

An Assessment of Learning Outcomes in Short-Term Study Abroad and Human Rights Education

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Abstract

How does short-term study abroad affect students' attitudes toward human rights? What role does study abroad play in human rights education? This study assesses the learning outcomes of two study abroad programs that aimed to promote human rights education. I applied a mixed methods approach to measure the changes in the opinions of students who completed my courses in two countries with poor human rights scores: The Gambia and Vietnam. I expected that The Gambia course would push the students toward ethnocentrism, and the Vietnam course would push the students toward ethnorelativism, but I was wrong about the impact of both courses. Intergroup contact theory provides the best theoretical framework for explaining these unexpected learning outcomes. My findings suggest that we need to question the compatibility between human rights education and study abroad in terms of learning objectives.

Keywords: short-term study abroad; human rights education; intergroup contact theory

Since 2000, I have taken over 300 students on short-term study abroad courses to Germany, The Gambia, and Vietnam. Human rights education was a component of each of these courses, but I understood assessment merely as assigning grades based on the students' understanding of the various aspects of human rights that we covered in class. Recently, however, I have learned that most international education administrators view assessment as something much broader. Rather than simply grading the students' work, I saw, I needed also to assess the impact of my study abroad courses on the students' attitudes. Did the students become better "global citizens"? Did their "openness to diversity" increase? While these abstractions are valuable questions to ask, they're difficult if not impossible to assess as written; rather than attempting to assess such abstract concepts, I decided to adapt the administrators' approach to my pedagogy. As a result, the more measurable question at the center of this assessment project is: How did my short-term study abroad courses affect the students' views on human rights?¹

Over the past three years, I gathered data from three short-term study abroad courses in The Gambia (West Africa) and one in Vietnam. I focused on changes in the students' intercultural sensitivity. Did they become more ethnocentric or ethnorelativist? Bennett defines ethnocentrism as "assuming that the worldview of one's own culture is central to all reality" (Bennett, 30). He defines ethnorelativism as "the assumption that cultures can only be understood relative to one another and that particular behavior can only be understood within a

cultural context. There is no absolute standard of ‘goodness’ that can be applied to cultural behavior” (Bennett, 46). My aim in this study was to assess whether or not these courses caused my students to adopt a more ethnocentric or a more ethnorelativist view on human rights. In other words, after completing the course, did the students’ beliefs shift in the direction of supporting a Western conception of human rights that defines individual rights as inalienable (i.e. toward ethnocentrism), or did they show greater sympathy for a collectivist approach to human rights that places the interests of the collective over the interests of particular individuals (i.e. toward ethnorelativism)?

I tested three hypotheses that reflected my personal expectations for this study: a) The students in the Vietnam course would shift toward a more ethnorelativist view on human rights; b) The students in The Gambia courses would shift toward a more ethnocentric view on human rights; c) The students who did not take either study abroad course (the control group) would show less attitude change than the students in the Vietnam and The Gambia courses. After a brief review of some relevant scholarly work, I will explain why I entered this study with these expectations.

Scholarship on Study Abroad and Human Rights Education

International education administrators dominate the literature on study abroad assessment. This means that most of the assessment research focuses on the degree to which studying abroad changes the way students view themselves and the global community. Relatively little work has been done on the links between study abroad and attitudes toward human rights. Woolf summarized this paradox: “The topic of human rights is ostensibly ideally suited to the several agendas of study abroad. In practice, however, this area of potential investigation receives muted attention” (Woolf, 20).

The most common approach to study abroad assessment has been to ask students if they thought that the international experience changed them. One example of this approach is Hadis’s (2005) interesting study of the academic benefits of study abroad. As part of the survey, he asked returning students to respond to two statements: 1) “The experience of studying abroad has deepened my interest in world affairs.” 2) “The experience of studying abroad has made me more open to new ideas.” Ninety percent of the students were “in agreement” or “very much in agreement” with both statements (pp. 61, 62). His research supports the findings of most of the literature, namely, that study abroad promotes “global-mindedness” and “open-mindedness.”

Carlson and Widaman (1988) also used a retrospective analysis, but they focused more on changes in the levels of international political concern and cultural cosmopolitanism. They surveyed students who had studied abroad and students who had not, and found that the study abroad experience, relative to the comparison group, made students both more sympathetic toward *and* more critical of the United States.

