

Supporting Wellness: Integrating Mindfulness Practices into Study Abroad

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Abstract

In this article we will share the impact of mindfulness pedagogy on students in a short-term study abroad course in South Africa. During a one-month program for undergraduate and graduate students, we implemented an explicit critical contemplative pedagogy (Kaufman, 2017) that included daily mindfulness exercises and reflective journaling as a path to increase student consciousness toward embodied social justice. The curriculum focused on cultivating presence, ensuring well-being, and engaging in conscious social change as developed through mindfulness. Study abroad participants created space for transformation by taking time to apply and reflect on their learning in real life contexts (Elliott, 2023). This critical contemplative curriculum and explicit mindfulness approach to experiential learning while examining systemic racism and post-apartheid dynamics in South Africa was powerful. In this article, we describe the curriculum we developed, the pre-travel orientation and post-travel debriefings, the mindfulness practices we used and excerpts from student journal reflections. Our goal is to empower educators to integrate similar wellness strategies into experiential learning experiences in a relevant and meaningful way; one that leads to increased understanding of the self as an individual and representative of their societies and “Others” (Delpit, 2006).

Keywords: *critical contemplative pedagogy, mindfulness, wellness, embodied social justice, study abroad, South Africa*

Introduction

By design, study abroad and international studies programs aim to expand college students' exposure to the world around them, with a goal of increasing cultural competence and broadening capacity for global leadership. However, many programs do not stress the importance of examining one's own biases and subjectivities while observing and experiencing difference in the world. Because of this, program participants run the risk of allowing unexamined stereotypes and biased thinking rooted in capitalist white supremacy culture to shape their observations and experiences with people from other cultures. In many cases, this mindset leads to deficit model thinking and the adoption of a savior complex among those who visit developing countries, especially those in Africa. Recent evolutions of the conventional study abroad model have begun to incorporate critical contemplative pedagogies to help students engage with the world from a mindset of respect, empathy, compassionate right action, and collective well-being. In this approach, mindfulness (including breathwork and self-awareness) is the primary contemplative practice used to increase intercultural competence and drive conscious social change.

The short-term study abroad program discussed was hosted at a university designated as an Hispanic Serving Institution with 55% of the student population identifying itself as students of color, with 40% of those identifying as Hispanic/Latino, 10% international students, and more than 40% first-generation students. The university has a strong commitment to diversity and places a high priority on creating an environment that supports the growth and success of underrepresented and underserved populations. This reality made our mindfulness component particularly salient in the short-term study abroad experience to South Africa. Because of the history of apartheid, and historical political and social oppression, we believed our students would benefit from conscious attention to these disparities. There were three faculty members who supported the experience. The lead faculty member was a White professor with expertise in curriculum and experience traveling in South Africa. A second education faculty member, a Black professor, held expertise in the arts and in stress management. Our third faculty member, “Dr. Niki,” was our mindfulness expert. Dr. Niki, also Black, led regular mindfulness sessions. Dr. Niki’s expertise lies in building heart-centered connections for educators to advance equity for children and families. She teaches Embodied Equity for Educators and Helping Professionals for the Polyvagal Institute. Our student group included ten undergraduate and graduate students, including seven aspiring K-12 teachers, who chose this particular study abroad experience to explore systemic racism with the goal of transformation. As indicated in the Participant Data, students represented a diverse range of ages, with differing paths of study.

Participant Data			
Name	Age	Area of Study	Student Status
Kaitlyn	19	education	undergraduate
Kira	23	education	undergraduate
Taylor	20	education	undergraduate
Carla	19	criminal studies	undergraduate
Noelle	20	education	undergraduate
Jacques	18	business	undergraduate
Lucy	42	early childhood ed	graduate
Jordan	20	education	undergraduate

Nadja	30	education	graduate
Melody	20	photography	undergraduate

The travel course took place in January 2019 as a 4-week intensive cultural immersion. The course was cross listed as an undergraduate/graduate honors education course titled Experiencing an International Culture: A Look into History, Culture, and Education in South Africa. It was the first time the course was offered and there was no previously established protocol. This facilitated freedom and flexibility in designing the course. The specific course goals were:

- Develop mindfulness practices to support their cultural immersion experience.
- Utilize multigenre research and journaling as tools for intrapersonal growth.
- Examine mindfulness practices as a social change mechanism. Focus on cultivating presence, ensuring well-being, and engaging in conscious social change as developed through mindfulness.

Mindfulness has emerged as an effective tool for advancing personal well-being and a reflective consciousness in education. The mindfulness approach utilized in this study was framed by Jon Kabat-Zinn (2004), a leading scholar in the field of secular mindfulness. His approach is one that trains practitioners to pay attention, with focused intention, to what is happening in the present moment without judgment. This idea of learning to focus attention and observe things that normally operate below the level of our conscious awareness are essential skills for educators to possess.

