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Designing and Evaluating Students' Transformative Learning

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Designing and Evaluating Students' Transformative Learning

Abstract

Transformative learning hinges on navigating cognitive dissonance; thus, intercultural competency assignments and experiences need to be integrated into study abroad/away courses to help students process and make sense of the cognitive dissonance such an experience provides. Assignments, therefore, need to consciously and intentionally triangulate learning by addressing the read (course readings), the lived/observed (conversations, interactions, activities, excursions, observations about public portrayals of culture, etc.), and the compared (home culture vs. host culture). The hope is to improve students' experiences so that semesters abroad are consistently deep, enriching, and intellectual as opposed to simply an extended tourist sojourn. This article documents the process by which I designed for and assessed, via an in-depth analysis of students' texts/writings, students' transformation of their intercultural competency skills and development. In addition, I compared students' works from two differing semesters to evaluate whether transformation in intercultural competency is inherent in the nature of study abroad or must be explicitly taught and cultivated. My Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) project corroborated the almost ten years of research that confirm our fears: exposure to another culture is not enough; studying and living abroad does not necessarily lead to increased intercultural learning. Meaningful, integrative, "learning-laden," and transformative study abroad experiences hinge on students' ability to make sense of cognitive dissonance. Intercultural competency assignments, therefore, need to be fully and intentionally designed and integrated into such experiences, and evaluated to document such growth.

L'apprentissage transformationnel repose sur la manière de naviguer la dissonance cognitive. Par conséquent, les devoirs qui traitent de la compétence interculturelle ainsi que les expériences nécessaires doivent être intégrés dans les cours d'études à l'étranger pour aider les étudiants à comprendre et à donner un sens à des dissonances cognitives que de telles expériences leur apportent. Ainsi, les devoirs doivent donc consciemment et intentionnellement trianguler l'apprentissage en tenant compte des lectures (documents à lire pour le cours), du vécu et des observations (conversations, interactions, activités, excursions, observations concernant la représentation publique de la culture, etc.) ainsi que de la comparaison (culture de son propre pays versus culture du pays hôte). L'objectif est d'améliorer les expériences des étudiants afin que les semestres à l'étranger soient toujours soldés par une expérience profonde, enrichissante et intellectuelle plutôt que d'être de simples séjours touristiques prolongés. Dans cet article, je documente le processus par lequel j'ai conçu et évalué, par le biais d'une analyse en profondeur des textes et des écrits des étudiants, la transformation des capacités et du développement des étudiants en matière de compétence intellectuelle. De plus, je compare les travaux des étudiants de deux semestres différents afin d'évaluer si la transformation en matière de compétence interculturelle est inhérente à la nature des études à l'étranger ou bien si elle doit être explicitement enseignée et cultivée. Mon projet d'avancement des connaissances en enseignement et en apprentissage (ACEA) a corroboré les recherches menées au cours de presque dix années qui confirment nos craintes : l'exposition à une autre culture n'est pas suffisante; le fait d'aller vivre et étudier à l'étranger ne mène pas nécessairement à un meilleur apprentissage interculturel. Les expériences d'études à l'étranger significatives, intégratives, chargées d'apprentissage et transformationnelles reposent sur l'aptitude des étudiants à donner un sens à la dissonance cognitive. Par conséquent, les devoirs qui portent sur la compétence interculturelle doivent être entièrement et intentionnellement conçus et intégrés à de telles expériences, et ils doivent être évalués pour documenter cette croissance.

Keywords

transformative learning, study abroad, course design, assessment, evaluation of learning



Most people intuitively know that study abroad has the *potential* to be a truly transformative experience. On any study abroad program website, quotes abound attesting to students' life-altering stints in far-flung places yet, the study abroad field has over a decade of research proving that abroad experiences are inconsistently transformative (Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, & Paige, 2009; Vande Berg Paige, & Hemming Lou, 2012). Moreover, there has been no consensus on the student learning goals of a study abroad experience nor any consensus on what that transformation should look like or how it should be measured (Deardorff, 2009, 2014). Nevertheless, the hope of programs and universities is to improve students' experiences so that semesters abroad are consistently deep, enriching, and intellectual as opposed to simply an extended tourist sojourn. This article documents the process by which I designed for and assessed students' transformation of their intercultural competency skills and development. In addition, I compared students' works from separate semesters to evaluate whether transformation in intercultural competency was inherent in the structure of our university's study abroad program or must be explicitly taught and cultivated.

Intercultural competency (or any of the eighty-five similar terms used by academics and study abroad/away professionals) encompasses a broad array of knowledge, skills, and habits of mind (Deardorff, 2009). While many definitions abound, Brian Spitzberg and Gabrielle Changong (2009) define intercultural competency as the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive, and behavioural orientations to the world. To have such "appropriate and effective management of interaction," individuals need to understand sources of oppression, differing contexts, and the how and why behind cultural difference. They need to communicate across difference, use multiple perspectives, listen deeply, and ask thoughtful questions. They need to be intellectually curious, seek substantiated answers, and suspend judgement in valuing others. In theory, study abroad (or domestic study away) experiences should provide ample opportunities for students to develop their intercultural competency by the mere fact that they are seemingly surrounded by difference. However, research shows that mere exposure does not necessarily lead to changed perspectives regarding other cultures or peoples (Vande Berg et al., 2009; Vande Berg et al., 2012).