Greene (2005) provides a rare dissenting conclusion. She surveyed students who had studied abroad and who had not and found no significant differences between the groups regarding “sensitivity to human rights, expression of empathy, or level of cultural competence”

(p.42).

Several studies have moved beyond testing whether or not study abroad improves “global-mindedness” and instead examine the factors that make certain international experiences more effective than others in changing students’ attitudes. Kehl and Morris (2007) show that a full semester abroad results in higher global mindedness scores than does a short-term program (short-term is defined as less than eight weeks). Chieffo and Griffiths (2004) do not refute this argument, but after surveying over 2,300 students, they conclude that short-term programs, nevertheless, “are worthwhile educational endeavors that have significant self-perceived impacts on students’ intellectual and personal lives” (174).

Of greatest interest to me is the literature that focuses on the factors that explain the differences in learning outcomes across different short-term programs. Jones et al (2012) compare four programs and conclude that the structure of the courses, in terms of the degree of cultural immersion, explains much of the variance in transformative learning outcomes. DeGraaf et al (2013) demonstrate an important link between the location of a study abroad experience and the long-term personal impact of the program on the students. Likewise, Tarrant et al (2014) emphasize the importance of the study abroad location for fostering global-mindedness, but they also assess the role of the pedagogy prior to and during the short-term trip. This conclusion caught my eye: “We have demonstrated that study abroad alone is not optimal for nurturing a global citizenry, but it has the potential to do so when the academic content and pedagogical delivery is offered in a synergistic fashion” (p.155). It was my aim in each study abroad course I led to create this type of synergy.

Human rights education is central to all of my courses. One of the most troublesome aspects of human rights education is that there is no agreement in the field on how to define the core concepts of the discipline (Flowers, 2004). For example, I am puzzled that the field does not devote more attention to the inherent tension between, on the one hand, the widespread support for cultural relativism and multiculturalism as positive learning outcomes, and, on the other hand, the widespread belief that every individual deserves to be treated with dignity. For example, do we want students to avoid judging (and condemning) cultural practices that are harmful to women (according to our Western standards)? If you believe that all women deserve to be treated a certain way, how can you respect a culture that denigrates women? As a human rights educator, what is my desired learning outcome? Should I seek to instill a stronger belief in principles that place “universal” individual rights above cultural norms (i.e. ethnocentrism)? Or should I promote the belief that respect for culture is more important than protecting individual rights (i.e. ethnorelativism)?

In my view, this problem in the field of human rights education requires us to examine the links between education and activism. Do we want students to stand up for rights around the world? If yes, how do we define rights? Do we want students to become cultural imperialists (i.e. advocating an agenda of individual rights over cultural tolerance)? Or do we want them to respect political systems that use cultural differences as an excuse to violate individual rights? Reilly and Sanders (2009) criticize the pervasiveness of “buzzwords” such as “global

competency.” They assert: “We can no longer afford to allow study abroad to be reduced to such catch phrases... We argue [instead] that study abroad should deliberately position itself as an activist force in the service of global survival” (pp. 241, 262).

Blaney’s (2002) essay on global education, disempowerment, and the limits of human agency is the most interesting piece I encountered in my review of hundreds of articles in the field of international education because he aims to “locate a balance between empowering our students while cultivating a sense of humility in the face of a complex world, a willingness to live with ambiguity, and an ethos of political self-restraint when in an advantaged position” (p.268). He argues, “if global education aims to cultivate in our students a responsible sense of agency, it should also involve disempowering them in important respects” (p.274). In many ways, this approach to international education has shaped my own pedagogy. As I describe in the next section, I did not aim to push students toward ethnocentrism or ethnorelativism. My approach to human rights education has, instead, been to make them understand how difficult it is to adopt either view.

My Study Abroad Courses

The structure and location of the study abroad courses are key factors in explaining the disparity between my expected results and the actual results. Therefore, it is important that I provide a proper description of each course, and an explanation of the similarities and differences between Gambia and Vietnam.

“Senegambia” was a two-part course. I met with the students every week throughout the semester prior to our travel to The Gambia. In this pre-trip part of the course, we examined Gambian history, contemporary politics, and economics. We examined the performance of Gambian government and the country’s traditional gender roles through the lens of ethnocentric/ethnorelativist debates. At the end of the spring semester, we spent three weeks in Gambia.