There are two types of mindfulness practices that are extremely beneficial in supporting aspiring teachers, and others, in learning to become aware of unconscious and systemic bias and their impact on public schooling outcomes. First, teaching focused attention mindfulness (Jennings, 2015) practices helps educators develop an inward focus that helps them become more aware of their inner state. Using international travel to South Africa as a context where the environment and people are unfamiliar gives study abroad students a great opportunity to learn to turn within, examine their inner state, and to build the capacity and awareness that's needed to regulate their nervous systems when they feel triggered by people and experiences that they've been socialized to fear or perceive as an unfamiliar other (Parker, 2020). This is where mindfulness practices such as breathwork, mind-body somatic awareness, and other self-monitoring skills support inner resilience to build more flexibility in the nervous system. These skills ideally increase the capacity for more positive, pro-social encounters with people from different countries. Building mindfulness skills that support inward focus through the study abroad experience can enhance a lifetime of professional skills. These skills offer a tremendous advantage especially to teachers from the dominant culture who may have limited exposure to people of different cultures due to living in segregated communities in the United States.

The second type of mindfulness skill that was developed through the program is referred to as open monitoring, or open focus mindfulness (Jennings, 2015). This involves developing a practice of scanning or observing one's larger environment with new awareness, without judgment. The idea of suspending judgment allows participants to build a set of skills that enables them to see beyond their known world, beyond the stereotypes that guide their perceptions. As a

result, open focus mindfulness opens them to fresh perspectives and expands their ways of knowing beyond their existing cultural frames. They can begin to notice the differences in culture, the nuances in how people of other cultures communicate, and to observe them with a sense of curiosity and wonder instead of immediately jumping to stereotypes or comparing them as being inferior to the dominant western cultural norms. This practice of open focus mindfulness helps expand the participant's lens to take in and to experience things that stretched them beyond their known boundaries and perceptions of reality. A trip to South Africa was especially relevant for developing open focus skills because the mindfulness practices allow students to engage with systemic racism as it can be observed in the post-apartheid South Africa. Through paying attention with open awareness, students were able to observe the stark contrast between the major city areas of Johannesburg and Cape Town, as compared with the segregated townships. They were then able to relate this disparity of economic opportunity and systemic racism and isolation to similar dynamics that exist in the United States, but are much less noticeable to them as a part of their own daily lived reality. By being mindfully aware of those dynamics within a cross-cultural context, it becomes easier for the students to connect to those equal dynamics of systemic racism and segregation that impact the quality of public education in the United States.

Critical Contemplative Pedagogy in Study Abroad

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970) established the foundations of critical pedagogy. He asserted that critical pedagogy ensures student learning should empower them to critically examine, and challenge established social structures. Additionally, in *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks (1994) emphasized the need to create safe environments for students and to encourage them to challenge dominant ideologies, furthering the idea of education being necessarily critical. With origins in Buddhism, another approach to teaching and learning is contemplative pedagogy, which encourages deep learning through focused attention and reflection (Roth, 2006). In *Critical Contemplative Pedagogy* (2017), Kaufman emphasizes the integration of mindfulness, critical pedagogy, and personal reflection, providing a framework for nourishing engaged and socially conscious citizens.

Study abroad experiences, especially short-term study abroad experiences, are a natural fit for Kaufman's synthesis of critical pedagogy and contemplative pedagogy. Gudykunst (1979), argues that short term study abroad generally provides an incomplete experience with little opportunity for changed attitudes because of a lack of meaningful interactions with locals. Students who interact more with the local community demonstrate stronger gains in intercultural competence (Vande Berg et al., 2009). Therefore, we believe an intentional approach to generating meaningful interactions with local communities and purposeful reflections on experiences is essential for maximizing the impact of short-term study abroad. This critical and contemplative emphasis is even more essential in a country such as South Africa, where post-apartheid racial inequities and economic disparities are still so present.

The study abroad experience we designed incorporated all five of Kaufman's dimensions of contemplative critical pedagogy (2017). Dimension one is establishing a foundation of nonduality. We established a community value of nonduality, in that we did not position ourselves as experts. Instead, we made a conscious effort to ensure equal respect among all participants. The faculty and the students, as well as in-country hosts and guides, were considered equals. Our experiential lens was not that of saviors nor as simple observers, but of travelers sharing lives and cultures. Dimension two is promoting awareness of interdependence. We emphasized our community, not our individual selves. We designed experiences beyond tourism, though we did visit some

more typical tourist sites as well. We attended a two-day academic conference at a prominent university. We also went to the homes of locals and immersed ourselves in local businesses. This allowed us to feel authentically connected to those living the experiences with us. Dimension three encourages the concept of impermanence, that we are all empowered to effect change and be active in eradicating oppression. This dimension was at the core of the selection of South Africa as the country for our study abroad. The history of inequality and oppression is transparent in South Africa. The conversations about injustice and inequality, and reparations despite lingering disparity, flowed freely. We felt engaging our students in this environment would allow them to build critical skills to address social inequalities within and beyond their home regions.

