“How Study Abroad Changed My Life”
Forum on Education Abroad
Thurs., April 3, 2014

Dr. Ann Lutterman-Aguilar
Mexico Site Director & Instructor
Doctoral Research on Perceived Impacts of Experiential Study Abroad Programs in Mexico Up to 30 Years After the Study Abroad Experience
Research Methods

- Involved surveys, focus groups, and in-depth interviews with 329/559 former students who studied in Mexico for at least one semester between 1979 and 2005 (59% response rate for surveys)
- Used SPSS social sciences research software to identify key words & themes
- Several DIFFERENT program themes, but all rooted in the same pedagogy
- Involved surveys, focus groups, & in-depth interviews with 105 Mexican community partners
LIFE-CHANGING

• 1979 student: “It changed my whole life. I still think about it all the time.”

• 1982 student: “Of all the educational experiences I had during high school and college, this was one of a handful that I continue to think about (although it has been more than 25 years), if not daily, then at least weekly.”
LIFE-CHANGING

• 1994 student said:

I mentioned to my mom... that we were going to talk about what impact our experiences had on us, and she said ´Wow, did it have an impact on your life!´ And it was nice to hear that she really recognized it... I know that it changed my life.”
LIFE-CHANGING

• 2000 student said:

My CGE semester was THE life changing event in my lifetime thus far. It absolutely opened my eyes to a new world, new ideas, new culture, new people... I cannot adequately describe in words how special and life-changing that trip was to me!
LIFE-CHANGING

2003 student:

I got the feeling that I became a new person after being in Mexico – so much so that I shaved my head before I came home so that the whole world would know that I was not the same person... I knew that my life would never be the same...
LIFE-CHANGING TRANSFORMATION

Results are consistent with the Fry & Paige et. al 2010 study of students “across a ten-year time span” (1997, 2002, and 2007) in many countries, which found that students

Was Your Life Transformed by Study Abroad?
### Largest Long-Term Impacts the Semester Had on Students’ Lives (Listed in order of Impact)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Understanding</th>
<th>Moderate to Large Impact</th>
<th>Large Impact</th>
<th>Moderate Impact</th>
<th>Little Impact</th>
<th>No Impact</th>
<th>Don’t Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of global issues</td>
<td>98.7%</td>
<td>82.8%</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to responsible global citizenship</td>
<td>96.8%</td>
<td>73.9%</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My understanding of poverty</td>
<td>95.9%</td>
<td>71.9%</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views about economic justice</td>
<td>95.8%</td>
<td>72.5%</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of differences among cultures</td>
<td>94.9%</td>
<td>64.0%</td>
<td>30.9%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of vocation</td>
<td>92.7%</td>
<td>62.4%</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of identity</td>
<td>90.1%</td>
<td>56.2%</td>
<td>33.9%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My understanding of issues related to race and ethnicity</td>
<td>87.6%</td>
<td>44.1%</td>
<td>43.5%</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views about gender</td>
<td>68.4%</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
<td>42.0%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality or faith</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs about God or the divine</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>31.5%</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What Impact Does Study Abroad Have on Personal Development?

THIS GROUP?
Notion that Study Abroad Leads to Personal Development

• Consistent with the International Education of Students (IES) 2002 Study with 3,700 Respondents

• 98% reported that their education abroad “enabled me to learn something about myself.”

Dwyer, 2004, 16.
Research Findings
Personal Development: Independence

Other Studies:
• Fry & Paige et al. (2010): reported increased “feelings of efficacy & independence”
• Shames & Alden (2005): reported increased independence

My Study
• Community over Independence:
• 2004 student said:

  Living with my host family was an intense and incredible experience. It challenged my relationship to independence and my concepts of community, family and religion.
Research Findings
Personal Development: Self-Confidence

Other Studies
• Fry & Paige et al. (2010): reported increased life enhancement skills such as developing greater confidence”
• IES (2002): 96% of students reported increased self-confidence

My Study:
• No specific question
• Emerged as key theme among Mexican participants but not former students from U.S.
• Instead, SELF-AWARENESS
Research Findings
Personal Development:
Critical Thinking Skills

Other Study Abroad
Research Findings:
• 2009 Braskamp et al. study: changes in cognitive domain were in “knowledge” rather than “the development of ” CRITICAL THINKING.

My Research: UNLIKE other studies:
• Students reported developing CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS and “informed understanding”
My Research Findings
Personal Development: Critical Thinking Skills

1980: “Since my experience in Mexico,... I never hear the news, politicians, preachers, etc. the same. I listen with a critical ear and wonder things such as (1) who is benefiting from this? (2) who is losing in this? (3) and who is not even being mentioned?”

1988: “I now am much more ready to question what I read and hear and I'm usually paying attention to whose voice is being heard.”
What Impact Does Study Abroad Have on Academic Engagement?

THIS

GROUP

?
Research Findings on Academic Engagement

Other Studies
• Hadis’ 2005 study indicated that “one of the most noticeable changes in these students is a higher than average curiosity and interest in academic matters.”