Transformative learning hinges on navigating cognitive dissonance. Jack Mezirow (2000) in *Learning as Transformation* delineates clearly the core components of transformative learning: uncovering veiled frames, considering multiple perspectives, making connections (with others and ideas), evaluating knowledge (one's own and others') and taking action that aligns with such a process. He states,

Transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. Transformative learning involves participation in constructive discourse to use the experience of others to assess reasons justifying these assumptions, and making an action based on the resulting insight. (pp. 7-8)

Clearly there is much overlap between intercultural competency and transformative learning. Thus, I argue that assignments and experiences that intentionally cultivate intercultural competency need to be integrated into any study abroad course to help students process and make

sense of the cognitive dissonance a study abroad/study away experience provides. Assignments, therefore, need to consciously and intentionally triangulate learning by addressing the read (course readings), the lived/observed (conversations, interactions, activities, excursions, observations about public portrayals of culture, etc.), and the compared (home culture vs. target culture) in order to scaffold deep, transformational change in perspectives and actions.

Intentionally Designing Assignments for Transformative Intercultural Learning

As a language, culture, and literature professor at a medium-sized liberal arts institution I have applied my disciplinary skills in varying non-disciplinary contexts. For example, in 2012 I created and taught a general studies course open to all students regardless of major while leading a semester-long study abroad in San José, Costa Rica. The course was about how the Spanish conquest set in motion patterns of behaviour that are still visible today and that had a profound effect on the economy, history, geography, politics, etc. of Spanish America. In particular, we looked at the coffee, chocolate, pineapple, and banana trades, their commodity chains, and their economic, historical, political, environmental, and socio-cultural effect on the continent.

Since I acknowledged that I didn't know enough about leading a semester abroad or teaching a course in another country, I read extensively and talked to many people about what skills students needed to practice while living and learning in a foreign country. I was surprised to find that the literature stated that study abroad experiences, when investigated, led to little intercultural gain (Deardoff, 2009; Twombly, Salisbury, Tumanut, & Klute, 2012; Vande Berg et al., 2009). As a Spanish professor, I knew that students came back from study abroad programs with wildly differing language skills—some students improved radically and some others remained at the same level of language despite living in total immersion for a considerable amount of time. My own experience studying abroad led me to believe in the potential for great transformation, not only linguistically, but cognitively and affectively as well. I questioned whether study abroad investigations based on indirect measures of assessment, such as surveys of students' impressions of cultural competency, were able to fully capture what happened during an experience abroad. Therefore, I set out to see if I could design and capture some of the transformational learning that I surmised was happening during a semester-long study abroad experience.

One thing I knew for certain was before taking a group of eighteen second and third year students to Costa Rica for four months was that I did not want them to come back from the semester with reinforced stereotypes about other cultures. Rather I wanted them to return to North America with a profound openness and respect for otherness and difference. In particular, I wanted students to understand why Spanish America had a particular history and how such a history shaped cultural practices. I wanted my students to expand their intercultural competency skills while living abroad, yet such expansion hinged on the students integrating into the Costa Rican culture. Thus, I designed a course assignment that would help students connect with their host families via weekly, guided questions. Yet, just chatting with their host families did not seem like it would lead to students' deep, critical, transformational learning. Thus, I connected those conversations with the course readings. Again, I felt it was not enough to ensure deep learning. I wanted my students to come to terms with and make sense of the often contradictory nature between the theorized culture (what they read), the lived culture (what they talked about with their families), the public portrayal of culture (what they saw and observed), and the compared culture (their own United States biases,

perceptions and cultural filters versus Costa Rican culture). For such to happen I needed to construct a more robust learning experience around their conversations with their host families.

As the first step in the process towards intentionally fostering transformative learning, I designed and created an assignment to stimulate and integrate the theorized, lived, portrayed, and compared cultures. The assignment asked students to write weekly blog postings where they reflected on and connected the discussions they had with their host families, the photos they took of particular public places, the course readings, the various field trips taken, their day-to-day experience living and learning in Costa Rica, and their perceptions of United States cultural practices (see Appendix A for more details about the assignment). A colleague, Dr. Pam Kiser, suggested I look at her Integrative Processing Model (IPM) as a means to help me guide or structure students' processing of their experience in Costa Rica. The IPM asks students to gather data from concrete experience, reflect, identify relevant knowledge, examine dissonance, articulate learning, and develop a plan (Kiser 1998). Yet, my students were not in a human services or service learning course for which the IPM was intended. Thus, I needed to modify the model and create weekly prompts for students that targeted certain intercultural competency skills. For instance, the writing and photo prompts for the third week of the semester were:

- What are some things that Costa Ricans find “weird” of others’ eating practices and foods? Are there any things that will absolutely not be eaten in Costa Rica or that are taboo?
- What does food “say” about a person? For instance, if someone is a bit overweight does it mean anything socially? How about if someone is very, very skinny?
- Take photos of food advertisements on the street (billboards, signs in shops, in newspapers, etc.). What do the advertisements “say” about Costa Rican food and tastes? What is being “sold” along with the food (status, progress, convenience, etc.)? How are those advertisements similar or different than in the U.S.?

The IPM provided a solid base for the entire semester’s work since the students’ blogs served as a way for them to practice the analytical and writing skills necessary to provide, at the end of the term, an integrative, deeply critical reflection on their entire semester-long experience.

Based on their performance and class discussions, the blog postings were admittedly a struggle for the students because they found it exceedingly difficult to integrate the varying aspects of the compared cultures. To help the students improve their weekly entries, as a class, we collaboratively created a joint posting in which we incorporated all of the component parts, we routinely evaluated individual postings as a class using the rubric (see Appendix A), we chose an exemplary one to serve as a model, and during class, we discussed challenges and potential modifications to future postings. It was not until the last two postings of the semester that their responses indicated that students were finally making deep connections between the read (theorized culture), lived (experienced and observed culture), and learned (internalized U.S. lenses) cultures (see Appendix A for a sample student posting). Such overt scaffolding and support made me realize that the integration of ideas was a discrete skill that students needed to practice over and over, with guidance, in order to acquire it as a way of thinking and expressing their learning.