The mindfulness approach to our study abroad ensured intentionality, Kaufman's fourth dimension. In morning meetings, the participants would speak openly and consciously about being intentional as we experienced the wonders of another culture. Finally, the fifth-dimension grounds the political with the personal. Pre-departure intercultural training has a positive relationship with intercultural learning outcomes (Paras, et al., 2019). During pre-departure and throughout the trip, we regularly discussed how personal experiences and passions can expand to anti-oppressive actions. We created journal prompts that led students to reflect on their power to impact their world.

Student Reflectivity and Intentionality During Pre-Departure Orientation

Most of our students had never traveled internationally before. We knew we would need to guide the participants carefully throughout the experience to ensure the study abroad was meaningful. At the opening of the experience, we were pleased with the apparent open-mindedness of the participants. We were also cautious that there may be some degree of naivete.

To establish the framework of our program, we designed an intentional pre-departure orientation. Recognizing that pre-departure intercultural training has a positive relationship with intercultural learning outcomes (Paras, et al., 2019), we created activities to encourage students to begin to critically examine their own social dynamics, e.g. the notions of difference, power and subjectivity, so they could understand the implications of entering another/different set of cultural dynamics. We had students complete readings and view films (Appendix A) that gave them a general understanding of difference and a basic understanding of our host country. We asked them to begin to consider how their own dispositions could enhance their learning experience.

We reviewed the logistics of the travel experience, safety guidelines, handling money, rooming and clothing expectations, course expectations and other important details. We met over a digital platform with our in-country hosts to enhance students' sense of familiarity. In addition, we hosted guest speakers who had recently traveled to South Africa to preview what students could expect and to answer student questions. One guest speaker in particular encouraged the students to frame their perceptions as wonderings instead of judgements. He told them they would come across cultural situations that were different and had the potential to be uncomfortable. He explained they would see socioeconomic disparity that may initially shock or surprise them. However, he provided them with a tool to gather self-awareness and frame cultural differences as wonders rather than judgments. He encouraged them to say, "I wonder why..." or "I wonder how..." when they encountered differences.

While all of the pre-departure presentations were impactful, the most powerful component of our orientation was establishing a shared understanding of mindfulness and building practical mindfulness practices. This work was led throughout the trip by Dr. Niki, who specializes in mind-

body wellness in PK-16 education. Dr. Niki served as a clinical professor of education and neurodiversity. In addition to her faculty role, she has earned certifications to teach Kundalini yoga, clinical breathwork, and secular mindfulness. Over the past 20 years, she has integrated these mind-body approaches in her work with students and teachers to support social-emotional learning and wellbeing in the classroom.

Contemplative mindfulness practices such as meditation, visualization and clinical breathwork formed a significant part of the pre-departure training students received from Dr. Niki. These practices were also implemented on a daily basis during the trip to help students remain present throughout the program, to manage triggers, and to notice when stereotypes emerged in their thinking. Our work was grounded in the use of mindfulness for racial justice (Magee, 2019), and mindfulness for effective leadership across social differences (Steidel, 2018). Because our travel group consisted of individuals who were considering careers in education, she also provided a foundation in the principles and applications of mindfulness for teachers (Jennings, 2015).

While awareness of self and others and the ability to settle oneself to remain in the present moment are valuable skills, we also recognized that students needed more specific preparation on the embodied aspects of mindfulness in order to integrate both the body and the mind in the travel experience, especially when triggering experiences might emerge. For this reason, our foundation of preparation included an introduction to polyvagal theory - the idea of cultivating felt-safety within the body through the nervous system (Porges, 2011).¹ Dr. Niki also provided specific training in trauma-informed breathwork as taught through the Breath-Body-Mind program (Brown and Gerbarg, 2012). Together, these practices provided a strong foundation and sense of awareness that allowed participants to engage in the travel program with new eyes, an open heart, a settled nervous system, and a receptive spirit to connect with the people of South Africa.

During the pre-departure orientation, students completed journal reflections based on thoughtfully designed prompts (Appendix B). Personal growth goals and journal reflections affirmed that the pre-departure orientation equipped the students with concepts and practices of mindfulness that they intended to use. Examples of student reflectivity were powerful.

In his pre-departure goals, Jacques, an undergraduate business major, detailed his intentions to be mindful:

Through this trip I will work toward a sense of citizenship through increased mindfulness, greater appreciation toward the daily struggles of marginalized groups, and better defining my own identity. [I will utilize] the many benefits of mindful living; highlighting the trait of equanimity, or displaying a stable mind in spite of chaotic surroundings. This key trait will aid in my understanding and interpretation of South African culture and its people. With increased mindfulness, I will be able to approach the unavoidable culture shock to which I will encounter with a stable mind.

Jordan, an experienced traveler, wrote about her intentions to master and use the box breath in real time settings.

