

## EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING THROUGH STUDY ABROAD: A MODEL FOR LINKING THEORY AND PRACTICE

### ABSTRACT

Globalization and its implications for future international relationships make study abroad a desirable option for faculty and students who wish to extend learning beyond its traditional boundaries. Study abroad experiences have the potential to influence students' view of themselves as global citizens while improving their skills as thoughtful scholars. This paper is an examination of the construction and execution of a study abroad experience as well a retrospective examination of the potential linkages between theory and practical application. In this respect the study abroad represents a dimension of experiential learning (Kolb 1984). The project is informed by literature that discusses theories related to pedagogy (Fobes & Kaufman 2008; Fobes 2005; Kaufman 2002) and activism (Feagin & Vera 2001).

### INTRODUCTION

In the context of teaching sociology in the undergraduate environment this paper builds on the previous works of those who likewise consider the merits of critical pedagogy (Fobes & Kaufman 2008; Fobes 2005; Kaufman 2002) and experiential learning (Kolb 1984). Both approaches add leverage to the case for social action as illustrated by Friere 1993; Feagin & Vera 2001 and to some extent the canon of Patricia Hill Collins who in her examination of critical social theory similarly regards the production of knowledge contested ground that forms the basis of power relationships (Collins, 1998).

Pedagogy, the art and or science of teaching continues to change and evolve as the academic community and its students move through historical points. While it is sometimes difficult to always anticipate which approach best addresses the needs of particular students at any given point in history, critical or radical pedagogy continues to be a topic of discussion and occasional debate. This particular pedagogy "requires adopting alternative grading practices, cultivating classroom dialogue, relegating considerable power to students, and promoting social activism" (Sweet, 1998). For the past decade some few articles published in *Teaching Sociology* have addressed and oft debated the merits of critical or radical pedagogy in the study of sociology (Fobes & Kaufman 2008; Fobes 2005; Kaufman 2002; Sweet, 1998; Gaianquest, 1998). Only one such article has addressed this pedagogy in the context of study abroad (Fobes, 2005). While another article published over a decade ago outlines processes for teaching sociology in an international setting, critical pedagogy is not a part of that dialogue (Kain & D'Andrea, 1992).

Catherine Fobes' summation of critical pedagogical canons includes a distinction between pedagogy and teaching. As Fobes notes from her own research of the subject "basic tenets [of critical pedagogical theorists] include education stimulating social change rather than mastering facts and skills, encouraging creativity through dialogic learning, working with indigenous people to co-create knowledge, maintaining teacher/learner flexibility, and emphasizing teaching as a human act." (p.182). For the purposes of this examination social change, creativity through dialogic learning and teacher/learner flexibility appeared to be the common threads that link to critical pedagogy in this project.

In general study abroad advantages those students who otherwise may not have an opportunity to visit foreign countries. In this example both student and parents seem comfortable to have representatives of the university and a university sponsored activity as a safety net. More generally, studying the intricacies of other cultures exposes students to a wider selection of lifestyle alternatives some of which may be more appealing than what they currently experience. In this case the student population is drawn from small rural communities within a 100 mile radius of the university. Their daily exposure to diverse customs and alternative ways of thinking typically does not extend beyond that circle. Many of these students are first generation university attendees with little exposure to or experience with alternative modes of learning. In the case of teaching sociology and certainly in attempts to discuss relevant social problems, those students with little or no exposure to opposing viewpoints present narrow and fragmented experiential frameworks of knowledge.

The study abroad program at Lander University, South Carolina is open to all students and continues to broaden its scope. At present the program offers full semester study abroad experiences as well as opportunities for excursions during summer and spring during the scheduled academic breaks. In this particular case the appeal of spring study abroad events lies in the possibility for students to receive financial aid as a consequence of being enrolled in course work connected to academic credit. This defrays some of the costs associated with this type of international classroom experience. Additionally, the program at Lander awards some scholarship monies to students based on documented financial need. Study abroad proposals are reviewed by committee and rated on a competitive basis. In this particular case the course design for the proposal was developed and presented to the director of the study abroad program nearly one year before it entered the approval process.

There were several reasons that the Netherlands was selected as the site for this study abroad experience. First, the country offered a marked contrast in social structure. Although a relatively small country the Netherlands presents not only an exemplar of well-integrated social policy it also presents frameworks for egalitarianism. Moreover, because the Netherlands is universally known for its sexual and drug related liberalism, the social institutions of the country were expected to reflect this particular position in contrast to those attitudes and practices in the United States. Second, English is spoken by the Dutch with relative ease and frequency. Thus, their willingness to interact with Americans was predictable. Finally, a resource network existed that allowed access to several "closed" organizations.

