

Short-Term Travel Abroad to Uganda & Guatemala: A Preliminary Assessment of Student Transformative Learning

JOHN WOOD

University of Central Oklahoma

JARRETT JOBE

University of Central Oklahoma

Abstract

We take a cumulative case studies' approach to explore transformative learning in the areas of service learning, global competencies, and leadership through travel abroad course trips to Uganda (May 2016, 2017) and Guatemala (March 2017). These courses took students on service-learning trips to educate and develop their knowledge and experiences related to the Central Six learning tenets at the University of Central Oklahoma. Student's primary emphasis for these experiences was the completion of a service focused project in partnership with a local organization. In addition to these projects, students engaged in cultural learning activities and programs focused on local customs and experiences. In Uganda, students partnered with St. Monica's Tailoring School/Sewing Hope Foundation to support their educational and civic efforts in the communities of Gulu and Atiak. In Guatemala, students partnered with Habitat with Humanity's Global Village program. In both tours with different students, we assessed whether students have exhibited indications of expanded perspectives by conducting a post experience, transformative learning assessment tool and by looking for evidence in student journaling using our Student Transformative Learning Record (STLR) rubric. We compared the trips to better assess their transformative potential for students. The research is valuable as little to no work has examined pairing transformative learning and short-term student travel abroad. We do find indications of transformation in students on both trips, especially through global and intercultural awareness.

Keywords: travel abroad, transformative learning, service learning, Student Transformative Learning Record (STLR)

Introduction

In 2017, the Institute of International Education (IIE) reported 325,339 American students studied abroad during the 2015/2016 academic year. They also report that study abroad participants have more than tripled during the past two decades, but growth has been slowing over the past 5 years (Institute of International Education, 2020). During this time, colleges and universities have expanded global destinations and academic programs, increasing opportunities for students which include learning outcomes focused on global/cultural competencies, service learning, and leadership. Students often return from these experiences with new perspectives and an understanding of a diverse world, a deeper appreciation of varied cultural practices and beliefs, and an expanded knowledge of their place in their own communities. NAFSA (National Association of Foreign Student Advisors): Association of International Educators finds that study abroad and its impacts on students are significant in the following learning outcomes: improved grades, retention, graduation rates, language learning, international understanding, enlightened nationalism, and employability (Johnson & Spalding, 1997). Johnston and Spalding (1997) and Thies (2005) recommend incorporation of student travel abroad into curricula due to the benefits provided to participants. These findings are valuable as higher education continues to commit

significant resources to these opportunities, providing students with transformative learning experiences which prepare them for a global work environment.

Yet these results have focused primarily on long term (6 months or more) international experiences and there is a growing number of higher education experiences which are one month or shorter. Short-term programs have been developed to solve three primary challenges related to international education. The first is the cost of semester or yearlong programs. Many students have neither the ability to save the amount of money necessary nor the option to take on additional student loans for these longer programs. Many academic programs have rigorous course requirements, which would extend student's academic programs into a 5th or 6th year of study if a student was to leave for a semester or year and miss core academic courses required for graduation. The final challenge is separation anxiety from peers and family. Students are cautious about missing key events at home or on campus and also experience trepidation related to their ability to navigate months away from home.

As these programs have developed, attention to the unique assessment challenges is needed to determine evidence of student learning, growth and transformative experiences. The University of Central Oklahoma's (UCO's) Student Transformative Learning Record (STLR) and assessment rubrics provide solutions to these challenges and have supported the development of consistent and intentional learning outcomes (King, Kilbourne, & Harrison, 2015). The STLR framework, based on the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) VALUE rubrics and developed by 20 faculty on UCO's campus, provide the foundation to develop specific learning outcomes which can be integrated into short-term international study courses. These rubrics help to provide three key components of assessment:

1. "Consistent set of values to guide assessment. Terminology and language that is shared across multiple disciplines in higher education.
2. Tiered system to measure a student's progress after the experience. The not achieved, exposure, integration, and transformation levels fit well into assessing a student's growth.
3. Learning outcomes that guide course development and material" (Jobe, 2017).

