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This research was undertaken in the summer of 2011 as an Adrian Tinsley Program Summer Grant project and was mentored by Dr. Jing Tan of the Social Work department. Her work was presented at the 2012 National Conference on Undergraduate Research in Ogden, UT. After graduating in May of 2012, Nikki plans to attend graduate school and pursue a career in advocacy for social justice and human rights.

T*his mixed-method study examined the impact that international community service experiences have had on college students' academic learning, cultural understanding, global interest, and sense of global citizenship after studying abroad through programs hosted by Bridgewater State University (BSU). Survey questionnaires were distributed to 427 BSU students who participated in university-sponsored international travel in the past 3 years. A total of 80 students returned completed surveys, and 10 respondents volunteered to participate in face-to-face interviews to elaborate on their experience abroad. Survey results show that 63% of respondents did not have a service component in their travel program, and 74% of those respondents indicated a desire to have done service while abroad. Statistically significant differences were found between the responses of students who did community service while abroad and those who did not with regard to acquisition of cultural knowledge and an inclination toward global citizenship. Interviews reveal that community service experiences create memorable interactions that offer travelers first-hand insight into a foreign country's culture and social problems. The results provide means for the evaluation of current travel programs and grounds for the potential development of an international service-learning program at BSU.*

Introduction

An increasing number of students are participating in international travel trips during their undergraduate years. According to recent statistics, an estimated 240,000 college students studied abroad between 2006 and 2007, and the numbers have been increasing annually. Additionally, it has been shown that students who participate in study abroad programs, even short-term programs of two to eight weeks, report notable gains in terms of their global values and engagement (Bringle, Hatcher, & Jones, 2011). Academic institutions around the world are beginning to incorporate more international education and service-learning programs into their curricula as they embrace the new era of globalization and encourage students to become "global citizens." Analysis and reflection on the social, cultural, and environmental contexts of an act of service is encouraged by many service-learning programs, which makes them practical and advantageous tools for teaching the concept of global citizenship.

Defining Service-Learning

The definitions of service-learning, although varied, specifically emphasize its

multiple and interconnected components. Bringle, Hatcher, and Jones (2011) identify four main components within the definition of service-learning. First, it must be an academic activity that is created to purposefully link an act of service to a particular academic curriculum. This distinguishes service-learning from an act of volunteering, which is often not intentionally linked to a curriculum. Next, the service activities within a service-learning program must not only be educationally meaningful to the participants, but also socially valuable to the community that is being served. Integrated and structured reflection activities are the third and arguably most important aspect of service-learning, as the reflection creates a link between the service activity and the educational content that provides opportunities to study, analyze, and interpret a community for deeper understanding. Finally, service-learning includes the unique objective of developing civic responsibility within its participants. The connection between serving a community and understanding the purpose and value of service project can produce a justice-oriented civic education experience. Such an experience can permanently affect the way that participants view global issues, as well as their role in their local and global communities. Furthermore, effective learning experiences occur when students are able to directly interact with the native people of their host country through a service project and are subsequently led to reflect on their work.

The Benefits of Service-Learning within Diverse Populations

Recent research has focused on the impact of both national and international service-learning experiences on participants to reveal a number of individual benefits, including the development of leadership skills, an increased sense of self-efficacy and social competency, a stronger drive toward high academic achievement, enhanced problem-solving and teamwork skills, and an inspired attitude toward civic engagement (Roehlkepartain, 2007). Service activities have also been shown to improve students' learning, or understanding of educational material associated with the service. Students in service-learning programs not only gain a clearer understanding of academic assignments, but also elucidate the connection between the subject matter and daily life (Tannenbaum and Berrett, 2005).

The personal and academic benefits of service-learning programs on individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds are multifold. Scales, Roehlkepartain, Neal, and Kielsmeier (2006) suggest that community service is related to smaller achievement gaps between students from higher and lower income backgrounds. Students with a low socioeconomic status and/or those who did not regularly partake in community service were found to experience less overall motivation for achievement, school engagement, and reading for pleasure than students who were

involved in community service programs and/or those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. Their study poses that community service and service-learning may be related to academic success because they provide youth with the two key resources of feeling useful and witnessing how their classroom education is connected to "real world" situations

Low-income, first-generation college students were the topic of recent exploratory research on the relationship between service-learning participation and student retention rates. All of the respondents in this small study noted that their service-learning experience was a vital part of their success in college, and their service-learning participation impacted them in four main areas: building skills and understanding, developing resilience, finding personal meaning, and developing critical consciousness. Involving low-income, first-generation students—or nearly any group from a disadvantaged background—in service-learning projects may be conducive to higher retention levels and academic success within this population (Yeh, 2010).