### **COURSE DESIGN AND OBJECTIVES**

Two courses introduced students to social problems as observed and researched concerning the Netherlands. The two were interrelated though not dependent and were offered in spring semester under the rubric of special topics. Students were expected to complete course work within the frameworks of field research methodology and course work in comparative social institutions. Initially the program of study proposed to provide close, comparative examinations of the source, nature, extent and consequences of selected social and cultural problems. The course also sought to address individual and structural social change in both the Netherlands and the United States. The idea of linking course work requirements to the study abroad experience was new to the university's study abroad program. Previous trips, especially those conducted during spring break had not been linked to graded, academic outcomes nor had they been arranged without the use of commercial tour packages.

There were four broad-based objectives presented as a part of the proposal submitted to the university study abroad committee. As the project developed more specific product driven objectives were added to replicate customary academic expectations. These objectives mirrored those of the 300 level research methods course required for all sociology majors. It was therefore possible for students to substitute

the field research course in order to meet this requirement. The expectation for the field research course was that students would be able to 1) discuss the major components of societies and the relationship of individuals to the social environment; 2) critically and sociologically analyze the circumstances and consequences of specified social environments; 3) Identify and compare individual and structural change in the Netherlands and the United States as it relates to specified social environments and finally, apply the tools of a selected research method through the transcription and analysis of field notes.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

Among several *manifest outcomes* for the courses were the usual paper, objective tests, and presentations. In addition the students were required to keep journals for both courses. The final paper was designed to develop a rudimentary research proposal and as such included the requirement to address shortcomings of the process as well as a description of the next steps to advance the research agenda. Journal entries were expected to develop observational and analytical skills as well as address the techniques for writing field notes. Several *latent outcomes* were identified based on the students' stated reason for participating in this particular study abroad experience. Those reasons are discussed in the conclusion portion of this paper. From the perspective of one instructor the latent outcomes are also included and linked to critical pedagogy.

### PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORKS OF THE PROJECT

This section of the paper presents a summary of the educational and social components of the experience. Here also begins discussion of the pedagogical and thus structural concerns related to replication of a plausible learning environment. Early in the process it became apparent that once removed from the traditional classroom setting rules and to some degree roles changed. Therefore in this section some attention is also given to group dynamics and student-centered learning as they impact this particular learning environment. Here too is the development of the link between experiential learning as pedagogy (Kolb, 1984) and the sociological tradition of social action (Feagin & Vera, 2001).

During the eight day period spent in Amsterdam and environs the attempt was to provide a balance between cultural exposure and data collection for academic output. Planned events included group meals, bus and museum tours as well as walking tours. Students also had the opportunity to experience several modes of public transportation such as the underground, the city bus and trolley and the intercity train systems. These experiences were orchestrated in accordance with the more formal academic appointments at the ambassador's office, two prison system facilities, and finally, the Netherlands Institute for Health Services Research (NIVEL). We were unable to effectively coordinate a visit to the University of Amsterdam or local hospital. However, spontaneous outings to a park and local fire station yielded valuable data. A number of students more vividly recalled these experiences more so than those events that were formalized by appointments.

Traditional student-teacher roles which typically include some form of hierarchical relationship became less visible and even less comfortable. The dynamics of selecting and sharing meals, plotting routes of travel, deciphering transportation systems and routes and shopping for souvenirs generated a synergy of its own. This temporarily presented a dilemma as this instructor felt compelled to challenge students to remain focused on academic outcomes. However, the shift from a traditional classroom hierarchical structure reflects the suggested pedagogy of Paulo Freire (1993) and in many respects laid the

groundwork for experiential learning as theorized in Kolb's model for creating knowledge through experience.

The educational doctrine of Freire arises from dilution of the power relations that are sometimes reflected in teaching environments especially at the secondary level of education. What was desirable early on in the study abroad environment was that students would develop not only a sense of adventure but be anxious to begin developing intellectual independence as they experienced the cultural aspects of Netherlands environment. Inherent in that independence is the belief that knowledge and its development is equally the territory of student and teacher.

Juxtaposed against Freire, David Kolb conceptualizes a model of learning that further amplifies the position that learning and thus knowledge are the creation and primary territory as well as responsibility of the learner. Kolb further theorizes that this model "is consistent with the strategies of human cognition" (Kolb, 1981, 1984). His model appears below (Figure 1).

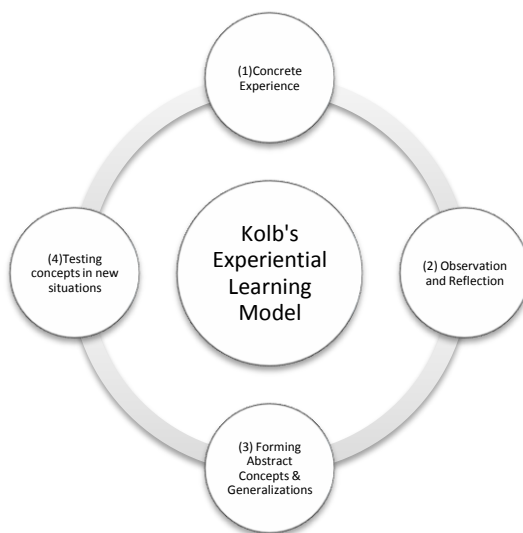


Figure 1. Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (1981)