Through this process we have arrived at two research questions. Can short-term study abroad programs produce transformative learning outcomes in participating students? How do we assess these outcomes to provide a deeper understanding of transformation? Examining these questions can help to provide consistency of assessment and broader application of transformative learning outcomes to short-term international experiences.

Literature review

Transformative learning

The foundations of transformative learning in higher education are most often associated with Jack Mezirow. Mezirow's (1975) early work developed an articulation of what transformation represented for adult students. Transformation is a change in perspective, a change in the way an individual views herself and her relationships. Transformative learning has also been described as "a comprehensive and complex description of how learners construe, validate, and reformulate the meaning of their experience" (Cranton, 1994: 22) Mezirow's ordered phases of transformation created a blueprint for recognizing and understanding the transformative learning process (Mezirow and Associates, 2000). These phases are listed below:

- "A disorienting dilemma
- A self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
- A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions
- Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change
- Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions

- Planning a course of action
- Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plan
- Provision trying of new roles
- Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
- A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's perspective."

Mezirow describes this constructionist perspective as one that focuses on rationality, ideal discourse conditions, and critical reflection. He finds it is a way of learning that constructs and appropriates new ways of thinking of one's own experience with greater personal independence and autonomy as the goal. Through transformation, thought changes into "a more inclusive, differentiated, permeable, and integrated perspective" (Mezirow and Associates, 2000: 18). Furthermore, he describes this transformation as a "transition from being a passive learning who accepts the definition provided by others to become active learners able to define meanings and gain new perspectives on their own."

Cranton *et al.* (2014) describes three types transformative learning: 1) Cognitive/Rational, Extrarational, and Social Critique. This study will focus on the first – Cognitive/Rational. He finds this way of transformative learning constructs and appropriates new ways of thinking of one's own experience with greater personal independence and autonomy as the goal. He later describes this process as "learning to think like an adult," or perspective transformation.

At the University of Central Oklahoma (UCO), transformative learning has been adopted and defined as a process that "develops beyond-disciplinary skills and expands students' perspectives of their relationships with self, others, community and environment," according to the website. The university engaged six core tenets, called the "Central Six": Discipline Knowledge; Global and Cultural Competencies; Health and Wellness; Leadership; Research, Creative and Scholarly Activities; and Service Learning and Civic Engagement. These six tenets serve as the foundation for academic and co-curricular learning for each student. Through a continuous process of assessment in courses, programs, and experiences, students can indicate growth in each tenet and communicate this progress through their STLR Snapshot and/or eportfolio.

Travel Abroad

Higher education study abroad programs in the United States initially developed between the two World Wars and now offer considerable options for students. While there has been a steady increase in students participating in these programs, globalization has made these experiences a priority for American students, higher education, and their future employers. The University of California-Merced compiled an overarching list of powerful statistics of study abroad participants. Noteworthy data points include a significantly higher likelihood of employment within 12 months after graduation (97% compared to 48% of non-participants) and 59% of employers reporting valuing the skills associated with international experiences (MERCED).

Research related to these experiences and student learning outcomes has also increased. Ingraham and Peterson provide one of the first comprehensive looks at student outcomes and their study abroad experiences. They find significant, positive impacts on a student's academic performance, personal growth, and intercultural awareness as a result of participating in a study abroad program (Ingraham & Peterson, 2004). Numerous studies have confirmed these results in the same areas of focus related to both long-term and short-term experiences. Chieffo and Griffiths (2004) look at short-term study abroad experiences and find students who participated in a short-term experience reported they were more confident in their intercultural awareness and knowledge versus non-participants. They conclude short-term experiences are worthwhile endeavors, focused primarily on one-month programs.