Community Service and International Travel at Bridgewater State University

Bridgewater State University emphasizes its commitment to community service through its multiple opportunities for service and travel that are accessible to the institution's diverse population. Fifty per cent of BSU students are first-generation college students. The university recently received more than \$600,000 in grants to be used toward increasing the graduation rates for students of color, first-generation and low-income undergraduate students (Bridgewater State University, 2011b). The President's Office and many of its social justice-oriented taskforces and councils oversee offices like the Community Service Center and the Center for International Engagement (CIE), which provide international travel opportunities for the students of BSU.

The Community Service Center's "Take a Break and Make a Difference" trips include low-cost trips to Honduras, Belize, and Guatemala. Students are selected from a pool of applicants for these one- to two-week trips, and they travel abroad to perform need-based community service projects for the duration of the trip. Pre-departure meetings are mandatory for all participants in order to learn basic information about the host country and the trip itinerary, but there is no required academic work for these non-credit programs. Time for personal and group reflections is often incorporated into the daily schedules of each trip.

The CIE organizes several types of international trips for BSU students. Two- to three-week academic study tours to

countries around the world are held each winter and summer and typically require academic work before, during, and after the trip that must be completed for credit. Service activities and reflection activities are incorporated into some tours, but they tend to be based on the preferences of the tour leader. Semester exchange programs are available in a variety of countries to offer more long-term travel opportunities. Many of these exchanges are offered through the CIE itself, and others can be accessed through affiliate program providers that organize international excursions and offer academic credit. Pre-departure readings and lessons are not required for most exchange programs due to the expected length of stay and planned education while abroad. Very few of these trips include a service component and are almost entirely based on academic programming (Bridgewater State University, 2011a).

BSU offers programs for international learning and international service, but there is currently no program specifically for international service-learning. Gaining a better understanding of the effects of community service on students' international experiences both provides a basis for the evaluation of current travel programs and explores the potential worth of establishing an international service-learning program at BSU.

Methods

This study employed a mixed methods design with the concurrent collection of qualitative and quantitative data. The results were subsequently integrated to develop a deeper analytical understanding of the topic.

Recruitment of Participants

The CIE and the Community Service Center at BSU were contacted and asked to provide lists of students who had participated in international travel in the past three years, particularly the "Take a Break and Make a Difference" community service trips, summer and winter study tours, semester exchange programs, and affiliate exchange programs. Students on all of the lists were contacted through their university e-mail addresses to distribute IRB-approved survey questionnaires that included questions on their travel program, the presence or absence of a service component, and the academic, cultural, and global experiences that students received from the trip. In total, 427 students were contacted, of whom 80 returned completed surveys; this represents an 18.7% response rate.

The surveys, which included a portion where students could volunteer to be contacted for further interviewing on their travel experiences, provided a voluntary sample for in-person qualitative interviews. Ten of the 12 volunteers were randomly selected and individually interviewed over the course of six

weeks. The sample of respondents (see Table 1) was comprised of a diverse group of students and was divided between students who had participated in a community service project while abroad and those who had not.

Measurement

Completed survey questionnaires were collected via e-mail, saved anonymously, and printed before inputting coded data into an SPSS data file for analysis. Univariate statistics were calculated to describe demographic variables and frequencies, and bivariate independent t-tests were used to determine the statistical impact of the community service variable on students' international experiences. These experiences were evaluated through 12 statements using a Likert scale in which respondents could strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with each statement; these responses were scored with the numbers 4, 3, 2, and 1, respectively. The 12 statements were grouped into four conceptual categories—academic learning, cultural understanding, global interest, and global citizenship—and can be viewed in Table 2. Mean scores were calculated from the collective responses to statements within each conceptual group and analyzed in the bivariate t-tests. Interviews were digitally recorded, uploaded onto a computer, and coded on a question-by-question basis using grounded theory methodology. Participants' responses were analyzed to identify common themes and important perspectives that encourage a deeper understanding of the personal significance of international community service activities. Over 270 minutes of audio recording were gathered from the interviews.

