

TOWARD RESPECTFUL ENGAGEMENT: REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM HOST COUNTRY FACILITATORS IN SHORT-TERM STUDY ABROAD

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Efforts to increase cross-cultural learning, while promoting understanding of social and political forces in particular country and regional contexts, has increased opportunities for short-term study abroad. Effective dialogue among faculty, students, and host-country nationals during study abroad is possible through skillful preparation and facilitation to maximize global understanding. Inter-country collaboration requires building relationships to negotiate reasonable expectations. Describing study abroad courses that were conducted in Romania, Guatemala, Belize, and South Africa, we collaborate with our host country facilitators. Their reflections focus on cross-cultural learning, language, and respect for cultural differences and provide important considerations for planning study-abroad courses.

Social work education in all countries is affected by globalization (Caragata & Sanchez, 2002; Cox & Pawar, 2006; Estes, 2005; Hokenstad & Midgley, 1997; Link & Healy, 2005; Nagy & Falk, 2000; Powell & Geoghegan, 2005). Issues of particular concern for social work are cross-border migration and the potential stress and volatility of cross-cultural-values conflict. Efforts to increase the cross-cultural knowledge and skills of social workers, and to help social workers understand the social and political forces in a particular country or region that often contribute to migration, have led to opening the curriculum to include study abroad courses (Boyle, Nackerud & Kilpatrick, 1999; Healy, 1988; Rotabi, Weil, & Gamble, 2004). Askeland and Payne (2001) caution that most cross-national social work activities are focused on cultural differences while neglecting other structural, knowledge, and process factors that must be included in any comprehensive analysis of their value. The educational benefits of short-term study abroad are beginning to be evaluated critically in the social work education literature (Poole & Davis, 2006).

The aim of this narrative is to examine what levels of student and faculty preparation are needed for effective study abroad. We present narrative reflections from in-country

host facilitators who share their perspectives on preparation for respectful engagement in study abroad so that future course planning and evaluation efforts are careful to consider these important considerations.

Opportunities for short-term overseas study experiences are expanding in U.S. schools of social work, especially with recent Council on Social Work Education requirements for curriculum integration of international content (CSWE, 2003). Effective exchange among faculty, students, and host-country nationals require skillful planning and facilitation to maximize cross-national learning and understanding (Gammonley, Rotabi & Gamble, in press; Ramanathan & Link, 1999; Rotabi, Gammonley & Gamble, 2006). Productive inter-country collaboration benefits from relationships built upon respecting culture and customs and negotiating mutual expectations. Feedback from host country facilitators results in both concrete recommendations important for ongoing relationship maintenance and future program development.

The three primary authors have more than ten years of experience facilitating short-term summer-school study abroad courses for graduate and undergraduate students and professionals receiving continuing education credit. Short-term study abroad, in this context

tours abroad of less than one month, are distinguished from longer term semester-abroad immersion programs. As is the case for many social work faculty conducting study abroad tours, selection of host countries was influenced by: (a) Personal contacts established through our involvement in international social work activities, and (b) efforts to be responsive to the influx of migrants and refugees in the region served by our campus community. Our study-abroad tours were focused primarily in Mexico, Central America, Romania, and South Africa. We have had the opportunity to build an effective curriculum for experiential learning in an international setting. In addition we have built relationships with social work colleagues and indigenous facilitators in these countries who have helped coordinate logistics, but, more importantly, served as powerful guides for cross-cultural exchange and understanding.

Respectful engagement requires openness to learning local wisdom, appreciating host-country perspectives and balancing the knowledge one brings to the experience with the knowledge one acquires in the field (Healy, 2001, 2003; Razack, 2002). Evaluating field experiences during study abroad relies on traditional course evaluation in addition to dialogue with host-country nationals who can provide important insight. Lessons derived from collaborative experiences in study abroad relate to (a) adequate pre-trip preparation and negotiating expectations, (b) respectful engagement in host-country communities and agencies, (c) hearing the realities of indigenous peoples, and (d) managing language and cultural interpretation.

This paper focuses on how international learning activities were structured and improved through the collaborative reflections with host-country colleagues and indigenous facilitators. Reflective discourse is used to ensure that a holistic view is considered, ensuring that the voices of *all* actors in the study abroad process are heard. Tsang (2007) points out that this reflective dialogue ensures "a broadened view [that] can limit the misuse of professional authority and enable the social worker to give fuller expression to core values such as respect, justice, and equality" (p. 681).