Harrigan and Vincenti (2004) provide evidence that higher order thinking can be facilitated not just by traveling to another country, but by cross cultural assignments implemented into the curriculum. Cannon and Heider (2012) adopted a critical approach, creating a "model of social justice action" to facilitate development in students through a travel abroad trip in Tanzania.

Transformative Learning and Study Abroad

Minimal research has been completed focusing on short-term study abroad experiences and transformative learning, particularly in the areas of service learning, global competencies, and leadership development. The most persistent gap is related to substantive critical reflection (which can be anecdotal and personal nature) and combining larger sample studies which provide a foundational understanding of the overarching learning outcomes of participants in these experiences.

Rennick (2005: 73) presents a theoretical paper on transformative learning and travel abroad, emphasizing Dewey, Freire, and Mezirow, creating a context for transformative experience which is “action oriented, collaborative, real world problem-solving education.” Kiely’s case study of service learning in Nicaragua provides some evidence of successful learning in these experiences and transformative learning. In his study, he found five areas where students experienced transformative learning: 1) Contextual border crossing, dissonance, personalizing, processing and connection. Rowan-Kenyon and Niehaus (2011) look at short-term experiences and how students integrated learning the year post participation. Using a case study approach and transformative learning as their framework, they determined that a short-term experience can create a point of entry for students’ learning, but additional experiences are needed for transformation and long-term learning. Short-term experiences can open the door to additional opportunities.

Methods

We take the cumulative case studies approach where information is aggregated from multiple places at different times (Yin, 2014). Case studies are often of a nonrandom sample for the purpose of observing a particular environment, group or phenomenon in a particular time or place. Case studies can be supported by both qualitative and quantitative data. This set of case studies focuses on three student study abroad trips: Two to Uganda in the summers of 2016 and 2017 and one to Guatemala in March 2017.

We used the student learning outcomes backing three of UCO’s Central Six learning tenets as a lens through which to view students’ transformative growth in all three travel-abroad experiences. The three tenets were global and cultural competences; leadership; and service learning and civic engagement. We employed a mixed methods approach by collecting evidence of transformative learning from journal reflection and surveys. Students met once a week over the course of six weeks before departure and once to debrief after returning from the experience. Class meetings covered student expectations, historical analysis of each destination, research on the service focused project or topic (e.g., affordable housing), and basic logistical topics. The student reflection piece was required for submission 2 weeks after return from the trip and consisted of a 12- to 15-page journal inspired paper. The post-survey assessment was provided during immediate return from the trip.

We assess transformative growth using UCO’s STLR rubrics, as described in the literature review, tied to each of the aforementioned Central Six tenets. However, reflection by itself can be problematic. Students do not come from the same place. Instead they individually bring a variety of experiences, beliefs, and intentions to the trip. Also, reflections may be convoluted as students often talk among themselves about the “right” answer they suppose will get them a grade they need (Cranton, 2006). Likewise, transformative learning can be a longer-term process and improbable in a single course, event, assignment, or even a trip (Wolcott & Lynch, 2001). Observation of student behavior can also be included as evidence, particularly when assessing a student’s capacity related to leadership. This process of observation and reflection of each student allows us to make appropriate assessments of their experience, which supports the designation of not achieved, exposure, integration, or transformation, as described in UCO’s tiered transformative learning system.

To further develop our approach and analysis we include Stuckey, Taylor, and Cranton’s (2013) Transformative Learning Outcomes and Processes survey. We created demographic questions and added them to Stuckey, Taylor and Cranton’s 95 survey questions. This survey combines questions from the aforementioned perspectives which dominate the field: 1) Cognitive/Rational 2) Extrarational and 3)

Social Critique. The cognitive/rational perspective is our focus here. Responses for the anonymous survey data for each question are the following: “Mostly disagree,” “Slightly disagree,” “Slightly Agree,” and “Mostly Agree.” We analyzed this survey by counting frequencies.

