vegetables and beef, on which the USA depends (Williams, 1986). Our over-consumption of such products in the face of extreme poverty and starvation in countries such as Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua challenges

students' notions of sustainable development (Estes, 1993) and highlights these differing realities.

Further challenging, in the context of developing nations, are host country citizens who suffer from health problems and disability. For example, in this context, students may see an individual suffering from thyroid problems, such as a visible neck goitre, and their immediate response may be that the problem is easy to 'fix'. Students may even think through plans for how to link Doctors Without Borders or some other health organization to this individual. Facilitators may use this as a teachable moment to discuss not only solutions, but also the dignity and worth of the person and the human right to health in the challenging circumstances of extreme poverty. This discussion is particularly powerful when applied to a host country individual who has an amputation and is visibly begging in the streets for money without the benefit of an appropriate prosthesis. These two examples are opportunities for the group to discuss the differing realities of health and possible solutions, including prevention. A discussion of *structural realities* is an important concept for students to understand as they grapple with their own altruistic need to 'help'. While facilitating this discussion, it is important to embrace the historical importance of the concept *dignity and worth of the person* for social work as a profession while remaining pragmatic and reminding students of contextual realities.

Pillar: self-determination

Helping study abroad students identify the contextual elements of self-determination is an essential component of study abroad instruction. Ethically grounded engagement in study abroad incorporates reflections about civil and human rights, freedom of choice and the role of human agency and individual responsibility. Guiding reflective discourse among students facilitates close examination of community context and reciprocal influences of larger macro social forces on individual functioning.

A key aspect of self-determination—professional paternalism—takes on important meaning in the context of a study abroad course in a developing nation (Reamer, 1999). Debates about the limits of professional paternalism and coercion in the provision of international assistance are fruitful topics for guided discussions (Anderson, 2000). For example, our student groups visiting areas of Nicaragua and Honduras devastated by Hurricane Mitch saw both positive and negative impacts of large infusions of international disaster relief aid on community re-building efforts. These included community tensions rising from decision making surrounding the distribution of short and long-term relief supplies, difficult choices to make in selecting appropriate and equitable locations for rebuilding communities, inequitable environmental degradation across richer and poorer communities, and expressions of cynicism and defeatism about communities from overworked humanitarian workers.

In addition to promoting comprehension of cultural dimensions of self-determination, the study abroad experience should reflect respect for student self-determination. Opportunities to explore individual topics of interest, guided group reflection and group decision making about the study tour arrangements and evolving travel experiences encourage student self-determination.

Pillar: boundaries

The traditional definition of boundaries within clinical social work practice encompasses role delineation, and management of dual, multiple and ambiguous relationships (Reamer, 1999). In the context of the kinds of community practice settings encountered in study abroad, this definition is more problematic due to the permeability of relationships. For example, the facilitator will often draw upon their own social capital to negotiate site visits to co-operatives, orphanages, villages and other dynamic settings. Moreover, during a study abroad trip, groups will interact with workers who play multiple roles in communities in violation of traditional clinically based constructions of boundary expectations.

For example, local facilitator, Myrna Manzanares, from Belize, Central America, offers expertise as a community organizer and local language documentarian. As a poet and Kriol drummer, she also offers students an opportunity to learn about her community and gender issues through art. These kinds of multiple roles played by indigenous host social workers are not typical of the clinical focus on ethics in most US schools of social work. Our students not only interacted with Ms Manzanares, but learned directly through interactions with her entire family, including her son and elder mother. This holistic exposure to family and culture in Belize provided a broader boundary-spanning opportunity than would have been offered simply by meeting with Ms Manzanares in her role as a social worker.

As an alternative to the clinical conception of boundaries, an organizational perspective offers a value system highlighting use of power, power relations and attendant negotiating skills (Edwards *et al.*, 2001). For example, when Myrna Manazanares introduced us to her village, students witnessed negotiations for our entrée to the community, including overnight accommodations, access to a youth group and informal drum lessons. Observing a respected and powerful community leader demonstrate flexibility, short-term contingency planning and decision-making highlighted for students the potential benefits of a dual relationship in community work.