Quantitative Results

Of the 80 respondents, 61 were female and 19 were male. The mean age was 22.81 years old. Approximately 84% of the respondents were seniors or alumni of BSU, 15% were juniors, and 1% were sophomores. The reported year of travel was divided between 2011 (44%), 2010 (37%), and 2009 (19%). In total, nearly 52% of respondents participated in study tours, 24% participated in an international community service program, 11% went on semester exchange programs, and 13% participated in affiliate or "other" programs. Only 37% of respondents did community service within their program. Of the 63% who did not do community service abroad, 74% indicated a desire to have done a service project during their program.

Table 2 shows the data collected from the survey statements using the Likert scale. The t-values represent the correlation between the response to the statement and the presence or absence of a community service component in the respondent's program. Four of the 12 statements were found to be statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).

Table 1: Interview Participant Information

Demographics	Type of Program	Service? (Y/N)
Male, 21 years old	Community Service	Y
Male, 23 years old	Study Tour, Community Service	Y
Female, 21 years old	Study Tour, Community Service	Y
Male, 24 years old	Community Service	Y
Female, 22 years old	Study Tour, Community Service	Y
Female, 22 years old	Semester Exchange	N
Female, 22 years old	Study Tour	N
Female, 23 years old	Semester Exchange	N
Male, 22 years old	Semester Exchange	N
Female, 21 years old	Study Tour	N

Qualitative Results

Participants' responses were analyzed using grounded theory methodology to identify significant recurring themes within the conceptual categories of academic learning, cultural understanding, global interest, and global citizenship.

Academic Learning

It was found that the amount of academic learning was strongly influenced by the length of their travel program. Two- to three-week study tours resulted in little long-term learning unless the academic lessons were connected to memorable and meaningful experiences for the participants. Pre-departure meetings were helpful in getting to know other participants in the travel program, but essentially ineffective in educating students about their host country. In contrast, those who participated in semester-long exchange programs without community service components reported significant gain in knowledge about their host country, particularly around the country's government, education system, and culture. Semester exchange participants reported no pre-departure meetings or readings. One student who spent a semester studying geography in Brazil described his eye-opening international academic experience:

"The focus of learning in America is in class... in Brazil, not so much. In class is not the focus; it's at home. I would talk to kids and they'd talk about this project they were doing, and then they'd tell me it wasn't for class. They're independently academic."

Another participant who studied maritime history through an at-sea exchange program also called her experience "eye-opening," but from a different perspective:

"Most of what we read in our classes made us feel bad about being Americans, you know, being descendants of Europeans. Some of the stuff we read about was just awful, like...Columbus and what he did to the people."

Students who participated in travel programs with community service components indicated that they experienced significant learning from their international travel. Planned service activities ensured interaction with native citizens of the country and provided students with an experience-based education that tended to deviate from their field of study in school. Interdisciplinary education in unfamiliar communities removed students from their comfort zones and, as a participant noted, exposed them to unique new situations:

"[Teaching in Belize] was an especially awesome experience for me, mostly because I don't want to be a teacher and I had to step out of my comfort zone. Honestly, for the first two days I dreaded it... however, by the last few days of it I was thinking, 'I could do this forever.'"

Journaling, or the practice of keeping a written record of daily activities during a travel program, was required of several students who participated in programs with community service components. Journaling encourages students to reflect on their daily experiences and how it impacts their service. Although journals are not entirely academic works, the reflections were meaningful to participants:

Table 2: Students' Reports of the Impact of Community Service Activities on Travel Experiences