• Study abroad sometimes results in lower grades afterwards, which may reflect a “shift of priorities.”

My Study:
• 48.7% stated that study abroad had a moderate to large impact on “decisions regarding [their] major(s) &/or minor(s) in college.”

• 54% said that it had a moderate to large impact on “decisions regarding graduate or professional school.”
What Impact Does Study Abroad Have on Career Paths?

THIS GROUP?
Research Findings on Career Paths

Other Studies:
• 2010 Fry and Paige et al. Study concluded that there were greater impacts on worldviews than actual behavior.

• 2002 IES study indicated that only 12% indicated that study abroad “caused career changes,” but 76% said that they “acquired skill sets that influenced career paths,” & 62% said it “ignited an interest in a career direction.”

My Study:
• 40.8% reported a large impact on “career choice &/or paid work.”

• 30.2% reported a moderate impact on “career choice &/or paid work.”

• 48.9% reported a large impact on “the way that I carry out my current work.”
What Impact Does Study Abroad Have on the Development of Cross Cultural Awareness &/or Global Perspectives?

THIS GROUP?
Positive Research Findings on Cross-Cultural Awareness or Global Perspectives

LOTS OF STUDIES:

• 2009 Bender et al. Study concluded that students who studied abroad developed more global minded-ness than the control group who stayed at home.

• 2002 IES study said 94% said that study abroad “continues influencing [their] interactions with people from different cultures.”

My Study:

• 82.8% reported a large impact on their “understanding of global issues.”

• 64% reported a large impact on their “understanding of differences among cultures.”
Lack of or Negative Development of Global Perspective

Other Study Abroad Research Findings:
• Rexisen reported in 2008 Medina-Lopez Portillo’s study showed: “little evidence for improvement” in intercultural sensitivity
• 2003 Kristensen research findings: “prejudices or pre-prejudices young people had about each other were strengthened in negative ways.”

My Research - UNLIKE Others, Students:
• Deepened understanding of complexities of global issues – intersectionality of nationality, race, ethnicity, class, gender, & religion, etc.
• Articulated awareness of ethical issues
UNLIKE OTHER STUDIES:

1. Articulated more profound understandings of SELF within the GLOBAL CONTEXT – issues of nationality, race, class, & gender, as well as power, privilege & responsibility

2. Articulated more complexity re. intercultural competencies (complexities of cultures within different nations)

3. Overcame prejudices and articulated complex understandings of racism, classism, etc.
What Impact Does Study Abroad Have on the Development of Responsible Global Citizenship?

THIS GROUP?
Research Findings
Global Citizenship

Other Studies:
• 2010 Fry & Paige et al. study: education abroad expanded “participants’ world views and sense of the possible”
• 2011 Lehman et al.: increased sense of interconnectedness

My Study:
• 73.9% reported a large impact on their “commitment to responsible global citizenship”
What distinguishes this study from some of the others is the inclusion of specific categories of global awareness.

- Nearly 96% reported moderate to large impacts on their understanding of poverty
- 95.8% reported moderate to large impacts on their views of economic justice,
- 87.6% on their issues related to race and ethnicity.
CROSS-CULTURAL EDUCATION:
CROSSING BORDERS & CHALLENGING BOUNDARIES
Study abroad – at its best – is not only about crossing NATIONAL BORDERS, but also about challenging socially constructed barriers and boundaries of:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Sexuality</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Aspects of Program that Made the Largest Impact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Moderate to Large Impact</th>
<th>Large Impact</th>
<th>Moderate Impact</th>
<th>Little Impact</th>
<th>No Impact</th>
<th>Don’t Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guest speakers who shared their stories with our group</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>68.7%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic courses</td>
<td>89.3%</td>
<td>49.3%</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty and staff</td>
<td>90.7%</td>
<td>47.2%</td>
<td>43.5%</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience living with a host family</td>
<td>85.3%</td>
<td>46.3%</td>
<td>39.0%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The group experience with other students</td>
<td>81.4%</td>
<td>42.7%</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Experiential Pedagogies

The vast majority of participants identified CGE’s EXPERIENTIAL PEDAGOGY as the primary factor leading to life-long impacts.
Create Opportunities for Profound Intercultural Encounters with Diverse “Others”

A student from 1988 said:

“What was unique... was the intentionality and care of setting up situations where students were able to productively interact with people from a wide array of backgrounds (e.g. peasant farmers, labor leaders, chamber of commerce or business leaders, politicians from numerous parties, people living in dire economic circumstances, etc.)”
A student from 1994 said:

“The notion that those who have the least to give, seem to give the most, was demonstrated by my host family. Just the day before I arrived, they finally got a permanent roof instead of the strips of corrugated tin that sheltered them before. Their poverty did not show as they embraced daily life and shared whatever they had with anyone who needed it.”
Common Fire: Leading Lives of Commitment in a Complex World
by Laurent Parks, Cheryl Keen, James Keen, and Sharon Daloz Parks

• Conducted 100 in-depth interviews with people who had sustained commitments to working for the common good for at least seven years.
• The lives selected “generally reflect society at large in terms of gender, ethnicity, and social class.”
• The purpose was to “achieve a richer understanding of how lives of commitment to the common good are formed and sustained.”