Gray (2005) calls this approach *indigenisation* and defines it as "an effort to bring out multiple voices and ways of knowing situated in particular *socio-historical and cultural locations* so as to establish a solid foundation for meaningful cross-cultural communication in international encounters" (p. 232).

The country experiences we will describe are from Romania, Guatemala, Belize, and South Africa. We asked five host-country collaborators to respond to a variety of themes in order to incorporate their perspectives and their "voices" in this paper. Their insights and realities on the following topics underlie the lessons learned through our international study-abroad partnerships:

- Examples of participants' demonstrating respect for cultural differences.
- Examples of participants' failure to demonstrate respect for cultural differences.
- Kinds of learning they hope participants will take home.
- Techniques for teaching foreigners about their country.
- The role of participant language ability in affecting the learning potential of study abroad groups.
- Positive and negative outcomes for them to be collaborators in teaching/facilitating study abroad groups.



**Short Term Study Abroad as a
Collaborative Experience:
Lessons Learned**

*Adequate Pre-trip Preparation and
Negotiating Expectations*

What should we expect students to bring to a study abroad and what can we expect them to learn from this type of cultural immersion activity? In our experience, students enter study abroad with a broad range of sophistication as international travelers, appreciation for global social issues, and skills for inter-cultural competence. Diversity of experience within the study-abroad group enhances opportunities for learning. The amount of travel abroad, types of experiences, and involvement in global initiatives at home or while abroad should all be assessed as part of the student pre-trip selection and orientation process.

Dr. James Ellis, a host country facilitator from South Africa, describes the most important learning student participants can take from South Africa as rooted in the concept of *ubuntu* which is the spirit of "commonality and concern for one another." He particularly cites the following issues as arenas for learning through short-term study abroad:

- reconciliation, peace, and restorative justice,
- care for each other in family and community contexts,
- dealing with race relations after apartheid,
- gender issues within the context of the particular apartheid mix of oppression of blacks and women, and cultural notions about the place and role of women and children,
- distinguishing between integration and transformation,
- linking transformation to national development needs, and
- consolidating democracy and comparing it with democracy understood from other contexts.

The set of understandings proposed by James Ellis are particularly reflective of the South African reality. Starting with a coherent set of learning objectives that can be tailored to highlight these kind of specific social conditions within host countries allows a social-work study-abroad program to appeal to students with both micro and macro practice interests. Clear learning objectives set initial expectations for the structure of a study tour. For all of our study tours, our learning objectives have taken a comparative approach to understanding contrasting social problems and policies, methods of social intervention, and specific social work practice techniques.

An additional objective addresses the ability to demonstrate understanding of how issues of social justice and diversity help frame social issues and social interventions in the host country (Gammonley, Rotabi, & Gamble, 2007). Underlying these objectives must be an ethical foundation to guide the development of inter-cultural competence. This ethical foundation, which leads to respectful engagement in context, is achieved with careful selection of site visits, lectures, and opportunities for U.S. student-to-host-country student interactions. Reflective dialogue among participants and between host country contacts and participants is central to this effort (Rotabi, Gammonley, & Gamble, 2006).

Reflections from our host country facilitators in Romania, Guatemala, and South Africa give us insight into the importance of advance preparation and negotiating expectations. A country in transition provides excellent opportunities for learning. A trip to Romania was planned and led by a young faculty member who had traveled there the year before through another university project. Romania was a good choice because of its recent independent status, which created a dynamic learning environment for the development of civil society. In that year he met several people in human services who could help plan the group course the following year. Having host-country collaborators is an especially important asset in planning. One way to establish such contacts is for faculty to go

themselves on an earlier visit to explore the possibilities.

Dr. Ovidiu Gavrilovici helped our university plan the short-term (two-week) study course to Romania in 1997. He also studied for his Ph.D. at the Mandel School in the U.S. Consequently he had perspectives on dealing with his own cultural immersion in our country. According to Ovidiu Gavrilovici, "...short term study offers culture shock as a trigger for faster, deeper insight into diversity...including the diversity of culture, of history and of manners." When the experience is good, he continues, "...it is like a spring shower in terms of knowledge. . .wet in a warmy, soaky manner." On the other hand, it can also be like a "cold shower when it gives you the sudden realization of realities you weren't used to before." Gavrilovici likens a short term abroad experience to "tattooing," an imprint that never goes away in the way that one looks at the world. Exploring the ways people are alike and different can provide "a strange feeling of global citizenship, relocating our attitudes and convictions through new ways of being," he continues.