Pillar: competence

Competence in the collaborative learning environment of study abroad encompasses abilities as a social work practitioner, traveller, member of a group and

in self-care skills. Students come to study abroad with varying levels of sophistication in each of these areas. Facilitators promote competence as a practitioner by encouraging students to represent their knowledge of American social work and social problems within the limits of their education and training (NASW, 1999). Numerous opportunities emerge for students to receive consultation from professional colleagues to enhance their expertise in a variety of substantive areas during study abroad.

Competent travelling, study group interactions and self-care are promoted with pre-trip planning information provided to participants including lists of required clothing, equipment and health care items. Reading lists, including scholarly, fictional and linguistic sources, are also provided. During travel, brief daily group meetings to assess self-care, emerging health needs and interpersonal conflicts or dilemmas are addressed and also help cement the depth of learning.

Pillar: facilitated learning in a safe environment

Facilitating collaborative learning is an essential skill for instructors of study abroad programmes. Because the vast majority of learning takes place in a community context, quite often with a second language, facilitation skills are heavily focused on functional communication (translation in context) and seizing teachable moments in the field. The study abroad group itself is a learning community as a travel group requiring traditional social work group facilitation skills. Beyond the confines of the study abroad group, participants also engage with community organizations, other educational groups and sometimes with entire villages or neighbourhoods as communities. During study abroad, three types of facilitated discussions promote student learning in the context of community:

1   during interaction in the community, when the student group visits with another group such as community leaders;

2   post-activity reflection circles for study abroad group;

3   problem solving and contingency groups; on-the-spot group interventions facilitated by the instructor to resolve crises and evaluate new opportunities for the travel group.

For example, in Guatemala, while visiting a furniture co-operative, students learned from community leaders who were co-operative managers about their plans to reach international markets. Students learned about this vision, but also learned that the men lacked a workshop that was necessary for the housing of basic power tools and that they were using child labour for the furniture finishing process. This teachable moment allowed students to continue to ask respectful questions while beginning to understand the structural constraints on this co-operative and the men who were sharing their hopes and dreams of financial success for their group. In this field example, the furniture co-operative

experience required all three types of facilitation groups and multiple techniques. During the visit, the instructor modelled respectful engagement using open-ended questions to build rapport and identify common experiences and encouraged students to ask relevant questions.

The issue of translation was managed primarily by a local host country facilitator with in-depth knowledge of the co-operative. This technique frees the instructor to more thoughtfully and spontaneously connect course objectives with the group activity. Translation efforts are crucial to the success of study abroad. American students are more likely to be English-only speakers. As a result, instructors and host-country facilitators must be committed to translation throughout the study abroad experience.

Physical safety in context is also an important component of this pillar. In the case of Guatemala, the country is a post-conflict environment with the usual safety concerns such as theft by mugging and sexual assault. Students are briefed prior to travel about the expectations for behaviour while in Guatemala. For example, there will be no travel after dark and students are expected to stay in groups of at least two while walking in the evening. Preparing students for this safety mindset and consciousness-raising about their risks of being victims of theft related to their role as a tourist requires pre-trip facilitation. Also, if and when a crime occurs, contingency group facilitation is essential. For example, in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, a student experienced a mugging in which her inexpensive necklace was quite literally grabbed from her neck. Aided by one passer-by who escorted her to a nearby police station to file a *denuncia* and another who ran off to retrieve the necklace from the thief, the student returned to the group a bit shaken and also disbelieving at the sequence of events. Post-incident group facilitation included a lengthy discussion of how and why tourists make easy crime targets and how street crime and vigilantism occur in impoverished communities with inadequate law enforcement resources.