As an end of semester activity, I asked students to reflect on the entire semester. I received astute, deeply reflective, and self-aware commentaries from the students; the level of detail, analysis, and connections they made in their posts surprised me. Students used the following questions as guidance for their end of semester reflection:

- 1) Overall, what has been your experience living in Costa Rica? What are some highlights? What are some low points? What was most challenging to get used to and what will you miss about living in Costa Rica?
- 2) What did you learn about Costa Rican cultures, U.S. culture, and yourself during this semester? How are you going to “take back” and apply your experience to your life once back in the U.S., both in abstract and concrete terms? (see Appendix B for the full assignment and student sample)

I surmised it was the constant struggle to explain their thoughts in the weekly blog postings that led to such well-articulated deep learning, yet I didn't have any concrete way to “prove” their transformative learning. Thus, I felt the need to devise a means by which to better document their change.

Measuring and Assessing Transformative Intercultural Learning

While I could tell students had learned a great deal through writing their integrative blog posts and documenting their study abroad experiences, I needed a means to better document and assess that growth. I had not explicitly set out to measure intercultural competency skills in my course, but I had those skills clearly on display in the reflective essays. Thus, once back in the United States, I received ethics approval from my institution to study students' written assignments; all students granted me permission to formally use their work. I asked the study abroad office for the students' application essays to function as a “pre-test” or starting off point and then compared these essays with the final reflective essays students wrote as part of the blog assignment for my course. The American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU) VALUE rubrics were developed by teams of faculty across multiple institutions and disciplines to provide categorizations and descriptors for core competencies such as critical thinking, global learning, integrative learning, etc. (AACU, 2017). Using the AACU global learning and intercultural knowledge and competence rubrics as a base, I created my own rubric. I reviewed the intercultural competency literature and pulled out the most prevalent knowledge, skills, and habits of mind. I added a category of “Action” to my rubric because implementation of those knowledge, skills, and habits of mind seemed essential to me. Since intercultural competency is a skill that crosses disciplinary boundaries, I visited Arts and Humanities departments at my university to discuss the rubric and received feedback from my colleagues. I then mapped my intercultural competency rubric onto the developmental continuum created by Bennet and Bennet (2001; see Appendix C for my rubric). Lastly, I compared the students' study abroad application essays to their final reflections and mapped where students were on the intercultural competency rubric and developmental continuum before and after the semester in Costa Rica.

Many studies in the social sciences and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) literature use grounded theory or emergent coding as a methodological approach. I could not get inter-rater reliability because I did not have anyone to read the application and final essays with me (after all it was not a team-taught course). Therefore, I read the essays carefully multiple times, gave each student text a score on the rubric I had created, and looked for broad, repeated patterns and tendencies among the pre- (application essays) and post- (final reflections) texts. Using my disciplinary textual analysis skills of making connections, seeing repeated patterns, finding concrete examples in the texts to help me make a plausible, logical interpretation of the text, and contextualizing the cultural/textual production, I was able to deduce that student learning did,

indeed, happen and that students' worldviews shifted away from being so ethnocentrically entrenched, thus demonstrating that students had made gains in their intercultural competency.

Bennet and Bennet (2001) provide a developmental model, which explains the way in which individuals move from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism. The first three categories, Denial, Defense, and Minimization, fall under the bracket of ethnocentrism. Individuals in the category of Denial see their own culture as the only legitimate one and will psychologically or physically isolate themselves so that other cultures don't have to be considered. Those in the Defense category see their own culture as the good, or right, culture, and cultural difference is often denigrated. In Minimization, one's own cultural worldview is perceived as universal, and other cultures are essentially similar to one's own. The next three categories, Acceptance, Adaptation, and Integration, indicate ethnorelativism. Individuals in the Acceptance category view other cultures as equally complex, and their own culture is one of many valid world cultures. Those in Adaptation can shift perspectives in and out of others' worldviews. Finally, in Integration, one's identity includes the movement in and out of different cultural worldviews. Movement from being entirely closed off to other cultures (ethnocentrism) to basing one's sense of self on the movement in and out of worldviews (ethnorelativism) is decidedly not linear or smooth.

In my students' application essays, most wavered somewhere between Minimization and Acceptance, with only two students fully in the Acceptance category. While students were able to pose (limited) potential cultural differences, the vast majority fervently stressed similarities between the U.S. and Costa Rica. The Minimization stage "softens" other perspectives and insists on similarities and commonalities. Such can be seen in an excerpt from the application essay:

There will of course be similarities and differences in our cultures, but I expect that the people in Costa Rica will be very relatable just as most people around the world are; despite the differences in our cultures, I expect to find more similarities with Costa Ricans as fellow human beings.

Also, in Minimization cultural biases and lenses are not recognized and one's culture is perceived as universal, which can be seen in a student's comment about Costa Rican youth culture: "For the most part, the social life of a teenager is a universal concept." Generalizations based on hearsay, "I have heard" or "As many of my friends have told me," were also abundant in sixteen of the student responses, thus squarely positing students in the Minimization stage. Before departure, knowledge was the weakest and most absent part of intercultural competency skills, while openness to difference (habits of mind category) was most prevalent. Students repeatedly wrote about wanting to "get out of my comfort zone," to "experience a different culture," and to "go with an open mind, ready to learn and experience something new." They were what I term "cluelessly open"—they displayed an overt willingness to be open to any differences or experiences that might come while studying abroad, but did not have any notion of what those differences might be beyond food, climate, language, and a vague notion that living spaces/homes would be different.

After a full semester in Costa Rica, students' final reflections showed that they had all moved into the Acceptance category; they consistently fulfilled the various parts of this category. At the Acceptance stage, other cultures are viewed as equally complex, but different constructions of reality and one's culture is one of many valid world cultures. There was a large increase in students' knowledge, skills, and action categories from pre- to post-study abroad texts, particularly

with self-awareness and recognition of U.S. cultural biases. Students articulated a newfound understanding of particularity or context. One student wrote in the semester cap reflection:

I realized the singularity that can be present in every small place, every community within a culture within a country as part of a larger region. That led to my changing view on the variety of Latin America as a whole, where formerly I perceived it as mostly homogenous.