Combining the survey data with the student reflections creates a dynamic assessment of these experiences which helps to mitigate bias across qualitative judgment and provides deeper meaning to results and findings.

Findings

Student Reflections and UCO’s STLR Assessment

Focusing on the cognitive/rational transformation perspective from Mezirow, assessment of student’s reflections and actions provided significant findings for inclusion. Our primary focus is aligning their thoughts and experiences with UCO’s STLR assessment rubrics. UCO’s definitions for each tenet and their levels are included below, with examples from student reflections for each tenet in the exposure, integration, and transformation levels. Global and Cultural Competencies as found on UCO’s Transformative Learning webpage:

1. Exposure – The student displays an openness to learning about global and cultural differences and/or took part in an activity where she/he was exposed to worldviews of other cultures.
2. Integration – The student’s perspective has expanded to value different cultural worldviews and she/he is able to articulate a sense of identity in a global context.
3. Transformation – The experience led to the student’s new identity as a global citizen, and she/he now seeks interactions and growth from diverse communities and cultures.

Below are examples of Global and Cultural Competency quotes from student journals. The first is an example of integration and the second is transformation.

Student Journal Reflection – Integration – “Throughout my time in Guatemala, I was humbled, amazed, and a little bit worn out, but mostly I was inspired by not only the people I met in the local community, but also by the students and faculty who were a part of our travel group. In the span of eight days, my life was completely changed.” (Senior, Female)

The student articulates a shift in her identity (life) related to her experience in an international environment and interacting with a community yet does not describe how this has transformed behavior/beliefs.

Student Journal Reflection – Transformation – “I have gained an incredible amount of knowledge from every single one of these experiences. I truly don’t know what I would be like today if I had not stepped out of my comfort zone that first time and gone to South Africa. It is crazy to think how my ideology about what is important in life has changed so drastically from just immersing myself in a different culture for seven days.” (Junior, Male)

The student describes a shift in ideology, particularly in his value system, through participation in this and other programs. Describes the culture as a mitigating condition. This shift is also accompanied by changes in actions and behaviors and was observed through his interaction with the community, project, and peers. Service Learning and Civic Engagement as found on UCO’s Transformative Learning webpage:

1. Exposure – The student took part in, or heard results of, a service or civic activity and/or is able to voice her/his perspective on the importance of these activities to her/himself and society.

2. Integration – The student’s experience led to new insights related to civic identity and to possible solutions to addressing social issues. She/he now desire to serve be more involved in a diverse community, and/or improve confidence in self as a change agent.
3. Transformation – The experience has prompted a major shift in the student’s attitude; and she/he now views service and civic action as a rewarding use of time for personal growth and/or to contribute to addressing community challenges by initiating action with a diverse team.

Below are examples of Service Learning and Civic Engagement quotes from student journals. The first is an example of integration and the second is transformation.

Student Journal Reflection – Integration – “The sense of community was astounding. The families interacted with each other and the workers as if they had known each other for many years. Seeing how big a transformation of a \$285.00 healthy home kit could make for a family, or a simple water filter bucket was sobering.” (Junior, Female)

The student describes an understanding of the civic identity of the community she engaged in during her experience. She includes a description of solutions provided during this experience and how this impacted her perception.

Student Journal Reflection – Transformation – “Feeling the need to take initiative and leave something better than when we found it, we decided to merge our dream and logical minds in order to transform the overlooked playground space.” (Senior, Female)

The student communicates an understanding of assessing a need in the local community, developing a plan to actualize this through an integration of ideas, and taking action to accomplish this goal. Observable behavior was paramount for assessing transformation. Taking initiative without encouragement from trip leaders reflected the student’s ability to connect community needs to their abilities and accomplish an additional project that could only be determined and completed after engaging in the environment. Leadership as found on UCO’s Transformative Learning webpage:

1. Exposure – The student is open to improving her/his views of leadership and/or participates in activities where she/he observes others using their influence to empower others/teams or advance a cause or causes.
2. Integration – The experience has led the student to recognize her/his leadership qualities; and/or desire to use her/his influence to empower others/teams and/or advance a cause or causes.
3. Transformation – The student has developed her/his identity as a leader due to the experience, and actively seeks to empower others/teams and/or advance a cause or causes.