Some of the “Course Goals” for The Gambia course were that the students would be able to provide an intelligent answer to several questions. Here are four of the questions (taken from the course syllabus):

- Should we praise or condemn President Jammeh’s performance as president?
- Can/should we use our “democratic values” as the standard for judging President Jammeh?
- Is it a sign of tolerance or condescension if we respect a government that has a poor human rights record?
- Can/should we tell a Gambian woman that she is wrong when she defends cultural practices that are (by our cultural standard) abusive to women?

“Vietnam: Imperialism, Communism, Globalism” was a three-part course. In the fall semester, we met every week to study the history and contemporary politics and economics of Vietnam. During the winter break, we traveled to Vietnam for three weeks. In the spring semester, we met every week, and the students gave post-trip reflective presentations.

Two of the “Learning Outcomes” for this course were that the students would be able to formulate intelligent answers to these questions (taken from the syllabus):

- Were the Doi Moi economic reforms successful? How do we define “successful”?
- Is the Vietnamese government justified in suppressing individual human rights for the purpose of promoting economic development?

“Introduction to International Politics” (my control group) is a one-semester course that I teach every semester on campus to undergraduates representing many different majors. This course does not include an off-campus component.

In each course, I repeatedly required the students to address various aspects of human rights, such as liberalism, women’s rights, the right to development, communalism, ethnocentrism, and ethnorelativism. In The Gambia and Vietnam courses, I made an effort to create a pedagogical “synergy” between the pre-trip course and the concepts we engaged with during each trip (see Tarrant et al). One way of doing this was by conducting many “debriefing sessions” during our time in The Gambia and Vietnam to discuss and debate the students’ daily observations and experiences.

Comparing The Gambia and Vietnam

The differences between these two countries led me to assume, first, that The Gambia course would push the students toward ethnocentrism, and second, that the Vietnam course would push the students toward ethnorelativism. To understand why I expected these outcomes, and to understand my conclusions concerning short-term study abroad, it is important to provide a clear description of the political and economic situation in The Gambia and Vietnam. I derived this summary from the readings that I assigned the students in the two courses.

Gambian President Jammeh (who fled The Gambia seven months after my most recent Gambian study abroad program) gained international attention for his disturbing public statements and behavior. Since seizing power in 1994, he issued a steady stream of public threats against homosexuals, most famously in front of the UN General Assembly. He bragged about his ability to cure AIDS and TB with secret potions. He shut down numerous newspapers and radio stations. He killed journalists who challenged him. He tortured and killed opponents he suspected of being witches (Human Rights Watch).

The Vietnamese government has not acted so outrageously, but their disregard for human rights has been similar to that of Jammeh’s government. In 2016, the CATO Human Freedom Index ranked The Gambia as the 125th worst and Vietnam as the 128th worst out of the 159 countries included in an extensive comparative study (CATO). In the same year, the Economist Democracy Index ranked The Gambia at 143 and Vietnam at 128 out of the 167 countries included in its study (Economist Democracy Index).

Vietnam has a much stronger record than The Gambia in the realm of women’s rights. The World Economic Forum ranked Vietnam at 65 and The Gambia at 104 (out of 144 countries) in gender equity (Global Gender Gap Report). One of the best indicators of the status

of women in any country is the fertility rate (births per woman). The Gambian fertility rate in 1960 was 5.6 per woman over a lifetime. This had risen to 5.7 by 2015. In stark contrast, Vietnam went from 6.3 in 1960 to 2.0 in 2015 (Fertility Rates). Polygyny and female circumcision are not practiced in Vietnam. In 2015, the UN estimated that 75% of Gambian women had been circumcised (Statistical Profile of Female Genital Mutilation). According to the Gambian government, “about one-half of Gambian women and more than one-third of Gambian men were involved in polygynous marriages” (Republic of Gambia Population Data Bank).

The contrast between Vietnam and The Gambia in economic development has been even greater than in women’s rights. The Gambia’s per capita GDP in 1990 was \$350 (in current value). By 2016, it had risen only to \$473. Vietnam’s per capita GDP in 1990 was \$98; in 2016, it was \$2185 (GDP Per Capita). While The Gambia remains one of the least developed countries in the world, Vietnam is commonly referred to as an “economic success story” (Davis).