Statement	Community Service?		t
	Yes (n=30)	Mean (SD) No (n=50)	
Category: Academic Learning			
My program increased my knowledge about the country that I visited.	3.867 (0.571)	3.7 (0.544)	1.302
The activities in my program helped me to better understand the pre-departure readings and lectures on the country that I visited	3.333 (0.922)	3.16 (0.889)	0.833
Category: Cultural Understanding			
My program increased my understanding of foreign cultures.	3.833 (0.592)	3.72 (0.572)	0.846
I was able to interact and connect with the citizens of the country that I visited.	3.833 (0.592)	3.6 (0.571)	1.744
I participated in traditional cultural activities through my program.	3.467 (0.819)	3.26 (0.828)	1.085
I have a better understanding of the needs and problems facing the country that I visited.	3.767 (0.626)	3.22 (0.815)	3.367†
Category: Global Interest			
My program has increased my interest in international travel.	3.833 (0.592)	3.6 (0.472)	0.777
My program has increased my interest in doing community service abroad.	3.733 (0.64)	3.02 (0.845)	4.269†
If I had the time and money, I would participate in another travel program with BSU.	3.767 (0.626)	3.76 (0.555)	0.5
Category: Global Citizenship			
I feel compassion for the disadvantaged citizens of the country that I visited.	3.767 (0.679)	3.22 (0.708)	3.43†
My program has increased my interest in studying foreign cultures and language.	3.533 (0.73)	3.44 (0.76)	0.539
I feel an obligation to serve my global community.	3.733 (0.521)	3.1 (0.789)	4.32†

†p < 0.001

“The lasting academic experience—it wasn’t so much academic, but reflective and personal—was the journals that we kept each day based on our activities each day at the school, our personal thoughts and experiences, or collective experiences. It is something that I still reflect on today.”

Cultural Understanding

All of the interviewed participants stated that their respective international programs gave them a better understanding of their host country’s culture, but it was found that deeper cultural understanding and appreciation was largely influenced by the amount of direct interaction that each student had

with the native citizens of the country. The length of semester exchange programs necessitates interaction with natives and provides cultural learning opportunities, but shorter programs often limit the amount of possible interaction. Participants mentioned the value of cultural immersion in gaining cultural understanding; this immersion was influenced by exposure to both urban and rural areas of the country, the participants' lodging location and accommodations, and the use of a translator.

A participant who had gone on a non-service study tour to Egypt as well as a community service trip to Belize noted that visits to museums and conversations with university professors in Egypt were helpful in reinforcing academic lessons, but working with young students and elementary school teachers in Belize was more effective in understanding the country's cultural and social situations. Another participant with a similar travel history stated the following:

"You learn through the people what *they* think their country is about. They're proud of their country everywhere you go, so that is who you learn from."

Study tours without service activities offered some immersion opportunities, but programs with community service were more effective in connecting participants with native individuals who provided a humanitarian perspective on the host country.

Global Interest

All interviewed participants indicated an increase in global interest and desire to travel. Their interest was derived from a variety of reasons, both personal and academic, but it is clear that participation in service activities affected these reasons. Those who did service during their program, such as this participant, tended to voice a desire to do so again in the future:

"When I do travel, I'm definitely going to look into how I cannot just *go* to a country, but how to get *involved* with the country."

Of the five students who did not do community service during their programs, two stated that the inclusion of a service component in their semester exchange would be "nice" but not necessary. The other three indicated a desire to have done service while abroad:

"I would like to have felt like I did some good, like I was a better person for having gone. I feel good myself, but I don't feel like anyone else felt good because of me."

"I really wish we did something more, like go to an orphanage or volunteer somewhere...just to give back, because [the people of Cape Verde] really welcomed us and did so much for us."

Global Citizenship

The analysis of interview participants' sense of global citizenship revealed strong positive correlation to the presence or absence of a community service component within their travel program. While nearly all participants claimed that their travel experience was "eye-opening," only those who were involved in international service projects tended to voice sincere empowerment and inspiration to help their global community and create change. Several participants implied personal obligations to assist their global communities based on their exposure to social issues and other injustices during their travel program:

"Probably what struck me the most was when we would walk out the door and there would be an open sewer down the street on both sides. That just drove home the fact that this is the situation and the standards that those who we are living among currently have and probably will have for a long time."

"People are universal, you know? Kids are the same in every culture. You realize these kids could be your nephews, or your cousins, or whatever. It just helps you realize that we're all connected, and that we're all responsible for each other."

Other participants described the impact that their travel programs and community service experiences have had on their personal global perspectives:

"To be perfectly honest, I didn't look into [world issues] before my trip to Belize. But now, my eyes are opened ... I've become so much more involved in community service, as well as looking into the global world and seeing what's going on."

Those who participated in programs both with and without community service components noted that each of their travel experiences offered different learning opportunities from which new global perspectives can be developed. According to the students, personal preference and desire to serve—not social or institutional pressures—should influence one's participation in a program with a community service component. One participant stated:

"If people are not looking to do community service, then going on these study tours is fine. You shouldn't think of yourself as a bad person if you don't want to get down and dirty, but for me, I know it feels good when I help someone out."