The authors found “constructive engagements with otherness to be the single most critical element undergirding commitment to the common good in the lives of those who studied.”
Common Fire Study

• 72% of participants “had had significant travel experiences by the end of their young adulthood.”

• Although not all of the travel was international, “these experiences were particularly significant for the formation of commitment to the common good when they opened up a sense of trustworthy belonging to a wider world and included constructive encounters with others different from oneself and one’s own people.”
Findings Also Consistent with Paige & Fry et al’s 2010 Study

Concluded that “interacting with host nationals was considered the most valuable and impactful aspect of the study abroad experience.”

Fry et al, 61.
Notion that Study Abroad Leads to Deepened Global Perspectives

• Consistent with the International Education of Students (IES) 2002 Study with 3,700 Respondents

• 95% reported that their education abroad “continues to influence my perspective on how I view the world.”

Orlando concluded that the reason that faculty & staff in his study experienced profound transformation & a sense of urgency to advocate change resulted from “intimate and humanizing encounters with the poor” that enable them to share their “core humanity,” by which he means “encounters that show this person... is not only someone who is ‘poor,’ but rather as someone who is a dynamic human being with talents and gifts and abilities and strengths, in addition to the limitations that we all share.”

Orlando 2007, 127.
My Study: Students Reported that the Experiential Design Helped Them Put Human Faces on Social Issues, thereby Disrupting the Status Quo by Making Issues Real & Urgent

A student from 2000 said:

“I will never see the world in the same way again. I will carry with me the experiences & faces of those we met.”
Living with Host Families Made Social Issues Personal

“Life with my host family gave me a personal and emotional understanding of the issues we were learning about in class.”
“Living with a host family… personalized and made real the issues we were studying. It helped us understand why it mattered so much if there was a slight change in tortilla or public transportation prices. It helped us understand why the pressure is so great to risk emigrating to "el norte" (the north).”
A student from 1996, who went on to become an immigration lawyer, said:

*After having been exposed to some of the great injustices of our world, I don't know how I could live a life that didn't try to address them... That is especially true because of my relationship with Daniel and Margarita. After being welcomed into their family the way I was, how could I not care what happened to them? ...When I looked at my clients, oftentimes I would see Roge or Goyo or Daniel. All of the immigrants I meet here have left people behind, have left lives behind. And having lived in Mexico with a family I cared deeply for, I feel that I bring a deeper understanding to the work I do here.*
Incorporate Story-Telling into the Educational Design

A student from 1993, who is now an international women’s rights activist, stated:

“The experiences I had in this program brought to life justice issues in a way that I could never forget because I have so many people’s faces and voices etched in my memory… My current beliefs and actions have been informed by the lessons learned from the testimonies of people met on my CGE semester."
Foment a Sense of Interconnectedness across Lines of Difference

A student from 1988 said:

*Visiting the Mothers of the Disappeared COMADRES from El Salvador was probably the most important influence on my later life. That guides all that is good in my life. They commissioned us to come back to the States and change our country because we could go to work in their country, but if we didn't change ours, nothing would improve in theirs.... I also remember visiting the US Air-force base in Honduras the day the B2 bomber was unveiled. "That plane costs more than my whole country makes in a year," said our taxi driver after we clarified that it was billions, not millions of dollars.*
Engage Opposing Perspectives

A student from 1989 stated:

“The coordinators of the program did an excellent job of having us meet with various groups and individuals... who represented all sides of the arguments we were contemplating... This was also a spiritual practice to have people of all different opinions involved in the discussions."
Foster Learning Communities that Engage Learners in Ongoing Social Analysis

A student from 1997 said:

“The diversity of students on the program, and the conversations we had challenging each other to grow as people and broaden our self-awareness, was one of the single most profound experiences I have ever had in my life. “
DESIGN EXPERIENCES THAT NURTURE HOPE & TRANSFORMED IMAGINATIONS: CHANGE IS POSSIBLE
A student from 2003 said:

“I will never forget meeting Maria,... who experienced countless horrors during the civil war, including the rape of her daughter. However, she managed to exhibit faith in G-d and hope for our future. It is amazing how the stories of those who have survived horrific life events can serve as inspirations for hope for our future.”
A student from 1993 stated:

“In Mexico and Central America I found new role models in the activists we met.”
Hope is an essential ingredient in personal and social transformation because, as James Cone says, “Without hope, you die, and there are a lot of dead people walking around.”
Study Abroad Helps Students Envision a New World and their Roles Within It

“If we don’t think differently, everything will stay the same.”

Mural on the wall of a Mexican community center near the U.S.-Mexico border
How Can We Help Our Students Have Positive Life-Changing Experiences?

By creating WELL-DESIGNED cross-cultural educational experiences for them that include all of these high-impact educational practices.
SI NO PENSAMOS DIFERENTE... TODO SERÁ IGUAL.