1. Polyvagal theory offers a framework for understanding how the human nervous system's capacity for social engagement is intricately connected to a bodily experience of felt safety. It provides a trauma-informed rationale for establishing safe connections as a necessary foundation for the brain to engage the body in healing, learning, and bonding.

[Dr. Niki] taught us the box breath as a way to practice mindfulness and showed us how our sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems connect and affect our brain. Currently, I've been using the box breath to help me stay calm, but it's not a practice I do often enough where I have mastered it. In fact, I usually forget that I know about the box breath until I'm already removed from the situation. A goal I have is to better practice my breathing so I can lower my anxiety about unfamiliar settings.

Lucy, an adult graduate student, explained her desire to be reflective and to use mindfulness to broaden her perspectives and reduce her experiences of tension around cultural differences.

As a human being, I need to see myself as a part of global citizenship. Everyone I meet during my travels has the same human rights and deserves equity in social justice. My goals through this travel opportunity are to become more aware of what happens in the outside world and promote my self-reflection skills. For this reason, I need to go outside my comfort zone, to be open-minded, and to have different perspectives by looking through other's lenses. I will humble myself and be vulnerable to allow provocative moments to trigger disequilibrium for the sake of my personal growth and development. I learned that mindfulness is more than just being mindful; it is a practice that could free myself from emotional tension I may have.

Based on student journal reflections it seemed the pre-departure orientation had prepared the students for the transformations we hoped would occur.

Critical Contemplative Pedagogy During Travel: Ongoing Journaling and Embodied Mindfulness

The travel itinerary (Appendix C) during this short-term study abroad experience was rigorous. The flights from Los Angeles to Johannesburg and back from Cape Town to Los Angeles were long, and included layovers in Istanbul, another opportunity for cultural learning. In South Africa we were hosted by a partnership with a respected business school, which involved attending a two-day research symposium, interacting with scholars and establishing rapport with two local scholars who would join us throughout the trip. Additionally, we explored museums, such as The Apartheid Museum, experienced school and business visits, and examined historical and cultural spaces. We intentionally designed the itinerary to create a rich dichotomy of experiences. For example, students visited a public township school one day, and an elite private school the next day, juxtaposing two extreme schooling experiences. In the township school resources were limited, there were children without shoes, and some of our students noticed outdated curriculum materials such as an incorrect world map. There was no cafeteria, no athletic fields and technology was minimal. However, our students noted the thoughtful commitment of the educators, the kindness and genuine care for the children, and the appreciation and investment in teaching and learning. In the well-resourced private school, our students noticed economic differences. They saw well-dressed students with polished shoes, students engaged in organized sports, and they toured well-furnished dormitories and a tidy well stocked cafeteria where full nourishing meals were being prepared. This was in contrast to the township school where many children were barefoot. The contrast in these experiences reflected the disparity of South Africa in general, which sometimes caused disillusionment and discomfort, and provided an opportunity for students to truly employ their mindfulness practices. Some of our students were shocked, others were inspired to act. Upon

entering the private school, the day after visiting the township school, Kaitlyn said, “I’m shook.” She vowed she would come back and teach in the township school one day. She wanted to engage in action to address the disparity she witnessed.

Throughout our travels, we encouraged critical contemplative practices. We framed this intention by beginning each day with a mandatory morning group meeting that lasted approximately 30 minutes. Each session began with an assigned mindfulness journal prompt that encouraged participants to reflect on the previous day, followed by a mindfulness meditation practice and small group dialogue. Students had ongoing opportunities to journal, with some provided structure (Appendix D) to guide their reflectivity. Based on what was listed on the day’s itinerary, participants were prepared to apply mindfulness practices to support their experience. For example, when students visited local cultural sites, schools, and businesses, they were encouraged to use mindfulness strategies such as focusing on the present, suspending judgment, and observing what they were thinking to help them better adapt to unfamiliar cultural settings and norms. At the same time, after the daily cultural excursions and activities, students recorded their own experiences and reflective thoughts on mindfulness practice, so as to deepen their understanding and application of this constructive strategy. For example, we asked white students how their mindfulness practices supported their ability to settle their nervous system and address any fear or apprehension they might feel when they became aware of being a racial minority in the Townships. We asked them to think about what they would do with their new understanding as it related to dismantling stereotypes and implicit bias. We hoped this would encourage the students to come to their own determinations about social change and personal impact.

Journal reflections collected during travel suggested students were capitalizing on their mindfulness practices to support their overall wellness in an unfamiliar experience. We had a truly cooperative and conscientious group of students. When selecting excerpts, we struggled to identify just a few of the most salient sentiments as all of the students shared profound positive impacts. Carla and Jacques were particularly effusive in their journals. One student, Melody, submitted her journal in a format that did not allow us to include any of her comments. Other students concurred with thoughts well stated by those included.