Finally, there was a stark contrast between the rhetoric of Gambian and Vietnamese governments concerning globalization and the role of the USA in international relations. Jammeh repeatedly denounced Great Britain and the USA as agents of neo-colonialism, and sought to promote Gambian isolationism by, for example, taking The Gambia out of the British Commonwealth and promising to reject English as The Gambia’s official language. By contrast, Vietnam has sought ever-closer ties with the USA and has shown the highest support for globalization in the world (Phillips).

In summary, both countries have poor human rights records, but Vietnam has achieved far more progress in advancing the status of women and in promoting economic development, while The Gambia has managed little economic growth and it remains one of the worst countries in any ranking in terms of gender equity. The Vietnamese government views the USA as a friend, while President Jammeh attacked the USA and globalization at every opportunity.

I expected that the students who traveled to The Gambia would see ethnocentrism, in the case of President Jammeh, as primarily an excuse to oppress. Jammeh repeatedly claimed that economic development was a higher priority than Western conceptions of individual rights. I assumed that when the students saw that Jammeh had done very little to promote economic development, and little to promote the status of women, their cynicism would push them toward an ethnocentric view of human rights.

I expected that the students who traveled to Vietnam would shift in the opposite direction. After seeing the remarkable rate of economic development and the impressive improvement in the status of women, I assumed that the students would gain respect for the argument that socio-economic development is a higher priority than defending individual rights.

Methodology

I gave the same pre- and post-trip survey to the 20 students in my summer 2016 Gambia course, to the 17 students on my winter 2016/2017 Vietnam course, and to the 48 students in the control group (two sections of my Introduction to International Politics course). I gave the initial survey to the students in the first class of each pre-trip, semester course. I gave the final survey

three weeks after the students had returned to campus from The Gambia/Vietnam. The control group took the survey on the first and last days of each semester (fall 2016 and spring 2017).

I limited the survey to eight questions because in my previous attempt to gather survey data from the students in my Gambia course (in 2015) only three students completed the 35-question post-trip survey. For the current analysis, therefore, I decided to make the survey far more succinct. The brevity of the survey, plus much encouragement from me, resulted in *all* the students on both study abroad programs completing the pre- and post-surveys.

In addition to the survey, I assigned a five-page paper after the students had returned from The Gambia and Vietnam. The paper topic was the same for both courses: “Is The Gambia/Vietnam an example of ‘good governance’?” I made the prompt ambiguous so that the students would have to choose their own standard for defining and assessing “good governance.” Would they apply an ethnocentric standard, or an ethnorelativist standard? I assigned this paper to the students in my three most recent Gambia courses (55 total students) and to the students in my Vietnam course (due to the structure of this course, only 12 of these students wrote the paper). I did not assign this paper to the control group because we did not cover The Gambia or Vietnam in my Introduction to International Politics course.

Analyzing the Survey Data

For my survey data, I created a scale of ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism as a way to measure changes (or lack of change) in each student’s outlook on human rights. This also allowed me to compare the aggregate changes between the students in The Gambia and Vietnam courses and in the control group. I did not conduct tests of statistical significance for my survey data, since such tests are inappropriate and unnecessary when the sample and the population are the same (Cowger).

Each of the survey questions (see Appendix) was followed by a five-point Likert response set as follows: strongly disagree (=1), disagree (=2), undecided/neutral (=3), agree (=4), strongly agree (=5). For each survey question for each student, I calculated a change score by subtracting the pre-test score from the post-test score. For example, a respondent who answered “agree” (4) to Question 1 on the initial survey and then answered, “strongly agree” (5) to the same question on the post-trip survey, received a change score value of 1 for this question. I coded the answers for each question such that a positive change score indicated a shift toward universalism, while a negative change score indicated a shift toward relativism. A change score of 0 meant no change. Next, I created a variable called *Overall change score*. I created this variable by summing each respondent’s eight individual survey question change scores. Values on this variable ranged from -11 to 12. Again, on this scale, smaller numbers mean a shift toward relativism, while larger numbers mean a shift toward universalism.