Pillar: integrity

The concept of *integrity* is critical to social work values. The National Association of Social Workers defines the value of integrity as 'reflected by the ethical principle: social workers behave in a trust worthy manner' (NASW, 1999, p. 4). Study abroad programmes that travel in developing nations provide an interesting challenge for instructors. Social care systems operate at variable levels of social development (Hall and Midgley, 2004). For example, in Belize, students visited the mental health institution where individuals with serious and persistent mental health problems are institutionalized. Students found this visit to be disturbing because individuals suffering from disorders such as schizophrenia were being treated by drugs that Americans now consider outdated. Often, our students want to make direct comparisons between social care systems and social problems. However, this example of mental health care illustrates the differing realities of trustworthy practice across social care systems.

Purely from a teaching perspective, promoting trustworthy engagement between facilitators and students is an important part of constructing and sustaining a study abroad programme. Communicating expectations for travel and engagement begins prior to the trip and continues throughout the duration of travel (Gammonley *et al.*, in press). For example, pre-trip student meetings and even screening students for appropriate personal expectations is an important component of travel planning. Further, while in the country, students are expected to share the responsibility of behaving in a trustworthy manner by posing appropriate questions, communicating their study interests (about social problems, etc.) in a manner that is responsible and respectful, and actively building rapport with various hosts. All of these skills are in the repertoire of a social worker's role in community, but students may feel challenged due to the stress of travel. For example, confronted with extreme poverty and being offered food under those circumstances, students may recoil from the opportunity to try a local dish. However, facilitators encourage students to consider the repercussions of turning down the offer of food in such an environment. At worst, the behaviour may be considered incredibly rude and at best the student is likely to be considered unwilling to truly engage in the spontaneous environment. This is an obvious example of concerns about behaving in a trustworthy manner. You may argue one position or another about food, but it is undeniable that the offer of one's cuisine is one of the oldest and most common means of building friendship.

Study abroad requires integrity in all interactions. This is promoted by establishing clear standards for student behaviour and modelling appropriate interactions. When there is an infraction within a cross-cultural relationship, this must be gently acknowledged as a teachable moment using the contingency and problem solving reflection group. Integrity is one of the most challenging pillars because it requires self-awareness on the part of the facilitator as well as constant attending to a dynamic group environment. Over the course of a study tour, the group process leads to students beginning to police themselves for respectful intercultural engagement. Responding to requests for resources or opportunities, beyond the scope of possibility for members of the tour group to provide, can be a particular challenge to trustworthy intercultural engagement. Students who are able to respond to such a request by declining in a respectful manner, rather than promising something they cannot deliver, are learning to demonstrate professional integrity.

Consciousness-raising as professionals

Professional consciousness-raising is an important goal of international study abroad, especially for students who have not previously experienced the extreme poverty found in developing nations. A learning experience of this sort can quite literally be shocking to one's sense of reality and social justice. It helps underscore Chambers' concept of reality and his question: whose reality

counts? (Chambers, 1997). Students who embrace this experience fully find their American value systems challenged. Some students even begin to reflect on very deep questions about their own consumption of resources, in the context of sustainable development and environmental justice.

Respectful engagement in context

Student and facilitator behaviours indicative of respectful engagement within each community context encountered during a study abroad course include: (i) knowing when to speak and when to listen, (ii) freely attempting greetings and salutations using the local language despite lack of fluency, (iii) readily and appropriately engaging a translator when needed, (iv) awareness of when and when not to take photographs, and (v) an ability to readily 'flow' with modifications to plans for site visits and travel.

A prerequisite to respectful engagement during study abroad is an informed knowledge of the history and culture of the planned country to be visited. Facilitators who carefully select appropriate reading lists drawing not only upon the academic literature but also the voices of indigenous authors, practitioners and advocates ensure an appropriate foundation for student engagement.