Understanding the historic, economic, geographic, and political reasons behind why people of differing cultures value and act in a particular way led the students to be more aware of their own perspectives and biases, and the reflections even documented fundamental shifts in their thinking. For instance, multiple students wrote powerful comments such as: “It made me think of how many times I had already judged Costa Ricans, and how I should have thought about their history and story beforehand.” or

I now recognize that saying that I am from America is an egotistical and ignorant view of the world. I am American, but so are Ticos [Costa Ricans], and so is everyone else from the Americas. I want to take that realization home with me, and remember there is more to things than what I grew up knowing to be true.

As reflected in their application essays, students pre-departure were “cluelessly open” to difference without ever having intimately engaged with it, but at the end of the semester, there was a clear pattern that documented a shift in how they perceived difference. Difference was no longer perceived as weird, but simply different. Moreover, students stressed that they wanted to not only explore the differences, but to understand the reasons why those differences existed and how they came to be. In his/her final essay, one student wrote, “There are so many different beliefs and cultures that I know so little about. What is important to them? More importantly, why is it important and how did it become important?” Students repeatedly wrote about how they had found a way to bridge cultural and linguistic divides to create meaningful relationships with their host families, whether as a result of the weekly assigned host family conversations or through some other way. One student reflected,

I knew that, due to my lack of language skills, it was not going to be possible to have deep conversations with my family, but it would be possible to make connections through doing something together, even with minimal conversation. Knowing that my Tica [Costa Rican] mom enjoyed cooking, one day I decided to bring home some ingredients for guacamole, and asked her for help making it, which instantly led up to a moment of doing something together. When I learned that she goes on a walk every morning, I began waking up early to walk with her... I have learned that there is much more to forming a meaningful relationship with someone than just linguistic communication.

Students’ formerly narrow definition of communication—based solely on linguistic capacity—expanded to perceiving other forms of non-verbal communication:

Not only did I develop the ability to hold a conversation with my Tica [Costa Rican] mom, but also I was able to implement our class readings and discussions into my life. Through the different commodities, I was able to see that food carries such a stronger, deeper

meaning than the object itself; food is a system of communication. This was when everything started to click and I stopped judging the surface issue.

Again, as a result of the students' experiences in and outside of class during their semester in Costa Rica, their reflections demonstrated developmental growth with regards to intercultural competency as well as an increase in their concrete intercultural knowledge, skills, habits of mind, and actions. Developmentally, they progressed from Minimization to Acceptance (at least at the precise end-of-semester moment captured in the final reflections). As a language, culture, and literature professor who infuses intercultural competency skills in all she teaches, and who explicitly created weekly conversations, photographic observations, and blog reflections to cultivate such skills, it was rewarding to see that such intentionality led to student learning and growth.

Comparing Transformative Intercultural Learning in Different Semesters

Since I was, indeed, able to assess students' growth in intercultural competency by using their final reflective essays, the logical question for me to ask was: Does growth in intercultural competency happen every time students study abroad for the semester in Costa Rica? Therefore, the third step of the project was to assess students' intercultural competency skills during different semesters at the university's program in San José, Costa Rica program so that I could place my students' learning into a larger context. Thus, I received permission to analyze the Spring 2013 study abroad students' final reflection papers in order to evaluate their intercultural competency. The caveat is that neither the assignment nor the goal of the course was to develop students' intercultural competency even if the research states that such is an assumed part-and-parcel of a study abroad experience. The results, for me, were striking. Students showed tremendous personal growth as individuals, but they wrote of that growth as if it had happened in a cultural vacuum—they learned due to the study abroad experience, not because they were in Costa Rica per se. They noted how much their confidence and feelings of independence had increased (since they were away from friends and family and in a foreign country), how much their storytelling and listening skills had improved (the focus of the course), and how much more open they had become. While many of them noted positive relationships with their Costa Rican families, the increased openness primarily revolved around being open to their classmates and developing close relationships with them. Some students did compare family interactions with information from the assigned course reading, the book *The Ticos* (Biesanz, Biesanz, & Biesanz (1999), but no one mentioned an understanding of why Costa Ricans do what they do nor an awareness of why we do things differently in the U.S. All this is not to say that students did not grow and learn during the semester; simply, I could not find any evidence regarding their development of intercultural competency skills. In the end, I could not score or place the students on the intercultural competency rubric and developmental continuum because their final reflection essays did not demonstrate any of the skills identified on the rubric. Again, it is not too surprising since neither the assignment nor course were explicitly designed for such, but it does substantiate various researchers' claims (Twombly et al., 2012; Vande Berg et al., 2012; Salisbury, An & Pascarella, 2012; Paige, Cohen, Kappler, Chi, & Lessegard, 2006) that "interventions" are necessary during study abroad courses in order to increase students' intercultural competency skills.

Conclusion

With the analysis of the students' texts, important lessons can be learned from this project: (a) intercultural competency skills need to be intentionally imbedded, practiced, and integrated into study abroad coursework; (b) growth in intercultural competency can, and should, be directly assessed via student works; (c) universities need to explicitly state their own student learning objectives for semester-long study abroad programs so as to aim for consistency of desired outcomes; and (d) faculty need support in how to cultivate intercultural competency in their students, particularly if intercultural competency is not a cornerstone of their discipline. This SoTL project corroborated the almost ten years of research that confirm our fears: exposure to another culture is not enough; thus, studying and living abroad does not necessarily lead to increased intercultural learning. Meaningful, integrative, "learning-laden," and transformative study abroad experiences hinge on students' ability to make sense of cognitive dissonance. One way to do so is to create assignments that require students to analyze theorized culture (what they read), the lived culture (what they talk about with people in the target country), the public portrayal of culture (what they see and observe), and the compared culture (their own biases, perceptions and cultural filters versus the target culture). In sum, intercultural competency assignments need to be designed with intention, integrated into the study abroad program, and evaluated to document students' potential growth.