Carla, an undergraduate criminal studies major, had a moment of realization early in the experience during our layover in Istanbul. She wrote:

...many Turkish people invited us for free drinks, asked us to come to their clubs, photobombed like all of our pictures, and etc. This was a bit alarming at first, but I remembered what we learned in class. No judgment. No judgment of other cultures because what may be not normal to us can be normal to them and in order to receive “wonderment,” we need to be open minded and not judgmental.

Carla elaborated a few days later when she applied her attitude toward another situation where she was out of her comfort zone.

I got very hungry and went in search of dinner. Because most of the individuals in my group are vegetarian, I had to conform to eating what they could eat, which was salads. At this moment, I focused on being an open-minded and nonjudgement because I really did not want to eat what they wanted to eat. However, through careful mindfulness practice (box breathing method), I realized that sometimes you have to be the “other” in a group who conforms to the majority in order to augment happiness and serenity of the mind.

Though Carla seemed to be applying mindfulness to relatively simple experiences of casual social encounters and dietary choices in a group, she was working to integrate the concepts of mindfulness and reflectivity into her experiences. This is an encouraging indication of the investment to transformation that the students seemed to embody.

During travel Noelle documented her mindfulness practices as a tool for remaining non-judgemental toward herself as she experienced loneliness during travel:

As we meditated I felt the breeze and felt the sweet air of South Africa as I placed myself in the safety of my home. This morning I missed my friends and I thought to myself, why? Today I want to be mindful of why I feel the way I feel without judging myself.

In this entry we see that Noelle is applying mindfulness to her inner self, not just to external experiences. This is another encouraging indication that students were beginning to internalize the desired impact of transformative mindfulness.

In his mid-travel journal, prior to a visit to Soweto, Jacques shared his anticipation of using mindfulness:

Today, mindfulness will help me to experience my emotions in the present. As I enter the Soweto township, I fear that the immense poverty will cause me to create judgment of such life. But because of today's morning mindfulness lecture, I plan to observe the new culture without initial reaction nor judgment. I hope that this voyage helps me to experience my true feelings more and more. I crave more knowledge of my self-identity! Our mornings with Dr. Niki have truly helped me to live my life in the present moment; developing a greater understanding of who I am. I anticipate this trip and mindfulness practices will transform me!

In reflections after the visit to Soweto, Jacques revealed the contradiction he was feeling and his resolve to use mindfulness practice to bring himself balance.

I expected the township to be of absent life. But in reality, life in the township was vibrant yet simple in pace. People seem to move slowly and truly care for those around them. But despite this philosophy, the township markets seem to move rather quickly. I was approached repeatedly by vendors, leading me into a state of anxiety. I want to help these people so badly, but I am not sure that I can solely through economic needs. Perhaps I could spread love instead, I want to love and be there for everyone in my surroundings. In this situation, I practiced the box breath to bring my soul to a state of equilibrium.

In her reflections after a visit to the township of Khayelitsha, Carla documented her recognition of the importance of impacting societal change.

Something that really stood out to me was that one of the men who was with us giving the tour claimed that the people of the community do not want to complain about their problems...instead, they want to fight for change. I believe that this is the way that we should all live, whether rich or poor.

In comparison to her earlier journal entries indicating Carla was applying mindfulness to casual situations, her later entry suggests meaningful application of mindfulness that resulted in a desire to invest in social change.

Jordan documented her experience of shifting her perspective by being self-reflective. In her discussion of the two school visits, she recognized that the differences in the two schools initially evoked pity and anger. She shared her concern about her initial feelings of pity, then realized she should not pity cultural differences. In her mid-travel journals, she referenced her use of breathing techniques to move her through such stressful situations. “As I practiced mindful breathing this morning I utilized the vagus nerve breath. I tried to notice each breath. After a minute of mindful breathing, I noticed my body feels calm and ready to start the day.”

Overall, students reported that the mindfulness meditations, breathwork and other contemplative practices made a significant impact on their ability to navigate both the joys and the challenges of their experience in South Africa. Developing the ability to observe without judgment was critical in helping them respect the cultural differences they observed without jumping to judge that they were inferior to American cultural norms. This led to a heightened respect that was visibly demonstrated in the students' interactions with the South African people we met on the trip. Additionally, several students were triggered by turbulence on the plane, as well as the extreme length of the 25-hours of travel. They reported using the box breathing technique to help calm themselves and settle their nervous system. Using breathing practices at various times during the trip when items were lost, when food was unfamiliar, or when they were upset by cultural and social disparities made all the difference for helping several students stay connected to the experience when they felt overwhelmed. The growth in their ability to manage the unexpected, remain present and graceful in unfamiliar environments, and be respectful and open-hearted toward people they have been socialized to pity or look down upon was the most significant outcome reported and witnessed during this life-changing experience.

