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Study Abroad in Guatemala: Self-Assessment, Cultural Empathy, and Global Citizenship

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Key words: fair trade, study abroad, globalization, sustainable product, culture

Introduction and Background. According to the Institute of International Education (2014) “a record number of global students, 886,052, studied at U.S. institutions in 2013-14 (up 8.1 percent over the previous year) and 289,408 American students studied abroad in 2012-13 (an increase of 2.1 percent over the previous year)” (Wandschneider et al., 2015, p. 150). According to Carini, Kuh, and Klein (2006) “student engagement is generally considered to be among the better predictors of learning and personal development” (p. 2.) Study abroad has become a primary vehicle for internationalization at colleges and universities, supported by studies that show student outcomes demonstrating cultural learning, openness to diversity and intercultural competence (Niehaus, 2012). There is less known about short-term study abroad programs, with results mixed as to their efficacy with internationalized student learning goals. In particular to textile and apparel industries, there is opportunity for students to engage with rich and complex cultural and global contexts through community engaged interaction with fair trade and smaller scale sustainability-oriented operations. The growth of short term (less than four week) service-learning or volunteer tourism programs is not without criticism, despite good student learning outcome planning. These criticisms include community engaged tourism as new forms of colonialism and the exploitation of host communities. (Hartman, Paris, and Blache-Cohen 2014). Thus, there is opportunity to define and place ethical standards, or use a fair trade learning model, to guide community engaged learning. In the consideration of ethical standards, it should be asked if we can identify students that are well prepared for deep, ethically-based, study abroad experiences as well as how fair trade study abroad might influence student’s self and global access. This study looks at how to understand and prepare students for fair trade and community engaged learning by evaluating personal characteristics in particular as predictors to success in a short term fair trade and sustainable product focused travel abroad experience in Guatemala.

Methods. Research was conducted through 9 scales and 52 items used in this study consist of the Beliefs, Events, and Values Inventory (BEVI) research instrument (2013). According to its website “BEVI is an accessible, adaptable, and powerful analytic tool that can be used as an independent or dependent measure in a wide range of applied settings, evaluative contexts, and research projects. From an applied standpoint, the BEVI helps individuals, groups, organizations, and institutions 1) understand better what they believe and value about themselves, others, and the world at large and 2) reflect upon how such beliefs and values may - or may not - be conducive to learning, personal growth, relationships, and the pursuit of life goals. From the perspective of evaluation and research, the BEVI 1) helps answer questions such as “who learns what and why, and under what circumstances,” 2) allows for the examination of complex processes that are associated with belief/value acquisition, maintenance, and transformation, and 3) analyzes the impact of specific experiences that are implicitly or explicitly designed to facilitate growth, learning, or change.” (BEVI, 2015). Based on previous reports and

findings (Wandschneider et al, 2015) the following hypotheses for this study include; *H1: Those with high self-access pre trip will continue to have high self-access post trip. H2: Increase in other access will occur pre trip to post trip. H3: Global access will increase post trip.*

For this study the instrument was scaled down to less items focusing less on students backgrounds and more on student self-access, 21 items, (emotional attunement, positive thinking, self-awareness), item in this scale include “I consider myself highly emotional”, “I am introspective”, “I tolerate confusion”; other access (socioemotional convergence, sociocultural openness, socioreligious traditionalism) in which 12 items included statements such as “I am progressive”, “I am culturally attuned”, “I am globally oriented”; and global access (gender traditionalism, ecological resonance, global engagement) which included items such as “I am introspective”, “I am open to experience”, and I am empathetic.” Items were measured on a 7 pt likert scale (1, strongly disagree; 7 strongly agree). Pre and Post t-tests were conducted to understand the differences between the students understanding of global context with the treatment of a 14 day study tour in between. An additional qualitative portion was included post trip consisting of 3 experiential reflection open ended items also from the IBEVI (2013) instrument. Researchers coded the data based on themes to draw conclusions from the student experiences. Questions in this part of the research included: “Which event or aspect of your learning experience had the greatest impact upon you and why?” and “What have you learned and how are you different as a result of this experience?”

Results and Discussion. Based on the findings of this study H1-H3 were accepted. Interesting findings regarding the qualitative portion of the study include references to increases in internationalized perspectives, including global citizenship competencies. These include recognizing individual and cultural differences, critiques of cultural values, curiosity about participating in a global world, and understanding interconnections across geographic regions. Limitations to this study include the small number of participants. Though there were only ten participants in this study the t-tests were conducted to better understand individual experiences in Guatemala and how that changes among personal understanding through global context.

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