I compared the two study abroad groups by conducting a simple comparison of means. The mean on *Overall change score* was .647 (s.d.= 4.15) for the Vietnam group, -1.1 (s.d.= 5.57) for the Gambia group, and .895 (s.d. = 3.2) for the control group. This is not a huge difference, but it does show that on average, students in the Vietnam course and in the control group moved

toward universalism, while students in The Gambia course moved away from universalism and toward relativism.

For my next analysis, I put each student into one of three groups based on his/her overall change score: 1) Shift toward relativism; 2) No shift; or 3) Shift toward universalism. Students with a negative value on *Overall change score* were placed in group 1, while students with a positive value on *Overall change score* were placed in group 3. Students who scored zero on *Overall change score* were placed in group 2. The results of this analysis are in Table 1. While 60% of the students in Gambia course moved toward ethnorelativism, only 35% of the students in the Vietnam course, and 42% of the control group did so. Table 1 also shows that while 47% of the students in the Vietnam course shifted toward universalism, only 35% of the students in the Gambia group did so. Perhaps even more telling, Table 1 shows that while a full 65% of the students in the Vietnam course either moved toward universalism or did not shift, only 40% of the students in The Gambia group either stayed put or shifted toward universalism.

Table 1
Comparison of Relativism – Universalism dimension

<u>Shift</u>	Vietnam (N=17)	Gambia (N=20)	Control (N=48)
(1) Shift toward Relativism	35%	60%	42%
(2) No Shift	18%	5%	8%
(3) Shift toward Universalism	47%	35%	50%

The survey data contradict my expectations in three marked ways. First, the majority of the students in Gambia course became more ethnorelativist. Second, only 35% of the students in the Vietnam course became more ethnorelativist. Third, the students in the control group showed more change than did the students in the Vietnam course.

Analyzing the Open-Ended Essays

The open-ended, five-page essays revealed an interesting divergence between the students in the Vietnam course, on the one hand, and the students in the Gambia course, on the other hand. As shown in Table 2, out of the twelve students who submitted an essay after the Vietnam course, ten concluded that the Vietnamese government was not an example of good governance. These ten students used an ethnocentric standard to reach this conclusion. They all referred to the lack of individual rights, such as restrictions on freedom of speech, as their measure of good governance. Two of the students used an ethnorelativist standard of good governance, arguing that economic development was more important than individual rights in Vietnam. These two students argued that Vietnam’s economic success is an example of good governance.

By contrast, 29 of the 55 students in the three Gambia courses concluded that President Jammeh’s government was an example of good governance, while 26 reached the opposite

conclusion. The most interesting aspect of the Gambia essays was that 40 of the students applied an ethnorelativist standard of good governance, and only 15 used an ethnocentric standard (Table 3). Even though The Gambia, unlike Vietnam, has a poor record of socio-economic development, 73% of the students in the Gambia course were willing to overlook the violation of individual rights as the primary measure of the performance of the Gambian government. As noted above, only two out of 12 students in the Vietnam course adopted this ethnorelativist perspective.

Table 2
Is Vietnam/Gambia an Example of Good Governance?

	Positive view of government	Negative view of government
Gambia Courses (2014, 2015, 2016)	29 students	26 students
Vietnam Course (2017)	2 students	10 students

Table 3
How did the students assess the performance of the Vietnam/Gambian governments?

	Ethnorelativist Standards	Ethnocentric Standards
Gambia Courses (2014, 2015, 2016)	40 students	15 students
Vietnam Course (2017)	2 students	10 students

Like the survey data, the findings from the students' essays refute my hypotheses. Considering the stark socio-economic differences between The Gambia and Vietnam, these results seem to be irrational. A closer examination of the students' essays helps us to understand why more than half of the students in the Gambia course defended an ethnorelativist view of good governance, while most of the students in the Vietnam course defended ethnocentrism.

The most common theme in the essays from the Vietnam course is that the Vietnamese were afraid to talk openly about political topics. Another interesting aspect of the Vietnam essays is that the students rarely mentioned their personal interactions with Vietnamese. They frequently referred to our meetings with Vietnamese government officials. A few of the essays described conversations with a group of Vietnamese students who joined my students in a scavenger hunt in Hanoi. Here are some examples from the students' essays of how their interactions shaped their views of Vietnam:

“On the trip, there were several times when I noticed Vietnamese afraid to say something or to talk about a certain subject. One specific time that I noticed this was when our group met with the mayor of Da Nang.”