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Appendix A

Assignment: Weekly photo/host-family conversation blog

Every week you'll have a set of questions to ask your host family (posted below), related to food practices, as well as photographs that you need to take (you can take video, too, if you'd like). Your analysis of the conversations and the photos will be posted on the course blog--*please integrate information from the readings to deepen your insights or observations.*

The final "entry" will be a synthesis of your ideas integrating the semester's readings, course concepts, varied conversations with your host families/Tican friends, and your observations/photos of the city.

Week #1: Due Monday, February 6th

- What are typical Costa Rican foods (eaten on a daily basis)? Why do you think these foods are typical of Costa Rica? Where do these foods come from (Costa Rica, other Latin American countries, the U.S., Europe, etc.)?
- What are typical "special" Costa Rican foods (eaten for celebrations)? Why do you think these foods are eaten for these occasions?
- There are lots of foreigners and immigrants in Costa Rica. How has Costa Rican food been affected by their living here?
- PHOTO: Go to a typical Costa Rican supermarket and observe the types of food and items sold there. What do you notice particularly about the products offered? Take photos of 1-2 things that catch your attention. What similarities and differences are there with supermarkets in the U.S.?

Week #2: Due Monday, February 13th

- What foods are "native" to Costa Rica?
- What are some customs related to food in Costa Rica? For instance, do people sit down as a family to eat at every meal? Is the mid-day meal larger than the dinner meal? Are all the dishes of food set on the plate and everyone serves themselves or are individual plates served in the kitchen and served? etc.
- PHOTO: Take photos of the foods served at the different times of the day. How does the food and the customs related to it dictate the structure of the day, both within the family and at work/school? Is the same true for the U.S.?

Week #3: Due Monday, February 20th

- What are some things that Costa Ricans find "weird" of others' eating practices and foods? Are there any things that will absolutely not be eaten in Costa Rica or that are taboo?
- What does food "say" about a person? For instance, if someone is a bit overweight does it mean anything socially? How about if someone is very, very skinny?
- PHOTO: Take photos of food advertisements on the street (billboards, signs in shops, in newspapers, etc.). What do the advertisements "say" about Costa Rican food and tastes? What is being "sold" along with the food (status, progress, convenience, etc.)? How are those advertisements similar or different than in the U.S.?

Week #4: Due Monday, February 27th

- When do people eat at restaurants? Is it only for special occasions or do people eat out at restaurants often? Is there a generational difference (older people prefer to eat at home while young people eat out more, etc.)?
- What type of restaurants are popular in Costa Rica, or at least in the city? When did foreign restaurants become more common in CR? Are all the foreign restaurants positive or negative for CR?
- PHOTO: Take a few pictures of a range of restaurants. Make sure to visit a restaurant that serves typical Costa Rican food, as well as a chain restaurant such as McDonald's and a family restaurant of any food-type (Italian, Chinese, etc.). How are the restaurants set up? How are the menu offerings different or similar to those equivalent restaurants in the U.S.?

Week #5: Due Monday, March 5th

Since we'll be visiting a farmer's market on Sunday's excursion, this week's focus will be on access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Also, this week we'll be studying chocolate, thus the second topic.

- When and how is chocolate eaten in Costa Rica? Is it only for special occasions or in desserts?
- Where does your family get the bulk of their fruits and vegetables? Do they buy them in the supermarket, from street vendors selling produce from the back of their trucks or from small, specialized shops (fruterias)? Why do they buy the fruits and vegetables from there? Also, how often do they buy fresh produce?
- PHOTO: Take some photos of the farmer's market in Zapote (Sun a.m. excursion). What do you notice about presentation or layout of the market? Who is shopping at the market? What is being sold there? What are interactions between sellers and customers like? How does this market compare with farmer's markets in the U.S.?

Week #6: Due Monday, March 12th

- When do people drink coffee in CR (morning, all day, etc.)? How is it served and drunk (are there special cups or a special method of preparing coffee, like tea is in England, or is it always served with something to eat, etc.)?
- At what age do people start drinking coffee? How is it introduced to children/young people (as an "adult" drink like wine, for instance, or something they need to develop a taste for over time, etc.)?
- PHOTO: Take photos of coffee--where is it sold? where/how is it served? where/how is it advertised? What is the "coffee culture" in the U.S.?

Week #7: Due Monday, March 26th

- Why is coffee so important in Costa Rica? What does it represent?
- How is coffee connected to politics in CR?
- PHOTO: Take photos of public places where coffee is drunk (coffee house, sitting area in McDonald's, etc.). What function do those places serve? Is coffee really the focus or is it something else? What do you observe about "public" coffee culture in Costa Rica?

Week #8: DUE Monday, April 16th

Since we are going to Nicaragua this long weekend and starting the new unit on bananas, the blog will be focusing on both.

- (with host family) How do Costa Ricans view Nicaraguans? Why? [keep asking about Nicaraguans in Costa Rica....how has their presence affected Costa Rica, etc. This may be a touchy topic for your family so let them lead the conversation and you keep asking questions as long as it is interesting and comfortable.]
- (for you to think about and respond to...) When comparing Costa Rica and Nicaragua, what similarities and differences did you notice while on our trip?
- PHOTO: If possible, take photos of the fruit (even better take notice of the bananas) being sold. What do you notice about the presentation, the sale, the fruits themselves, etc.?