Being open to such an experience requires some preparedness so that one can experience the new culture, history, and manners "without too many false impressions and stereotypes." Without the preparation, Gavrilovici suggests, much more than "short term study" would be required. To be successful in short-term experiences, he suggests you should have "a long term study of your insides and your own world."

Gavrilovici suggests that the country-specific guide books we prepared as part of the class syllabus were valuable in two ways: to prepare the student for some basic understanding of the new social, cultural, historic and political perspectives they would experience; and, to give the host-country partner a "double reflection" of his/her own culture through U.S. eyes. "It is true that a visit can open your closed eyes, but a good guidebook, stories from an experienced friend, or contact with a person from the country you will visit is worth a thousand hours of being by yourself in a different land."

In Guatemalan host Srta. Maria Elena Yoc Chin's reflection on what she offers to an incoming group in the pre-trip preparation phase, she highlights the limitations of language differences. These must be anticipated in the planning stages in order to be effectively overcome during a study abroad encounter:

In order for me to organize student visits to Guatemala, I have the advantage of knowing the situation of Guatemala, knowing the tourist areas, and awareness of the expectations of foreigners. I am especially aware of the time and organization necessary for sharing knowledge of this country. One of the difficulties I face in organizing visits is that I don't know very much English, so if the visitors don't speak Spanish, we have a bit of a communication problem.

Awareness of the expectations of foreigners is an especially important area to explore with a prospective host-country facilitator to ensure expectations are mutual. This is essential in terms of logistics, financing, joint and individual responsibility for activities, and skills and abilities brought to the study-abroad encounter by students and faculty. Sharing a bit about the group members, their social work interests, and prior experiences with the host country through email exchange or the preparation of an orientation book for the host country facilitator will help achieve this important aim of advance preparation.

Drs. James Ellis and David Nghatsane, South Africans affiliated with the University of North Carolina who came to our university in the late 1970's through the Council of International Programs (C.I.P.), now provide leadership to universities, nonprofit social and economic development organizations, and government at all levels in South Africa's new "rainbow nation." As such, they were outstanding host-country facilitators. David Nghatsane recommends a careful and thorough orientation of student participants in order for them to be prepared for the cultural,

historical, and different living conditions they will encounter. He feels groups are best prepared for learning when they can demonstrate a sense of inquiry, both in body language and in words, that is respectful and avoids sounding critical.

Some participants who are easily impatient with the pace of the schedule or outcome expectations show that frustration in body language that is hard to miss, turning away or actually walking away from presenters and forming small cliques to reinforce their frustration in discussion. David Nghatsane suggests that a good pre-travel orientation, while it cannot cover all the aspects of the travel schedule and new cultural experiences, will help to break down stereotypes and build the capacity for mutual respect and acceptance.

Negotiating expectations, including planning for future collaboration with mutual benefit, with partners in host countries is of particular importance to James Ellis. While financial rewards may influence the cooperation of host-country partners, unless some mutually beneficial rewards are negotiated in advance, these short-term exchanges are too time consuming to be worth the effort. The kinds of mutually beneficial rewards he speaks of are:

- clear understanding of expectations on the part of partner hosts so that they know what to expect and how to plan their workload
- clear understanding on the part of participating students so that they know what to expect in the experience and will be so satisfied with their experience that they become "cultural ambassadors" for the country
- the potential for students and faculty participants to establish linkages that go beyond the initial programs
- the possibility that the host country partners can build their own networks of colleagues/associates/friends that may provide more personal opportunities

- the possibility to extend program and faculty cooperation with formal linkage agreements



David Nghatsane adds additional topics specific to the South African experience that are critical for pre-trip negotiations:

- South Africa offers a great opportunity to be part of the post apartheid historical process. It is an excellent location for deep learning in social, political and cultural development.
- External group visitors can have the effect of breaking down barriers among a variety of South African communities.
- The expectation should be that there would be a mutual sharing of information with the goal of assisting each other to understand different perspectives through respectful questions and dialogue.
- Participation with different groups should be guided by dispelling ignorance and prejudice as part of the effort toward nation building.
- Networks should be developed that focus on the transformation people are experiencing as they build a new democracy.
- There should be an expectation for a final report that provides some comparison and feedback on the development of the collaborative experience over time.
- While the collaborative experience should be done in the spirit of "*ubuntu*" (commonality and concern for one another), the actual financial constraints, honoraria and reimbursement of expenses must be handled

appropriately if the collaboration is expected to continue.