Post Travel Reflections Reveal the Impact of Mindfulness and Critical Contemplative Pedagogy

As Kaufman (2017) explains, critical contemplative pedagogy emphasizes the integration of mindfulness, critical pedagogy, and personal reflection, providing a framework for nourishing engaged and socially conscious citizens. In their final reflections, graduate and undergraduate students in this program revealed the impact of mindfulness and of a critical contemplative pedagogy. They wrote about self-realization and the benefits of mindfulness on their overall wellbeing. Kira described transformative takeaways that she felt would enhance her physically and mentally. She saw the value of mindfulness in stressful situations and in helping her live in the moment, and she also provided a concrete example of a physical benefit when she applied breathing techniques on the flight home:

One of the three benefits that I have gained while practicing mindfulness is a sense of calmness in the middle of what could be a stressful situation. The second benefit that I have

gained is a physical benefit. On our way home there was lots of turbulence, and I was very uncomfortable with the shaking of the plane. I practiced the vagus nerve breath and I immediately felt my heartbeat drop, anxiety go away, and the stress relieved. I was still scared but physically I was much calmer than I would have been without this practice. The third benefit that I have gained is living in the moment. I have had a hard time letting go of what has happened in the past and I have taken plenty of time worrying about the future. I'm a work in progress, but with these new tools I will be living in the moment one step at a time.

As evidence of her continued transformation in building mindfulness practices, Jordan described her growth:

One benefit I gained from this practice is being able to be more aware of my body and an improvement in visualization. During our guided meditations when Dr. Niki would tell us to imagine eyes on the bottom of our feet or in our lungs, it gave me a heightened awareness of how my lungs were breathing because I could visualize my body, visualize my lungs, and my eyes looking at the lungs I visualized. I could associate the movement of my lungs as they expanded and contracted while I breathed.

Based on end of trip revelations, it was clear to faculty leaders that students were internalizing the discrete mindfulness skills and using the breathing and reflective techniques they were learning during the trip. As demonstrated by Jordan above, students talked about physical benefits and usefulness of the techniques when they wanted to gain a sense of calm and increase self-awareness.

Students also discussed how the experience helped them to address biases and keep their thoughts in check amidst a different culture. Jordan wrote, "I feel that mindfulness has also helped break down certain biases that I have had with the world. I thought South Africa was going to be a scary place, when in reality, it was beautiful and the people were so kind."

Reflections on Mindfulness and Intentions for Future Practice

The ultimate goal of the experience was internalized mindfulness practices and sharpened ability to recognize and act on injustice beyond the study abroad experience. Evidence of such transformations emerged as the end of trip revelations began to indicate ideas that will transcend the trip itself. Kira explained a critical reflective perspective shift. She wrote:

I will interact with others in a mindful way by not being quick to assume the other person's opinion, background, or ethnicity. I will interact by doing my best to keep my words in check because I have had a history of not knowing what I have said is hurtful or offensive. I will mindfully interact with others by keeping them on the same level as me, to not put myself below or above the other person.

We saw similar evidence of the potential long-term impact of this intentional contemplative experience from the students. Taylor, another undergraduate education major, was clear in her future use of mindfulness in her profession:

I am studying to be a math teacher. I plan on using mindfulness to allow everyone the best educational experience by establishing a safe and comfortable environment and by being a

resource for dealing with and helping students with disabilities. Mindfulness had helped me advocate for the importance of safe, comfortable and respectful environments to maximize learning and participation.

The use of a contemplative and critical lens, one that promotes deep thinking, compassion and the challenging of societal norms, was apparent in several journal entries. Kira indicated her understanding of South Africa as a representation of people who maintained joyful mindsets amid fighting for change and justice. She wrote:

South African culture showed me that even through all its countries differences that its people came up to fight for their political freedom. The country in itself still stands for all of us that every country has its people stand up for their freedom whether it is in the political, education, rights, or equality. The people of South Africa didn't let their joy get suppressed by inequality. The young children in the public school showed that the future was in their hands and were eager to learn all that the world can offer them. The abundance of love and hope that was shown in the country was beautiful. The ability to see communities in the township unite in hardship and help their neighbors when needed. The township saw people leave their community to get higher education but also saw them come back to help other people earn their freedom.

As the journey concluded, student journal entries indicated important growth in the application of mindfulness to their lives, particularly in response to culturally different spaces. Nicole shared that, "Mindfulness allowed me to observe the world without judging it. Just that one minute of silence and focus allowed me to feel more peaceful and aware of myself to start the day." Jacques reflected that mindfulness practices helped to "mindfully integrate my soul with that of completely different people." Nadja shared, "I found that traveling abroad mindfully can change lives, change perspective, and change hearts."

Conclusion

Integrating daily mindfulness practices with a critical pedagogy lens during our study abroad experience in South Africa enriched the student and instructor experience by providing a holistic framework for engaging with the host culture. Students were equipped with the tools to navigate intercultural encounters with empathy and cultural competence. This approach fostered a sense of intentionality and social responsibility, which encouraged students to truly believe in their capacity to make change in our interconnected and complex world. Utilizing the framework of critical contemplative pedagogy in study abroad programs holds the potential to transform students into mindful, culturally aware, and socially responsible individuals, poised to contribute meaningfully to a globalized society.