Week #9: DUE Monday, April 23rd

- How are bananas and plantains eaten in Costa Rica (fresh, cooked, etc.)?
- Are bananas an important fruit in Costa Rica? Why or why not?
- How is Costa Rican history tied to banana cultivation?
- PHOTO: Take photos of bananas. How are they sold? How many types are being sold (ripe/unripe, small ones, large ones, etc.)? How prominently (or not) are they displayed? What does the selling of bananas/plantains tell us about the centrality or importance of bananas to Costa Rican culture?

Week #10: DUE Monday, April 30th

- How is pineapple eaten? Is it only eaten as a raw fruit? Is it only for breakfast?
- Are there different kinds of pineapples being sold now than formerly?
- How and why is pineapple important to Costa Rica?
- What does pineapple symbolize?
- PHOTO: Take photos of pineapples and/or some food with pineapple in it. Also, observe pineapple in its many forms, particularly in the supermarket. What sort of foods have pineapple or pineapple flavor in Costa Rica as compare to the U.S.?

Weekly Blog Entry Rubric

- A** Reflects, connects, reacts to, and articulates learning and what still needs to be explored or thought through. Includes deep level of critical reflection and makes astute observations/conclusions/connections, etc. between the course readings and the ideas brought forth in the conversation with host family. Focuses on the various thought processes and connections instead of mere description. Explicitly connects thoughts and ideas to then formulate concrete conclusions; explains, justifies, and substantiates such conclusions.
- B** Reflects, connects, reacts, articulates learning and what still needs to be explored/thought through. Solid level of critical reflection, but not all parts of the analysis are as equally strong or analytical. Focuses on the various thought processes instead of mere description. Connections are not overtly made and therefore conclusions are weak.
- C** Reflects, connects, reacts, articulates learning and what still needs to be explored/thought through, but not all parts are present or as equally analytical. Includes more description than the various thought processes. Ideas not connected, therefore conclusions are lacking.
- D** Limited or partial reflection, connection, reaction, learning, and questioning. Description dominates and thought processes either incomplete or faulty.
- E** Severely limited or faulty thought process. Critical reflection not present or erroneous.

Student sample of blog entry

This reflection is from the end of the semester, and it serves as a solid example of a student making connections between the readings, the conversations, and their observations of the physical world around him/her:

Pineapples have become one of the world's favorite food items. As we learned from *The Pineapple King of Fruits* by Fran Beauman and *Pineapple Culture* by Gary Okihiro, the fruit was a near instant hit because of its extremely sweet taste, and the fact that it is not like other normal fruits. As made visible in the picture above, pineapples do not look very appetizing or attractive to eat, but once the rough outer shell is cut through, the fruit on the inside is easily one of the best fruits in the world. The result of pineapples finding favor taste wise throughout the world, is that its production has become a very large and profitable industry, and the pineapples that are eaten today are grown all around the world. As of relatively recently, as in during the 21st Century, pineapple consumption and production has grown and is now an important part of Costa Rican society and the economy.

Pineapples are very important to Costa Rican society, especially food wise. It has been the most common fruit I have noticed available during breakfast time. It was also the first fruit that my host family offered me my first breakfast, and it still continues to this point. Based on the frequency with which my host family buys pineapples and the speed at which it is eaten, I can come to the conclusion that pineapple is one my family's favorite foods. Every weekend on Sunday my Tica mom buys two pineapples from the feria or farmers market, but they are generally both eaten away

by Wednesday dinner time. The fruit is served for breakfast, but after asking them about how they use the fruit, they take some of it to work and school, and in the case of my Tico dad he loves to make smoothies with the fresh pineapple. According to my host family, pineapples are used different ways in Costa Rican food. You can have them served in slices as normal, or you can buy them in various pastries, in smoothies, on pizza, salads and even in jam. I have noticed that my Tico family buys and uses a lot of pineapple jam with their bread for breakfast or for the cookies around coffee time.

According to my host dad there are also different types of pineapples. Some of the pineapples include the Criolla type, the Dorado and the Hawaiian. Although these are the different available types of pineapples in Costa Rica, my Tico dad has acknowledged the fact that the Hawaiian pineapples are the most common and that it is the type of pineapple most purchased and kept in the house. He claims that the Hawaiian brand of pineapple is so common and popular because it is the most widely produced by the new large scale fruit companies. The pineapple industry has become a large source of income in Costa Rica, and people have realized its new importance. My host family told me during discussion about the fruit, that pineapple production is important for the economy. That being said my family likes to buy pineapples because they are local grown. Implied importance of the pineapple industry and pride in local grown pineapples means that pineapples are developing a new cultural significance, one that is higher than bananas. When I compare it to coffee and bananas my Tico dad was quick to distinguish that the value of pineapples was not as high as coffee, but definitely better than bananas.

Pineapples in Costa Rica are used and incorporated in many different products and sold in many different ways. Similar to the rest of the world, one of the main ways to buy pineapples is in the whole fruit form from the grocery or market. The picture above shows me at Mas por Menos, the local grocery store, holding a whole pineapple produced by Dole, a large international fruit producing company. It was also possible to purchase canned pineapples, but they didn't seem to be very popular. As mentioned earlier pineapple is sold in pastries, as a jam, in smoothies and in other mixed fruit drinks. The fruit drinks and smoothies seem to be one of the more popular ways that they are sold outside of the whole fruit. It was interesting however, that in the grocery, and it was relatively large, there was not a large selection of fresh pineapples. As in the picture, this pineapple looks very green, similar to 8 or 9 others that were available to choose from. Pineapples are more widely sold in the fruit stores and by the fruit vendors on the side of the roads. They tend to have better looking and more pineapples for probably cheaper.