“I was continually struck by the reluctance of professionals to say anything that may be interpreted as criticism of the government.”

“The student I interacted with agreed with my argument that development comes before individual rights. He understood that the focus on economic policies over the establishment of human rights was a necessity for Vietnam to develop.”

Aside from the frequent references to our group meetings with state representatives, and the few mentions of political discussions with Vietnamese students during the Hanoi scavenger hunt, the essays resembled typical research papers in an upper level Political Science college course. In short, it was clear that the students’ personal interactions in Vietnam played a small role in shaping their responses to my prompt about defining and assessing good governance.

The essays from the Gambia course were much different in that most of the students drew from their extensive interpersonal relationships during the study abroad experience to define and assess good governance in The Gambia. The depth of the students’ immersion in Gambian culture is evident in their essays:

“It was the people of The Gambia that adjusted my harsh view of their ruler to one that is not as inconsiderate.”

“Who are we as outsiders to come in and declare that the people are wrong, and we know better than they about their own living state?”

“I was very shocked by how many of the individuals in the country were so upbeat and happy although the conditions that they were living in were nowhere up to par to that of the West. Overall, what changed my view of Jammeh was something simple. The people of The Gambia were always in good spirits. Everyone I encountered was happier than people in America. Perhaps The Gambia is so happy because of Jammeh, even if some of his practices may be unorthodox to the average American.”

“Looking from the outside, people might not see Jammeh as a good president, but you have to put yourself in the shoes of the people there. People should not judge Jammeh for how he acts, without going to The Gambia and spending time with the people to really see what is important to them. What is important for their country may not be the same as what is important for our country.”

“After many conversations, observations, and a more developed understanding of Gambian culture, I have a better idea of why President Jammeh rules the way he does. The people there seemed happy and content with their lives, and it took me visiting and experiencing the daily routine to realize why Gambians often do not fight for more freedoms; they are simply trying to get through the day, feed their families, and work to make money. My opinions have changed of him due to my experiences in Gambia.”

Explaining the Results

The surveys and essays show that my short-term study abroad programs produced outcomes that were the opposite of what I expected. I must reject all three of my hypotheses: 1) The students in the Vietnam course did *not* shift toward ethnorelativism; 2) The students in the Gambia course did *not* shift toward ethnocentrism; 3) The students who did not go on either trip (the control group) showed *more* change than the students in the Vietnam course (but *less* than the students in the Gambia course). I created my hypotheses on the assumption that one of the most impactful aspects of a study abroad program is the location of the program. I assumed that the contrast between Vietnam's impressive economic growth and Gambia's economic underdevelopment would be the primary factors in shaping the students' views on human rights. I learned, however, that the structure of the study abroad programs was the most influential factor.

There were significant differences between the levels of cultural immersion in my courses. My findings support Allport's intergroup contact theory, which asserts that prejudice and ethnocentrism can be broken down through contact between members of different groups (1954). For most of their time in The Gambia, the students stayed in a guesthouse located in a residential neighborhood. Four Gambians (my former students at the University of The Gambia) lived in the guesthouse with us. I gave my students in this study a lot of independence to explore the area on foot and by taxi. They developed friendships with Gambians on their own and through my numerous contacts in the country. I put the students in groups of three and placed them in homestays with Gambian families for three days and two nights in the capital region. When we traveled upriver to rural villages, I placed each of the students on their own with a Gambian family for two days and one night. Throughout our program, the students had constant, personal contact with Gambians. The fact that English is The Gambia's official language made it easy for the students to strike up conversations with anyone.

Unintentionally, I structured the Vietnam course in a way that made it much more difficult for the students to experience cultural immersion. For most of our time in Vietnam, we were travelling together by bus, train, boat and plane. Because I wanted the students to see as much as possible, we moved around the country rapidly. In Hanoi, where we stayed for almost half of our program, the students stayed in a Backpacker Hostel. This meant that most of their personal interactions (outside our group) were with other young people from Europe and Australia. In addition to these aspects of the program in Vietnam, the language barrier played a role in limiting the students' immersion in Vietnamese culture.