Respectful Engagement in Host Country Communities and Agencies

Our groups of U.S. participants represent a range of ages, interests, and levels of international experience. Having undergraduates on trips along with other faculty and seasoned professionals has not been a problem. As is true in any classroom, people learn as much from each other as they do from their individual experiences. Even though our overseas courses always include pre-travel guidance for cross-cultural and sensitive learning, certain responses and behaviors cue us when additional introspection is needed to promote accurate cultural interpretations

In Romania, students and instructors had several discussions about why it would not be prudent for participants to walk about with large cameras hanging from their necks, with little American flags sticking out of their backpacks, or dressed so casually that they would be quickly identified as American tourists. Periodically, participants need help to understand the arrogance of ignoring local customs in dress and behavior and the dangers involved in flaunting cameras, expensive jewelry, and symbols of a country not necessarily appreciated by everyone (Rotabi, Gammonley, & Gamble, 2006).

No matter how much we prepare course participants for learning *from* and *with* our host-country presenters, it is often necessary to remind them that U.S.-based solutions are not necessarily the right answer for social problems in a new context. In dialogues with host-country human-services workers, some of the U.S. participants quickly interpret the presentation as an opportunity to tell host-country human-services colleagues how we have solved that problem in the U.S. Generally the host human-services presenter interprets such a response as, "They don't really want to hear about how that situation presents itself in our country" or, "They have come only to tell us how to do rather than to learn how we do." Pre-trip discussions and during-trip group-process-reflection sessions about how

to stay open to learning about difference rather than thinking only from one's perspective are important techniques to promote learning from difference while avoiding misattribution to 'cultural' difference, in an international encounter (Askeland & Payne, 2001).

Host Myrna Manzanares, Belizian educator, folklorist, musician, actress, and expert in the kriol language, shared that students demonstrate respect for cultural differences by "...asking questions for clarification when they do not understand and participation in cultural activities that may seem a little strange." She prefers to see students "laugh with people and not at them." Also, she likes to see students sharing "information about themselves and their own culture and finding commonalities in which to build friendships."

In regards to failure to appropriately discuss cultural differences, Myrna Manzanares shared that:

Students sometimes exhibit the attitude that they have the blue print on information because they are from an industrialized country. Sometimes this takes the form of talking down to individuals or treating them like children who do not understand. Also, sometimes students disregard a cultural practice as unimportant because it is not recognized in one's own country.

Myrna Manzanares also shared that although not a problem with our group, she has experienced outsiders "talking negatively about a practice or aspects of the culture and laughing about it even though members of that culture may be near by." This kind of barrier clearly impedes mutual understanding—especially Belizeans being open to cross-cultural dialogue.

In terms of the kind of learning that she hopes students take back to the United States from Belize, she listed the following:

- Respect, and enjoy positive aspects from another culture

- That our cultures are dynamic, and that even though they are different they have an underlying thread that unites us which enables us to live in harmony and peace
- To be observant and tolerant of the variety of inconsistencies that may seem to dictate life in the place they are visiting, and to understand that though a practice may not have meaning to the outsider it is meaningful to the native of that community.

In Romania, home stays taught especially valuable lessons about respectful engagement because they afforded each student to learn more directly about the day-to-day lives of our hosts. We learned where they worked, where and how they shopped for groceries, where they were when the revolution against Ceausescu began, and how it evolved. Students experienced first hand how the dissolution of a centrally controlled economy, and with it enforced social norms, cause families to struggle with sorting out livelihoods, property ownership, educational opportunities, and discrimination.

Home stays can sometimes bring cultural and comfort differences more sharply into focus. They can provide the intimacy and companionship for deep and appreciative learning, but they also sometimes result in cultural and behavioral arrogance on the part of a visiting student participant who is not prepared for the loss of comfort and familiarity.