In our 4-week study tour to South Africa we created an intentional curriculum that included daily mindfulness exercises and reflective journaling as means for intrapersonal growth and increased student consciousness toward embodied social justice. We selected South Africa as our destination country purposely because of its history of social conflict and apartheid, and the open discussions about racism and historical socio-political oppression that our past travel experiences indicated are typical with the South African people. There were challenges along the way, of

course, but those were logistical in nature. Overall, we saw transformations in the students, reflected in their journal entries and final course projects that included powerful personal poetry.

The students on this study abroad experience began as open-minded and eager learners, willing to explore the landscape of South Africa while also learning and practicing mindfulness. They agreed to invest themselves and to engage in reflective journaling. This was a fortunate scenario as other college level study abroad hosts have reported their participants in short-term study abroad were distracted by partying and socializing. This was not the case for our group. An important limitation on the effectiveness of mindfulness in study abroad may be the dispositions of the student and faculty group.

The students arrived at every daily meeting on time with their materials and an earnest attitude. In their journals we saw an eagerness to learn and explore. Initially students reported using their mindfulness practices in casual social encounters and in situations where their breathing practices supported them in calming anxieties of airline travel and homesickness. As the journey continued, students began turning inward, discussing their dispositions of purposeful nonjudgment of themselves. They demonstrated an elevated metacognitive awareness of the need to reserve judgment in culturally different situations such as in township and school visits. Students applied compassion and empathy but also respect and admiration for the joyfulness of people different from themselves.

As the journey concluded we really saw the biggest shifts in the students and the long term impact the experience would have on them. Their journals affirmed students had moved into critical contemplation of themselves, their place in the world and the impact they could have by extending their practices beyond the trip. As a criminal studies major, Carla discussed her investment in fighting for societal change. As future educators, Taylor and Lucy indicated concrete ways they planned to bring mindful, thoughtful practices to their future students. Jacques wrote of his “new lens” while Nicole differentiated that she was no longer a tourist during travel but a visitor who sits among humanity equally. Students talked about the ways mindfulness helped break down barriers and help them see the joy in the hearts of the people they met.

An unintended outcome of this experience was the benefit of the mindfulness approach on the faculty members. Guiding a study abroad excursion, especially a short-term whirlwind trip such as this one, can be grueling. The logistics and managing adult students can be demanding. With the entire group invested in intrapersonal growth and daily peaceful and mindful practice, we gained interpersonally as well. The mindfulness practices supported faculty in starting each day fresh. The positive energy of the cooperative and invested students elevated the morale of the entire group. There was no concern about students wandering off or resisting group expectations. Students did what was expected and then some. We wondered if this was because the students who chose to engage in this particular study abroad experience did so knowing the expectation to invest in intrapersonal work, and with the realization that in South Africa there would be no option for individual time separate from the group purely for safety. Maybe we just got lucky. We do feel the trip was an extraordinary success that we attribute to the intersection of study abroad and mindfulness, and we are determined to create similar magic in the future.

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Appendix A
Required Readings & Films

- Arno, P. (1952, December 6). Is Bali Still-er-Bali? [Cartoon] *New Yorker*.
- Eastwood, C. (Producer/Director). (2009). *Invictus* [Motion Picture]. USA. Warner Bros. Pictures.
- Geertz, C. (1983). *Local knowledge: Further essays in interpretive anthropology*. Basic Books.
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- Singh, A. (Producer), Towers, H. A. (Producer) & Roodt, D. J. (Director). (1995). *Cry the beloved country* [Motion Picture]. USA: Miramax Films.

Appendix B

Assignments Before Departure

Read all assigned readings and view films

Personal Growth Goals

Before departure students will research the impact of studying abroad and develop a 1-page statement of goals for personal growth. Students will comment on personal, academic, and socio-cultural goals. What do you expect to learn? What aspects of the experience will be most challenging? How will this experience impact you? How do you expect to apply the learning from this experience?

Historical and Cultural Research Presentation

For this assignment students will research a specific aspect of the history or culture of South Africa and present the findings to the class. The presentation must include a discussion of the following:

OBJECTIVES:

Before departure students will:

- research and present the historical or cultural factors of one aspect of the areas of travel.
- identify and analyze the similarities and differences between the current culture of travel and their own culture while demonstrating an awareness and appreciation of both.

Pre-departure journal entries: Complete and submit all four pre-departure journals.

1. What is your prior experience with mindfulness and/or meditation? What strategies do you currently use to help you stay present, feel calm, and remain engaged in unfamiliar settings?
2. Discuss: The meaning of culture and the importance of sensitivity toward people from another culture other than your own.
3. Write a paragraph synthesizing each reading/film, discussing themes that connect across the readings/films. Integrate quotes from each reading/film.
4. Discuss the expected impact of intercultural experiences and develop your personal growth goals.