Below are examples of Leadership quotes from student journals. The first is an example of integration and the second is transformation.

Student Journal Reflection – Integration – “On the plane ride back, I looked out the window over the Gulf of Mexico. I couldn’t tell where the sea ended and the sky began. The world is so big and there are so many people in it – many of those people need help. Not many care about them and less are looking after them. I wondered to myself if it was all a lost cause. After all the good is done, does it make a difference? Will it end up changing the world? I could not answer this question for a long time, but then I realized I did not have to – what I know is there are people who need help and I want to be there to help them. It does not matter if I change the world – what matters is one person who needs help and is asking for it. All I want to care about is if I can just

help one more person, their world will be changed. That is what will make it all worth it.”
(Sophomore, Male)

The student expresses a clear identity and role for themselves in a global context. He includes a description of how he plans to advance his efforts in serving a broader community through one interaction at a time.

Student Journal Reflection - Transformation – “The trip to St. Monica’s was a life-changing experience that has helped me to appreciate the things I have more, complain less, and invest in those around me to the best of my ability. These are not one-time lessons; I’m going to have to work on each of them every day. But without the trip to Gulu, Uganda, I might never have begun that journey and for that I am very thankful.” (Junior, Female)

The student articulates a recognition they can support individuals through their investment in a community. She also recognizes a process of development necessary for her to empower and advance others. A behavioral shift is communicated that the student recognizes has been part of this experience.

We find applying these rubrics and descriptions to students’ reflections and observation provides robust results from the study tour course experiences. The percentages reflected in Table 1 report the percentage of students who earned this ranking in our final assessments.

Table 1

STLR Assessment –Transformation, Integration and Exposure

	Transformation	Integration	Exposure
Global and Cultural Competencies	30.7 %	57.8%	11.5%
Leadership	23.1%	57.7%	19.2%
Service Learning and Civic Engagement	34.6 %	57.7%	7.7%

An important addition to this analysis is the description of a disorienting dilemma for participants. Mezirow (1991) argues this is the first stage of transformative learning. For Wasserman and Gallegos (2009), authentic dialogue is the key to this sort of transformation (Wasserman & Gallegos, 2009). These disorienting dilemmas arouse emotion in people, generating a need to reflect deeply even to the point of questioning their very sense of self (Taylor, 2000). With this questioning comes grief, but also enlightenment which might lead to new ways of thinking (Scott, 1997).

We find 77% of student participants experienced a disorienting dilemma during their experience, creating opportunities for them to reframe their own perspectives and life experiences. Included are examples of three reflections from students describing these disorienting dilemmas:

When we returned to St. Monica’s, we planned to attend a cultural dance competition in town. Our entire group went. We walked up on the event to a huge crowd of people. I was intimidated. We made our way to the back of the crowd. Immediately, the show transitioned from the dancing to us. I have never in my life been stared at in such a manner. Every eye was on us. I figured it would end after a while, but it certainly did not. The people stared at us up until the minute we left. As uncomfortable I was, I am grateful for this experience because it showed me what being the minority of a group felt like. I can now empathize with anyone who has ever stood out because of their skin color. I can relate to the aggression some minority groups feel. I can see how alienating it feels to be the odd one out. I remember wanting someone to come up and talk or

smile at us. Now, I hope to be the person who smiles and greets those who feel out of place.
(Junior, Female)

This student reveals a shifting in self by noting that after being in a place as a minority, the shoe is on the other foot, and she can now “empathize with anyone who has ever stood out because of their skin color.”