Compared to the pineapple culture in the United States, for one, all the available fruits are available in groceries. Since pineapples are not grown in the US, they are imported to the groceries and so there are no vendors or small fruit stores that have sweeter or better pineapples available. As a result in the US pineapples are also more expensive in the US and eaten more among the upper class and in the middle class, where people have the money to purchase the fruit. In Costa Rica, because production is local and widespread, the fruit is a lot cheaper and enjoyed by more different social classes. As a result pineapple is more important in Costa Rica than the United States because it is available everyday and is therefore more entrenched in culture whereas in the US pineapple is more of a novelty or specialty fruit from the tropics, although there are many products with pineapples. The majority of those pineapples are processed and not the same as the fresh pineapples that are eaten in the Costa Rica.

Appendix B

Assignment: Final Reflective Blog Entry/"Application" Essay Question

The final blog entry isn't only to reflect on your weekly course blog entries and host-family discussions, but also to reflect upon your entire semester, with an eye on trying to integrate the two. Please answer the following questions. There is no page requirement, but like with all writing, get to the "meat" of your ideas quickly! You don't need to answer the questions below in order, just make sure you touch on them in some way or another in the essay. Find core themes to your responses and structure your essay around such. (100 pts)

****Overall, what has been your experience of living in Costa Rica? What are some highlights? What are some low points? What was most challenging to get used to and what will you miss about living in Costa Rica?***

****What did you learn about Costa Rican culture, U.S. culture, and yourself during this semester? How are you going to "take back" and apply your experience to your life once back in the U.S., both in abstract and concrete terms?***

Student sample of final blog entry/reflection

All students expressed very high levels of change and openness to difference, but this student recognized and voiced just how much change had occurred as a result of the semester's experience:

Costa Rica has been an unbelievable experience that I will forever hold in my memories. I am truly blessed to have had this opportunity to get to know new places and new people. I was very skeptical about this program, because I had not yet been at Elon for a full school year. However, I knew that if I had the courage to transfer to a "new world" full of strangers once, then I had the strength to travel with 19 more strangers to a second "new world". Living in Costa Rica for the past 3½ months has challenged my conservative views and ethnocentric values. I have not only learned a great deal about myself, but also have learned and come to appreciate different cultures

Before arriving in Costa Rica, I had no conscious expectations. I came with the intention of meeting new Elon students and to travel to new places. Little did I know I would learn and even adapt to a whole new way of life. I was very hesitant at first to fully accept the Tico lifestyle, because subconsciously I reminded myself that I am a citizen of the United States of America, a first world country. As time passed and I finally came to accept the fact that this country was going to be my home for a full semester, those subconscious thoughts slowly faded and I was able to experience a different culture, instead of a worse, 3rd world country.

There have been a few experiences that I will never forget that have helped shift my mindset on life. One experience occurred between myself and other classmates. After getting to know each other on a basic level, Allie addressed me as a rich Yankee. To say the very least, I was in complete shock. I was very offended by this comment, but laughed it off because I had no idea how to react; I had never once been called a Yankee, let alone a rich Yankee. They initially thought that I perceived myself as superior, with dispensable funds and daddy's credit card, all of which were completely false assumptions. They did not know who I was or where I came from, so how could they possibly already label me as a specific type of person? Every penny in my bank account is a

direct result of my personal hard work; money has never been handed to me on a silver platter. My parents are two of the hardest workers I have ever met, but yet they still struggle financially to support four kids. My mother was hospitalized multiple times while I was in first and second grade, which essentially led to my parents getting divorced. I have no memory of my parents ever being happily married. And my brother battled against alcohol and drug addiction for years before finally getting his life under control. For these reasons and many more, I struggled to come to grips with the fact that I was immediately labeled as a rich, stuck up brat. In an odd way, however, this harsh judgment was a very defining moment. Just those two words, rich Yankee, made me re-evaluate how I perceive other people and how first impressions can be lasting impressions, regardless of accuracy. It was definitely an act of reverse psychology, because it was the first time I was the one being judged, not the one doing the judging. Although it was very uncomfortable to recognize, I realized that I often do portray myself as superior to others in order to shield and protect myself from my past. This led me to the realization that everyone has a story, and the cliché saying is 100% true: “don’t judge a book by its cover”, because often times we are unaware of what lies within. As I’ve learned in Political Science, it is necessary to analyze the root of the issue in order to make accurate evaluations about the surface issue.

This new awareness of my roots and why I act the way I do, was of great help when trying to get to know the Costa Rican culture. Initially, I struggled with the language barrier and repeatedly questioned why I ever decided to study abroad. I was barely able to communicate with my Tica mom and for the first two weeks I cried and complained to my mom about how awful Costa Rica was and how much I hated the Spanish language. Her response was always the same: “Wash your face, take a deep breathe, go to sleep. Everything gets better with time.” In the moment I didn’t believe things would turn around, but I tried to stay positive and not judge solely on first impressions because I knew how it felt to be judged on that basis. This was definitely my lowest point throughout the entire semester. Not having a phone to communicate with my friends or family at home made the matter even worse; I had no one in Costa Rica that I could truly rely on and talk with about my feelings. My optimism thankfully kept me going, and before I knew it everything was turning around for the better. Not only did I develop the ability to hold a conversation with my Tica mom, but also I was able to implement our class readings and discussions into my life. Through the different commodities, I was able to see that food carries such a stronger, deeper meaning than the object itself; food is a system of communication. This was when everything started to click, and I stopped judging the surface issue.

In Elon orientations, we were constantly told that our diet was going to consist of rice and beans and plantains. I was very nervous about the food because I had a preconceived notion that I was going to be eating food that I didn’t particularly enjoy. While growing up, my mother had an eating disorder so food automatically was a loaded, depressing part of my life. I figured that food in Costa Rica was going to continue along the same path of negativity. In sharp contrast, however, the preparation of food in my Tica house is a labor of love. Every recipe has a long history within the family and my Tica mom takes pride in knowing that I enjoy her cooking. This made me realize that even though my Tica mom doesn’t blatantly say that I’m part of the family or that she has enjoyed my company, I know that every meal communicates that message. One day she even said that every meal is made with love and friendship. This was definitely a highlight that I will never forget because it reinforced that language is not the only form of communication. From that point on, I had a whole new appreciation for my Tica mom and the Costa Rican society as a whole. It

made me think about how many times I had already judged Costa Ricans, and how I should have thought about their history and story beforehand.