Appendix C
Travel Itinerary

Day:	Time:	Activity:
Day 1	6:25PM	Departure from Los Angeles 13 hour flight
Day 2	8-hour layover	Arrival in Istanbul Tour of Istanbul, Sultana Restaurant, belly dancing and exploration on Istiklal St. Mindfulness Meeting #1
Day 3	2:15AM	Departure from Istanbul, 9 hour 30 min flight Arrival at Johannesburg OR Tambo Airport
Day 4	9:00 AM	Mindfulness Meeting #2 Full Day Tour of Johannesburg and Soweto with a guide: Homes of Winnie Madikizela Mandela Nelson Mandela Bishop Tutu in Vilakazi Street-Soweto Hector Pietersen Memorial Apartheid Museum Downtown Johannesburg Lunch in Soweto Vibrant Sandton
Day 5	Morning	7-8 am Mindfulness Meeting #3 8:30 am departure: The Economics of South Africa: Wits Business School
Day 6	Depart hotel 8:00 AM	Wits Business School Research Symposium Day 1 Tour and visit of elite boarding school for girls, Johannesburg
Day 7	Morning	7-8 am Mindfulness Meeting #4 Tour and visit of township public school, Johannesburg Tour and visit of a cooperative, a business ecosystem consisting of a network of organizations
Day 8:	Morning Evening	Wits Business School Research Symposium Day 2 Moyo's Restaurant Traditional Tribal Dancing
Day 9:	8:45 AM	Pilanesberg Game Reserve-game drive by open vehicle with a game ranger Overnight at Tented Camp

Day 10	6:00 AM	<p>Departure on early morning game drive Return to Tented Camp 7-8 am Mindfulness Meeting #5</p> <p>Check out and transfer to Johannesburg OR Tambo International Airport for departure flight</p> <p>Departure from Johannesburg 2 hour 15 min flight</p> <p>Arrival in Cape Town</p>
Day 11	Morning	<p>7-8 am Mindfulness Meeting #6 Tour of Cape Town Table Mountain Robben Island</p>
Day 12	Morning	<p>Business Visits: Khayelitsha Cookies Wesgro Triggerfish Animation Studio Tour</p>
Day 13	Morning	<p>Mindfulness & Group Meeting #7</p> <p>Project Work Time or Leisure Time</p>
Day 14	Morning	<p>Breakfast and check out</p> <p>African Cooking Class</p> <p>Departure from Cape Town 11-hour flight</p>
Day 15	6:00 AM	<p>Arrival in Istanbul, 8 hour layover</p> <p>Mindfulness Meeting #8</p> <p>Departure from Istanbul 14 hour flight</p> <p>Arrival in Los Angeles in LAX</p>
Day 18		<p>MIndfulness Group Meeting #8 Final Reflections</p> <p>Culminating Celebration and Final Presentations</p>

Appendix D

Assignment During Travel

Journal/Multigenre Research Project

This assignment will assist students in reaching personal growth goals and in researching and reflecting on the area of travel. Students will compose their own narratives, use qualitative data collection and gather artifacts during travel to compose a multi genre journal that expands on their research and documents their experience. The following strategies are forms of qualitative data collection; observation, interviewing/questioning, journaling, collecting and analyzing public documents, examining someone's work, observations of social situations, taking and examining photographs and artifacts. Students may use any of these strategies to collect, record and analyze their observations and thoughts in their journal.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Through written descriptions, interview transcripts, cultural artifacts, and photographs/videos (if possible) students will describe and reflect on cultural experiences in South Africa, with peers and local citizens.
2. Students will reflect on the impact of mindfulness practices in a new and unfamiliar environment. Use the following questions to guide your reflections.

Four Mindfulness Journal entries. Each entry will include:

- As I practice mindful breathing, I notice each breath I take, observing each inhale and exhale. This is how I noticed my body feels after a few minutes...
- Today I sit quietly and observe my thoughts as they enter my mind. I don't judge them, I just watch and notice. This is what my observation revealed to me about my thoughts...
- Today I sit outdoors and observe nature and my surrounding environment. This is what I observed when I became fully present with my surroundings.....
- I spent time today being fully present and engaged with the people around me. This is how I felt when I anchored in the present moment awareness without judgment...

Three Cultural Site Visit journal entries:

1. Where was the visit?
2. What are your observations of the importance of the cultural site?
3. How did visiting this cultural site impact you?
4. What will you do with your new understandings?

Two School Visit journal entries:

1. How did your interactions with local students and teachers feel? What surprised you?
2. What did you observe the role of the teacher to be? (you may consider how they interact with children, their teaching approaches, how they interact with parents, and/or how they value children)?
3. What did you observe the role of the student to be? (you may consider how the children interact with each other, or how they interact with the teacher. The teacher's expectations will influence how children interact with one another. You may also observe how discourse, collaboration and reciprocal relationships are encouraged).
4. What will you do with your new understandings?