Discussion

The research, based on this sample of student self-reports, supports that community service experiences have a positive effect on the academic learning, cultural understanding, global interest, and global citizenship of BSU students who participated in international travel programs, but the extent of the impact varies across the conceptual categories. Analysis of the responses to the 12 evaluation statements posed on the Likert scale shows that the group of respondents who did community service while abroad consistently produced higher mean scores than those produced by the group of respondents who did not serve abroad. However, statistically significant differences between the group means were found for four statements in three conceptual categories. These data correspond well with the responses offered in the qualitative interviews.

No significant differences were found between group means within the survey statements regarding academic learning. Similarly, interview participants did not attribute increased levels of learning to community service activity, but rather to the length of their program and the "hands-on" exposure to another country and its culture. Structured community service work provided a means for students to get involved in a culture, but semester-long exposure to a culture seemed to be more effective in teaching the travelers enduring academic lessons.

In the category of cultural understanding, statistical significance was found between the group means for the statement "I have a better understanding of the needs and problems facing the country that I visited," which suggests that service is effective in informing students about a country's social issues. Interview participants who had served abroad noted that their service allowed them to have direct interaction with native citizens who could share insights about their home country and inform the students about the country's societal problems. Those who had participated in semester exchange programs without service components also indicated a similar level of education and concern about their respective host country's needs and problems. Students' affirmations of enhanced cultural understanding, therefore, can be at least partially attributed to the amount of direct interaction that the students had with citizens of the host country. Short-term service-based programs deliberately concentrate large quantities of direct cultural

interaction into a short time period, while semester exchange programs gradually expose participants to various aspects of the culture through several months of cultural immersion.

Collected data revealed a significant difference in group means in response to the survey statement "My program has increased my interest in doing community service abroad." However, the finding that 74% of those who did not serve abroad indicated a desire to do so suggests that international community service is highly regarded at BSU. Interview participants who had served abroad emphasized that the advertised service components for their respective travel programs were paramount in their decisions to apply for the programs. Moreover, several of them insisted that they will never travel to a foreign country again without performing some type of community service. For many students in this study, it seems that their global interest is fundamentally tied to global service.

The most significant and powerful results were related to the category of global citizenship. Two statements—"I feel compassion for the disadvantaged citizens of the country that I visited" and "I feel an obligation to serve my global community"—produced the strongest differences between group means out of all the statements. The presence of a community service component, according to several interview participants, allowed students to connect classroom learning about their host country to real people around the world. Based on the findings of this research, such a connection seems to produce a sense of humanitarian obligation to help people in foreign countries in the face of social issues they may be encountering. Semester exchange programs, in spite of their length, may not stimulate this level of compassion within students unless they feel deeply connected to the citizens of the host country. Based on the interviews, travel programs with community service seemed to empower students by educating them about a society's problems and then provided them an outlet to make a positive difference within that society. Interactive service activities help diminish cultural boundaries between the students and the native citizens and foster a perspective of global citizenship.

Limitations

Several limitations in this study must be acknowledged. The research period was limited to 10 weeks due to the nature of the research grant, so the results were consequently restricted. A low survey response rate could be attributed to the timing of the study, the method of survey distribution, and/or the difficulty of contacting students who had recently graduated. Graduates lose access to their university e-mail accounts shortly after graduation, preventing a small number of students from the sample from receiving the survey. The survey statements,

conceptual grouping categories, and interview questions used in this study were non-standardized and subject to error. The generalizability of this study must be taken into consideration due to the low response rate and the demographic characteristics of the sample of BSU students.

Implications

The results of this study not only contribute to previous research on the benefits of international community service, but provide suggestions for improvements on university-sponsored international travel programs. Community service activities have a positive effect on most students' international experiences—particularly on their understanding of a culture and their humanitarian connection to foreign cultures and people—and appear to be valuable components of any international program. The Center for International Engagement at BSU could evaluate their current travel programs and consider requiring a community service component within every international program, particularly the short-term study tours. This combination of community service with academic learning would create a large, interdisciplinary variety of international service-learning trips at BSU. The implementation of an international service-learning program—at BSU or any other institution of higher education—would present more opportunities for students to become global citizens and reflect a strong institutional commitment to social justice.

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