James Ellis suggested that participants demonstrated respect for cultural differences when they showed interest in and were willing to engage with hosts around religion, food, language, and music. Respecting property and privacy of hosts was an important issue, demonstrating that no matter how humble or different the surroundings, people have placed value on their belongings and ways of being.

In a few unfortunate instances, some student participants demonstrated intolerance with time frames and punctuality, were impatient when their accustomed way of life was not matched by local conditions, or placed demands on hosts that could not be met. Host-country partners describe this as "typical American arrogance." A particularly

destructive form of this arrogance presents itself when disinterested student participants engage in loud, private conversations during presentations by host guides or lecturers.

Hearing the Realities of Indigenous Peoples

The focus on indigenous realities has taken on special meaning in our study-abroad trips to the multi-racial country of South Africa. Seeing this new democracy that had made a relatively bloodless transition from a brutal apartheid state to a modern democracy, a democracy that incorporates even more than the basic civil guarantees outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in their new constitution, is an important experience for all people who love peace and freedom.

Our group of students was very keen to revel in the hopefulness in this ongoing transition, but also to see the potential trouble spots. We engaged with public and private HIV/AIDS treatment and action organizations that were actively pushing the government to take a responsible stand with regard to antiretroviral drugs. During the visit to Parliament, we were afforded the opportunity to listen to dialogue and debate relating to everyday problems of crime, health care, symbols of diversity, and women's rights. We had several cross-cultural experiences that included participation in two very different African religious services, as well as more informal opportunities where we were invited as a group to the homes of two of our host-country colleagues. The graciousness of these invitations provided an exceptional experience for students to have informal discussions with South African families.

On the last day, we visited the prison on Robben Island where Nelson Mandela spent twenty-seven years of his life. Our guides were two ex-prisoners, one of whom had spent fifteen years of his life in the same compound with Mandela. This was, for many of us, one of the most moving experiences of the two week journey through the new South Africa. For the most part, people from the U.S. cannot appreciate the meaning of political prisoners without such an experience. Freedom has a

new meaning for most people who have taken the trip to Robben Island.

In Guatemala, we were hosted by Maria Elena Yoc Chin, a young indigenous woman from San Juan, Sacatopequez, a small municipality approximately one hour outside of Guatemala City. Our connection with Maria Elena Yoc Chin was because of her friendship with one of our two instructors, a former Peace Corps volunteer. Because she and our co-instructor were trusted community organizers, their social networks into the rural community promoted our acceptance as outsiders.

For our initial community entry, Maria Elena invited us to celebrate our arrival at her family home. A memorable experience was attempting to make our own tortillas and trying on colorful indigenous clothes. Our hostesses encouraged our students to try on the clothes, learning how to make the complicated folds of the skirts. This activity represents an important bridge into indigenous culture because the colorful clothes are held as one of the most treasured customs of the Indians in Guatemala. When tourists attempt to wear the clothes, they are often viewed as insulting to the people by wearing them incorrectly (Menchu, 1984). However, in this case we were invited to try on their personal apparel; many of the shirts that we were loaned were special-occasion costumes for weddings or other important events. It was a short and highly symbolic activity that resulted in a deeper personal connection.

This activity in a family home also provided our group with an understanding of living conditions in Guatemala. Arguably, Maria Elena Yoc Chin's family has more resources than many families as they live in a cinder-block home that was modestly furnished, including a television. And even with running water from a spigot, the family still had a toilet that drained into a running stream behind the compound. This served as a powerful example of the limitations of the physical infrastructure related to many of the health problems in Guatemala. Our personal connection with the family enabled our students to gracefully experience these living conditions, and instead of looking at it as distanced outsiders, we

shared in the environment and honored the home as guests.

Our success in Guatemala was directly related to Maria Elena Yoc Chin's introduction of our group to her family, friends, and coworkers. We started building rapport with our host-country facilitator and her community by sharing food and costume, both integral components of indigenous culture. She led us further into her community and helped us make connections with people engaged in economic development, health promotion, and child welfare initiatives who shared social problems and solutions as they defined them. Making those connections through Maria Elena deeply enriched our ability to connect and build rapport with otherwise strangers, transcending language and the obvious differences of culture and socio-economic status.