The results of my study support Wortman's assertion that students on fully integrated programs and students on programs in English language programs show more change in the direction of openness to diversity than students in non-integrated and in non-English programs (Wortman). Likewise, my study confirms Nam's findings from her comparison of short term study abroad programs. Namely, what matters most is the structure of a program. The key factor, she concludes, is the frequency and intensity of interactions with the inhabitants of the study abroad program (Nam). As a strong advocate of study abroad, I am troubled to realize that my

findings confirm Greene's argument that "the anticipated benefits of study abroad experience may need to be reconsidered to accurately reflect any real effects of studying abroad" (p.3).

Pettigrew (1998) builds upon Allport's contact theory in noting the significance of deprovincialization, generalization, and friendship for shaping views of ingroups and outgroups. Pettigrew describes the consequences of effective intergroup contact: "Ingroup norms and customs turn out not to be the only ways to manage the social world. This new perspective can reshape your view of your ingroup and lead to a less provincial view of ingroups in general ('deprovincialization')" (p. 72). Pettigrew affirms Allport's argument concerning the importance of intimate contact, as opposed to trivial contact: "The contact situation must provide the participants with the opportunity to become friends. Such opportunity implies close interaction that would make... friendship-developing mechanisms possible. It also implies the potential for extensive and repeated contact in a variety of social contexts" (p. 76).

Conclusions

My analysis indicates that the strongest factor in changing students' views on human rights was the structure of the study abroad program. The degree of immersion in the local culture had the strongest impact on students' views on human rights. This suggests that deeper cultural immersion produces increased respect among the students for an ethnorelativist understanding of human rights. This suggestion, however, raises another, potentially difficult question: Is this type of understanding a desired learning outcome? Could an intensely immersive study abroad program make students tolerant of *any* "cultural practice"?

This study has forced me to wrestle with some important questions. Did my study abroad program in Gambia promote openness to diversity, or did this program push the students toward cultural condescension? How do I reconcile my determination to promote openness to diversity with Zechenter's assertion that cultural relativism undermines efforts to protect individuals (Zechenter)? Woolf captured the paradox of linking study abroad to human rights education: "Cultural relativism, embedded in study abroad, contradicts the moral imperatives implicit in the idea of human rights that are, theoretically, universal, absolute and applicable across all political, national, and social structures" (Woolf, 29).

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Appendix
Survey Questions

Questions	SD	D	N	A	SA
Q1: “Culture and religion should never be used as an excuse to discriminate against women”					
Q2: “I cannot respect a government that does not allow freedom of speech”					
Q3: “The U.S. has a moral responsibility to condemn human rights violations in other countries”					
Q4: “The right to ‘freedom of speech’ is more important than the right to ‘economic development’”					
Q5: “It is hard for me to respect the opinion of someone who thinks that a dictator can be a good leader”					
Q6: “The U.S./Western standard of ‘inalienable’ human rights works well in the U.S. and Europe, but this standard should not be applied to societies/cultures that don’t yet understand the importance of individual freedom”					
Q7: “I cannot respect a culture that denies individual freedom in favor of the interests of the community”					
Q8: “The U.S. education system should focus more on promoting universal principles of gender equality and focus less on promoting respect for alternative, multicultural values concerning gender roles”					

About the Author

Dr. Emil Nagengast. Emil Nagengast is a Professor of Politics at Juniata College in Huntingdon, PA. He teaches courses on comparative politics and international relations, such as Human Rights, African Politics, and US Foreign Policy. He taught two semesters at the University of The Gambia. He serves on the International Education Committee at Juniata College.

¹ In the course of preparing this study, I discovered an interesting division between the way that course instructors, on the one hand, and international education administrators, on the other hand, approach the assessment of international education learning outcomes. I have experienced these contrasting perspectives several times at my college and at national conferences. In my opinion, administrators focus too much on nebulous concepts such as “global citizenship” that are not part of most professors’ learning objectives and that are difficult to assess; however, I accept that we professors must change how we assess learning outcomes. We cannot merely assign grades based on the students’ acquired knowledge of discipline-specific course content. We need to assess the impact of our courses on students’ attitudes concerning intercultural learning. This study is my attempt to bridge the gap between these two approaches to assessment.