I’m ashamed to admit it but I can’t possibly deny that I’ve been whining to God about already wanting to go home. The motion sickness and sleep deprivation has me drained and I don’t see a way over this hill. How shallow am I for feeling that way? The second thing I prayed was for God to sustain me through this trip. I hope God hears my prayer and honors my honesty. I don’t want to be the selfish and whiney person that I feel like I’m being right now, but that’s where I’m currently at. (Junior, Female)

This student is becoming aware of her “whining” about the need to go home and is having difficulty experiencing the “shallowness” of these emotions.

It was almost unreal to me to see these wild creatures in the environment that they had inhabited for thousands of years. It was a once in a lifetime opportunity and I couldn’t have asked for a better experience! But at the same time there was a strange feeling that accompanied the experience. I felt a bit of guilt that I was experiencing these amazing things in such extravagant comfort while the people that I had seen in countless small villages throughout our drives through the African countryside had next to nothing. I still would not trade the experience and I am so thankful that I received it, but I came to the realization that the fulfillment I had been looking for may not even lie fully in seeing great beauty and unbelievable sights in different parts of the world. I decided then that I couldn’t live life as a tourist and be entirely content. (Senior, Male)

This student is becoming aware though guilt that he is experiencing a comfort level not experienced by those he has seen on the countryside of Uganda.

Survey Data

Stuckey, Taylor, and Cranton’s survey includes 95 topic questions for review. Each student participant completed the survey post-experience within 24 hours of completion of the program. When examining the survey data we focused on questions which reported a 75% or greater response rate for “Mostly agree.” We have aligned the survey results with STLR competencies to determine the tenets where development is occurring.

Table 2

Mostly Agree Survey Results – 75th percentile

Statement	Mostly Agree %	Competency
I have greater empathy for others’ positions than I used to have.	88.5	Cultural
I become aware that some people have more advantages in life and others have few.	88.5	Cultural
I feel a strong need to be active in giving back to my community.	88.5	Service/Civic
I realize that I am a different person now than I used to be.	88.5	Cultural

Table 2 Continued

I am aware that my beliefs are both the same as and different from others' beliefs	80.8	Cultural
I look for opportunities to act to make the world a better place.	80.8	Service/Civic
My feelings show when I talk about my values.	76.9	Service/Civic
When I have a new understanding of something, I act on it.	76.9	Service/Civic
My learning is not complete without action.	76.9	Service/Civic
Reflection about others who have less privilege leads me to question my lifestyle.	76.9	Cultural
Self-reflection leads me to revise some of the assumptions I used to hold.	76.9	Cultural

Rowan-Kenyon and Niehaus would find that at least six of the eleven statements reveal intercultural competence: first, second, fourth, fifth, tenth, and eleventh in Table 2. Likewise, Chieffo and Griffiths would label these statements as intercultural awareness. UCO's STLR rubric would likewise find these six statements are related to the Global & Cultural Competencies value of the "Central Six." Four of the eleven statements reflect the "Central Six" value of Service Learning and Civic Engagement, specifically the third statement and sixth through nine.

Combining the student reflections with the survey data provides substantive evidence of transformative learning in UCO STLR categories, particularly global/cultural competencies and service learning/civic engagement. In these tenets, there is clear articulation individually through journal reflections. The STLR tenet rubrics offer a consistent and thorough approach to assessing their reflections and provide instructors baseline definitions to use across multiple experiences and programs. The included student reflections are indicative of individual development in the targeted tenets and themes according to these rubrics.

The survey data conveys our aggregate data of participants, reporting the frequency of student learning outcomes across the various themes of cultural competency and service learning. With multiple themes reporting over 75% of responses in the "mostly agree" category, students report they believe these experiences have increased their capacities and development in these areas.

We also find it necessary to inspect student's perception in areas where survey data reports a significantly lower agreement with the provided statements. These responses are included in Table 3.