Managing Language and Cultural Interpretation

Because Maria Elena spoke with our group only in Spanish, the immersion into language occurred quickly. We relied on several Spanish speakers in the group to translate, but often our students followed along by being attentive and attempting to try their rudimentary Spanish. There were inevitable frustrations and occasional miscommunications, but listening and translating were a part of the relationship building and ultimately enhanced our language learning objective.

Maria Elena Yoc Chin shared that one of the things that she has "...observed is that foreign students and volunteers who come to Guatemala arrive with a great desire to share their knowledge with the people in rural areas." In this discussion, she shared that:

"many of the students that immerse themselves rurally learn to speak the basics of our languages—one of Guatemala's 22 indigenous languages in addition to Spanish." In terms of communication, "students become even more immersed in their community if they learn its specific language, especially salutations, vocabulary for food and health, and other topics related to the culture."

When it comes to language, Belize is an interesting example because of the *Kriol*

which is a local usage of English mixed with other languages. Myrna Manzanares shared that:

Language and [cross-cultural learning] is not a great problem as English is the official language. However, there are four other major languages which are considered national languages, and of the four one is the local vernacular called *Kriol*. This is the primary language of communication among Belizeans. I am fluent in both English and the local vernacular Kriol, and therefore I tend to shift back and forth between the two languages as is sometimes customary of the Belizeans. This puts students at a disadvantage, since they do not know the vernacular. Because of its similarities to English it is easy for students to miss concepts and here you have to go back and teach the concept again and make sure they understand the underlying difference.

Managing language, however, is only one aspect of effectively partnering with host country facilitators to promote accurate cultural interpretations. Maria Elena Chin highlighted a key limitation of short-term study abroad: "In order for a student to understand the situation in Guatemala, he or she needs to have quite a bit of information; in addition, I think you need at least two years to really get to know my country." Guatemala, being a country of great diversity of people and natural resources, is a place celebrated by tourists. Much of the diversity is captured in the "typical clothing worn by the indigenous people and, each region has its own costume in a variety of bright colors." These costumes offer opportunities for students to explore the arts and crafts of Guatemala in addition to gain insight in the symbols of Guatemala.

Maria Elena further shared that:

It is important for visiting students to learn about the education Guatemala provides for its children. Visiting hospitals and organizations which help Guatemalans, in addition to attending cultural and social events, are activities which expand the experience of students who come to learn in Guatemala. These activities illustrate our social service systems, both the strengths and limitations.

Visiting a neighboring country during a single study-abroad trip can strengthen opportunities for cultural interpretation. Our trip to Belize was a one-week immersion that served as a comparison for our group that traveled through Guatemala. Our host country facilitator was Myrna Manzanares, who had previously worked with one of the course instructors on several projects related to Peace Corps.

The economy and social service systems in Belize are far more advanced than in neighboring Guatemala. Stark contrasts are abundant, not just from a formalized social service perspective, but also culturally. There are many opportunities in Belize to highlight differences in culture, language, and perspectives.

One of our main foci in Belize was the study of village life. We undertook an immersion in a local village where our group stayed in a local guest house cooperative. Activities were planned in advance with our co-facilitator, who grew up in the village. Prior to arrival, our facilitator organized for our group to interact with a local youth group to do a quick participatory appraisal (Participatory Rural Appraisal: See Chambers, 1997). This activity included community mapping, where the children were able to educate us about their village and the local characteristics that are not necessarily readily apparent.

Another activity that was important for our community entry was a walk through the village on the only road and footpath. Our



student group and facilitator stopped to talk with village residents who were selling ice cream and cold drinks. Also, students were able to talk with many youth who joined in the walk. These youth spoke of their experiences in the United States, where many of their family members had immigrated. The local artists, especially the *Kriol* drummers, celebrated our arrival that evening with a traditional drum and dance ceremony. The entire village gathered and danced around the fire with our students.

After our intense village-immersion experience, we continued on to Belize City where we were able to interact with several directors and staff of non-governmental organizations, including the National Organization for the Prevention of Child Abuse. We had an opportunity to share a meal with the staff and hear about their programs, challenges, and opportunities. Students and staff were able to share perspectives about the problem of child abuse, but mostly our students listened intently, recognizing that U.S. interventions were not particularly relevant to the context.