The study group itself might be best characterized as a situated learning community (Ovens, 2002). Respectful engagement emerges out of the physical location of the study abroad course and the social context within which reflective dialogue between participants, between participants and facilitators, and between the study group and host facilitators takes place. The facilitator's ability to use a variety of techniques to promote thoughtful student reflection encourages respectful engagement. Some strategies we have found useful include personal journaling assignments, brief ten to fifteen-minute morning group meetings, three to four in-depth group debriefing sessions of at least 1.5 hours, at least one group debriefing session led by a host country facilitator, critical incident debriefing groups as needed, and informal social exchanges between US student groups and social work students in the host countries. Ultimately, respectful student engagement in the context of study abroad evolves as a process rather than as a definitively achievable endpoint. During a study trip, each participant, facilitator, host country facilitator and some community members will inevitably encounter challenges to respectful engagement. Reflective analysis of these culture clashes, followed by group decision making to resolve concerns, promotes intercultural competence.

Intercultural competence

As we move into these next decades, we see every country in the world becoming less homogeneous and more multicultural. This is true for our own country, and for most of the countries we have visited. For most of our student participants,

the opportunity to find themselves in a minority if they are white and travelling in an African or Central American country, or even for African-American participants to discover that their experience is quite different from someone who grew up in South Africa or Belize, is another point of new learning. Assumptions about oneself and about the other are often challenged. Initially, our groups are often very thoroughly observed in public places, making it very clear that we cannot hide our privileged appearance, sometimes not because of our skin colour but because of its tone, and not necessarily because of our dress but because of our general height and robust health. Discussions about how we are different, or appear to be different, and how we feel about those differences are good ones to explore.

After the first several days, our participants begin to develop attitudes about how our hosts treat them, and how they begin to treat others. How should they treat people who are overly friendly, seem overly cool? How should they engage with beggars or street children? What is the appropriate response to a personal question someone might ask privately of a student participant? Should women in the group be offended by catcalls from men in the street, or should they take such comments in their stride? What should a particularly attractive young participant do when a male host seems overly attentive, even in front of his wife? What should the group do if the young participant seemed oblivious of the behaviours of this host? These are all questions that will be an inevitable part of the experience.

Handling these discussions openly and directly in closed group discussions is the best way to explore the issues and to distinguish between cultural difference and inappropriate human relations. With thoughtful reflection, facilitated jointly by social work faculty and host country nationals, intercultural competence will grow during the short-term study abroad tour. A more important indicator suggesting achievement of this pillar is the sustainability of the new knowledge, skills and abilities acquired through a short immersion in a new culture once the study group has returned to the USA.

Conclusion

Short-term study abroad courses provide social work students with opportunities to learn about different cultures, social problems and how to engage in different cultural contexts. However, meaningful and engaged community entry provides a challenge to instructors and students who bring their own personal views and expectations to a foreign context. As a result, we have presented ethical pillars to provide students and instructors with a structure for planning and engagement. With these pillars, students can experience consciousness-raising as professionals while being respectfully engaged in an international context. Finally, the goal of intercultural competence can be achieved.

The Ugly American is the worst sort of arrogant travel abroad and does not adhere to the expectations that social workers behave in a trustworthy manner.

It leaves others with feelings of disappointment and, in the worst case, it may even leave individuals and groups with a sense of disempowerment. However, when study abroad is facilitated in a manner that engages others from a strengths perspective, the experience can be mutually beneficial.

We present our conceptual model to stimulate thought and critical discourse in the profession about ethical engagement for study abroad courses. Our intention has been to leave readers with guidance about how to build a study abroad course that is more than a tour group and involves critical thinking, cross-cultural learning and the potential for intercultural competence.

Note

1. By the use of the term 'Americans', the authors note that it is being used to refer to individuals who live in the USA. This usage implies that people from the USA often see themselves as uniquely 'Americans', like peoples from Canada see themselves as Canadians. However, the authors recognize that peoples from Mexico, Canada, Central and South America are also Americans, but we exclude this usage for this paper.

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