Table 3

Mostly Agree Survey Results – Least Agree

Rank	Statement	Mostly agree %	Competency
79	A traumatic event leads me to question my values	21.9	Identity
81	I seriously question my beliefs and actions	21.9	Identity
82	I use poetry or fiction to help me understand myself and my experiences	21.9	Cultural
83	To address injustice, I confront those in authority	18.8	Service/Civic

Table 3 Continued

84	I participate in social movements	18.8	Service/Civic
85	I question my beliefs and how they are shaped by those in power	15.6	Identity
86	I move away from the beliefs of my family and culture that are related to gender, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation	15.6	Cultural
87	When I am making a change, I can see in my imagination how things should be	15.6	Identity
88	I realize I am a different person now than I used to be	12.5	Identity
89	Creating art during a life-changing experience that helps me to understand myself	12.5	Identity
90	Dreams give me insight into my soul	12.5	Identity

In examining the other end of the spectrum where students seemed to disagree most with the Stuckey, Taylor and Cranton's questions, it seems they reveal more dramatic changes of identity did not take place. While students who participated in travel abroad in one of the three aforementioned trips did exhibit greater intercultural competence and greater efficacy in service learning and civic engagement, they were less likely to say they found a profound shift in their identity. As evidenced by Table 3, students were not likely to participate in events such as social movements, address social injustice through confronting authority, questioning power holders, or even do more poetry for fiction now due to the experience. They were also not likely to question who they were in terms of their beliefs, values, insight, or understanding themselves. These observations provide important understanding of how we look at the student transformative process in these experiences. Students reported they agree they have been changed in areas of perspective, individual autonomy, empathy, when to act, and challenges communities experience. Yet these experiences have not consistently shifted their thoughts concerning higher authority and core beliefs related to family and social experiences. This provides illumination on potential limitations on transformative learning on short-term international experiences.

Conclusion

Short-term travel abroad experience reveal opportunities for transformational learning as three quarters of students in our study experienced a disorienting dilemma; followed by critical reflections assigned to all of them (both through journaling and completion of the surveys). These open them up to further intercultural competence and confidence in service learning and civic engagement as found in our survey. However, we do not find any profound change in the self-reported identity of students. This research does, however, give some gauging of the transformative learning experience because while disorienting dilemmas, reflection, dialogue, and action are important, time and multiple experiences might be just as important. This finding may give more credence to the idea of a more gradual and cumulative rather than epochal transformative learning as the realistic goal for short-term travel abroad.

There is minimal research on short-term international experiences and the impact they maintain on student learning and transformational learning. As these programs continue to grow in number and scope, to include service learning, gaining a broad understanding of potential and expected outcomes is vital to develop sustainable and impactful experiences.

The international service experiences highlighted in this research have provided students with transformative learning experiences in developing global/cultural competencies, their leadership skills, and in understanding their capacities related to service learning and civic engagement.

Through using well defined STLR rubrics in desired learning outcomes, it is our belief this research can continue to be measured across a diverse set of experiences and environments. With the limited work on short-term international programs, expanding this work is vital to our understanding of expectations related to these programs, and ensures we can continue to communicate the value of these programs for higher education institutions, and prepare students in meaningful ways for their futures.

Future Research

Since we covered only three short-term travel abroad trips to two different locations, research on more trips might be worthwhile to continue to build a broader understanding of the consistency of student experiences across multiple destinations and course expectations. With the continued emphasis on expanding global engagement in higher education, further examination is necessary to effectively assess student learning and value of this work. While we found that transformational change was more gradual rather than on an epochal scale, more study on disorienting dilemmas and reflection in cross-cultural frameworks could help make clear the links between short-term study abroad and transformative learning.

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Author's Note: John Wood, PhD, is an associate professor of public administration in the MPA program at the University of Central Oklahoma. Jarrett Jobe is an adjunct professor at the University of Central Oklahoma, where he also currently serves as Executive Director of Student Leadership Programs.

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