One of our trip objectives was learning about economic development initiatives. As a result, we visited one of the smaller islands in the country where tourism is the major source of income. Students were able to visit a national marine reserve and also debate the benefits and limitations of ecotourism and its management with local residents. The student group observed two different villages that had identified their community as a refuge for wildlife—one for birds and a second for howler monkeys. We had an opportunity to walk with local guides through the villages and learn about the balance between the community and protected animals.

Conclusions

No matter where they practice, all social workers need knowledge and skills to help them appreciate and engage with cultures and peoples different from themselves. Our goal has been to plan short-term study abroad courses that will provide the best experiences for cross-cultural learning. Experiential cross-cultural learning requires respectful

engagement. Planning for respectful engagement requires careful listening to the voices of our host country colleagues and indigenous partners. In the earlier sections of the paper we have described the kinds of experiences we planned for participants in a number of countries. We have incorporated the perspectives of host country partners from Guatemala, Belize, Romania and South Africa. From our collaborative experience, we have identified the following five important considerations:

- Pre-trip planning and preparation (instructor experience, participant assessment and preparation, logistics, course ethical philosophy, and learning objectives).
- Negotiating expectations (with students/participants; with host country colleagues).
- In-country engagement and relationship building (listening and speaking with respect; less focus on physical comfort and more focus on different realities).
- Cross-cultural enrichment (respectful in-country behavior; finding opportunities to deepen understanding and mutual appreciation).
- Language barriers (responsive to interpretation; patient with accents; open to learn).

All of our studies abroad have been planned with in-country partners with whom we had some earlier relationship. When that was not the case, as in Mexico and Nicaragua, we contracted with the Center for Global Education at Augsburg College, which have extensive experience in short term international learning and whose philosophy of engagement is very similar to ours. Assistance in planning study abroad from graduates of our social work program who were previous partners in Peace Corps programs gave us the opportunity to quickly develop an understanding of the expectations and opportunities.

Marketing, recruiting, selecting, and orientating the participants requires significant

attention. A specific number of paid participants must be recruited for the trip to be viable, but identifying appropriate participants cannot be overly emphasized. A diversity of participants adds to the experience. Participants need to be very clear that the course is not a foreign holiday. The course requires the same focus on learning social work skills that demonstrate respectful and responsible engagement as any other field course. As was identified by several host-country partners, no participant should enter a new culture without some awareness of its history and culture and some understanding of socioeconomic and demographic issues.

Relationship building can be an important part of developing group norms even before travel has begun. If a diverse group of participants begins to gain the value of learning from each other through both structured presentations and informal sessions, that sense of learning will carry over to engagement with host-country people. Anderson and Carter (2003) have outlined a number of competencies for diversity that could be applied to building norms for these kinds of international learning experiences, especially the following three:

- Being more comfortable and less anxious or defensive with diversity
- Developing critical consciousness in order to understand the causes, consequences and dynamics of all forms of oppression,
- Letting others teach about the differences that make a difference for them (p. 250).

Our host-country facilitators have offered some of their own impressions of what they perceive as benefits of study abroad. Maria Elena Yoc Chin shared that:

Study abroad is such a wonderful opportunity for me because I am able to share my perspective as an indigenous woman. In my country, that is not usually the case.

For Myrna Manzanara the benefits of working with study-abroad groups:

Working with students from abroad has given me an opportunity to interact with individuals from different countries and disciplines. It encourages me to keep abreast of current global issues in order to respond to questions and queries about differences and similarities. It has also heightened my interest in international and cross cultural relations. I have also found that I employ a variety of methods quite easily. I have also become more cognizant of the need to understand the generation gap and employ techniques which addresses it.

David Nghatsane has felt the warmth of good experiences on the part of participating students who experience through real engagement the transformation taking place among the peoples of South Africa. His goal is that these kinds of students will play an international leadership role in the future. For him, personal growth is also definitely a part of the benefit he receives from these collaborations.

It is our experience that countries in transition, such as Guatemala, Romania, and South Africa, provide special opportunities for learning because of the excitement and energy of the people who are building and transforming the country. Cross-cultural learning is sometimes magical when the new realities of a host facilitator come together with the new knowledge of a course participant. It is these kinds of experiences that become the permanent tattoos described earlier and that are particularly satisfying to an instructor. We are hopeful that future efforts to evaluate student learning outcomes associated with study abroad will include the recommendations and participation of host-country colleagues who so generously share their friendship and expertise to promote international learning.

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