These experiences and many others have opened my eyes to whole new perspective on life. As a result of truly understanding the consequences of judging a book by its cover, I have become more patient and observant. This is a learning experience that will directly help with my summer job. I work in Human Resources at Julian Krisnky Camps and Programs, which is a year-round tennis and golf club and summer camp. About 95% of the staff is foreign; from London to South Africa to Australia. Three years ago was my first summer working in the office and it was quite challenging because I had never before been exposed to so many different cultures. I was quick to judge the counselors because not all of them acted according the American cultural standards. Being in Costa Rica has made me think about what the counselors think of American culture and how different it must be from their daily life. I am now more aware than ever that there is two sides to every view point and although each might be very different, one is not better or worse than the other, it is just different. With a new appreciation for culture, specifically differences, I think working at JKCP this summer will be an entirely new experience and I will be able to enjoy it in ways that I haven't been able to before. I hope to get to know the counselors on a deeper level so that I can understand their individual stories, rather than simply their surface person.

From traveling to a different country with complete strangers to living with a Costa Rican family to getting to know not only Costa Rica, but also Panama and Nicaragua, I have come to appreciate the uniqueness of people and cultures. I struggled to come to terms with the fact that my personal views were being challenged, but I am so thankful that I am now culturally sensitive to people with different values. This awareness has helped me enjoy the semester to the fullest, because I began respecting people more for who they were rather than disrespecting them for who they were not. It is interesting that in a world where individualism is held high, we look for conformity and instead deem the individuals as the "other".

Appendix C Intercultural Competency/Literacy Rubric

According to Brian Spitzberg and Gabrielle Changnon (2009), intercultural competency is the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive, and behavioral orientations to the world (“Conceptualizing Intercultural Competence”). This rubric was created by interlaying Janet Bennet & Milton Bennet’s (2001) developmental theory onto the AACU global learning and intercultural knowledge and competency rubrics.

	Baseline (Denial/Defense)	Benchmark (Minimalization)	Milestone 1 (Acceptance)	Milestone 2 (Acceptance towards Adaptation)	Proficiency (Adaptation and Beyond)
Knowledge	Doesn’t acknowledge roots of oppressions or own biases interfere with comprehension of such.	Acknowledges, but has partial understanding of roots of oppression and privilege.	Understands their own and other cultures’ values, history, social structures, etc., comprising the unique cultural context. Is aware of tensions, debates, controversies, and historical roots of oppression and privilege.	Understands intersecting roots of oppression and privilege.	Has a rich understanding of sources of oppression, of differing contexts, and of the how and why behind cultural difference.
Skills	Doesn’t often consider others or other alternative ways of thinking and being, thus avoids communicating across difference.	Begins to consider alternate ways of thinking, though their own culture’s values are considered universal. Makes tentative attempts to communicate across difference. Makes tentative attempts to learn from others who are perceived as vastly different.	Is self-aware and recognizes cultural biases. Critically reflects on values, beliefs, and assumptions of U.S. and other country/countries. Sees multiple perspectives. Demonstrates empathy and recognizes feelings of another group. Attempts to communicate across difference and foster mutual learning.	Communicates across difference (communicates in ways that recognize difference in verbal and non-verbal strategies of communication, in direct/indirect and explicit/implicit meaning, etc.). Sees and takes multiple perspectives. Listens deeply, asks thoughtful questions and fosters mutual learning.	Communicates effectively across difference (communicates in ways that recognize difference in verbal and non-verbal strategies of communication, in direct/indirect and explicit/implicit meaning, etc.). Sees, takes, and defends multiple perspectives. Listens deeply, asks thoughtful questions and fosters mutual learning and understanding.

Habits of Mind	Feels threatened when world-view or perspective is challenged.	Other perspectives are “softened” or (only) similarities found because they are (or have to be) like own culture.	Tolerates ambiguity and uncertainty. Is flexible and open (to difference and change).	Is intellectually curious, asks questions, and seeks answers. Suspends judgment in valuing others.	Is intellectually curious, asks deep (the how and why) questions, and seeks substantiated answers. Suspends judgment in valuing others.
Action	Is more comfortable and remains with same-group others. Does not seek out different experiences.	Makes generalizations based on experiences or hearsay. Does not seek out knowledge or other sources of information.	Has the ability to use research-based cultural generalizations to navigate difference. Explores and engages difference. Creates connections between various experiences with difference with knowledge learned. Begins to build relationships of mutual respect and co-operation.	Challenges one’s own and others’ thoughts that are judgmental or demeaning. Works to eliminate biases, prejudices, and discrimination in their own thought and acts. Builds relationships based on mutual respect and co-operation.	Is committed to working towards eliminating biases, prejudices, and discrimination in the public discourse. Is committed to building relationships based on mutual respect and co-operation in the public sphere/in the community.

Ethnocentrism.....to.....Ethnorelativism

Denial	Defense	Minimization		Acceptance	Adaptation	Integration
One’s culture IS the only real or legitimate one; psychological and physical isolation so that other cultures don’t have to be considered	One’s culture is the GOOD one; cultural difference is denigrated or romanticized	One’s cultural worldview is perceived as universal; other cultures are essentially similar to one’s own		Other cultures are viewed as equally complex, but different constructions of reality; one’s culture is one of many valid world cultures	Can shift perspective in and out of another worldview	One’s experience of self/identity includes the movement in and out of different cultural worldviews