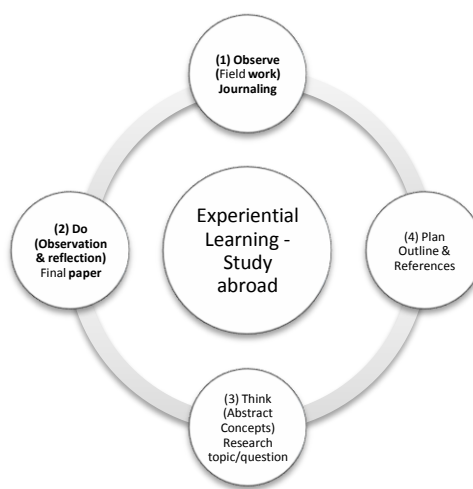


Figure 2. Adaptation of Kolb's model (2009)

Kolb's model is seemingly the gold standard in the canons of learning and likewise adapts easily to the study abroad experience under review. It not only serves as the blueprint for the learning components and outcomes associated with the course construction it also attends to the learning style of the students. Each stage corresponds to a specific learning style in the following manner. Stage 1: "accommodators" [whose] "greatest strength lies in doing things...in carrying out plans"; Stage 2: "divergers, [whose] greatest strength lies in imaginative ability...the ability to view concrete situations from many perspectives"; Stage 3: The "assimilators." In this case the learners "create[s] and use theoretical models [and] excel in inductive reasoning." Lastly, Stage 4 addresses the learning style of the converger, who has as "their greatest strength the application of ideas." In the use of this model each stage must be experienced by each learner. However, there is no necessity to complete the stages in sequence (Kolb, 1981, 1984).

Thus, and for example the products or assignments for the final paper began with students selecting a research topic then developing their research question (Figure 2). This can be conceptualized as Stage 3: Forming abstract concepts or thinking and corresponds to the learning style of the assimilators who

learn better when presented with theoretical models. Note that all students were concurrently enrolled in a related course entitled Comparative Social Institutions. In part that course provided useful information about the institutions that they anticipated examining while in the Netherlands. Thus the formation of abstract concepts was given a general framework for consideration of comparison and ultimately social change. Beginning with Stage 3 and moving clockwise around the model places the learner at Stage 2. Here what they “do” results in a paper referred to as a research proposal.

In retrospect students may initially benefit from examination of this model as part of their preparation for the study abroad experience. Such an overview provides the broader context of the learning experience. It likewise presents students with the opportunity to make choices about the quality and depth of their experience at each stage of the experiential learning process. This model further supports the findings from one study that queries sociology majors about the mechanics of learning sociology (McKinney, 2007). The study determined that “student’s beliefs about what helps them learn fit well with existing research and theory on learning in higher education including the importance of experiential and active learning...” (p.117)

One major concern of this model however, is that of assessment. What are the most effective and valid measures for determining whether or not students’ experiences are accurately assessed especially in learning environments where such assessment is driven by traditional quantitative measures? In part it seems inconsistent with a goal of a critical pedagogy. The goal to co-create knowledge or facilitate student empowerment in the learning environment may necessarily demand the involvement of students in evaluation not only of the project but also of themselves. To then apply such measurement methodologies that are strictly instructor driven may once again suggest a higher order of knowledge accessible only to instructors. In this respect such measurement disregards the intent of the pedagogy. This particular conundrum was addressed in part using an end of the course survey and students’ self-assessment. Those evaluation tools are further examined in the methods and data analysis portion of this paper. To this point the discussion of pedagogical concerns has examined the dissolution of power relations and thus, the co-creation of knowledge as well as the application of an experiential learning model that maps to product driven outcomes. What follows is yet a third concern of this learning experiment.

Again in retrospect, the unforeseen realities of group dynamics played a pivotal role in this learning experience. Group dynamics is a term used to define and explain the mechanisms of group interaction. The subject and related research provides ample information for a separate study. In short, group dynamics typically is the territory of educational psychology, organizational development and in the discipline of sociology is sometimes used to conduct focus groups, a data collection method in qualitative research (Stewart, Shamdasani and Rook, 2007; Morgan 1997). Pertinent to this discussion however, is the role that intergroup dynamics played in executing this study abroad experience. Once outside the traditional classroom environment this particular group of learners was now faced with developing interdependent relationships to accomplish several tasks. In every respect they had to reconstitute the group because of the change in environment and to some degree a shift in leadership roles. A number of the tasks they set to accomplish had to be negotiated across racial and gender divides. Three things were evident. Group members had not experienced the five stages of group development (Tuckman, 1977) in this environment; therefore they had not previously negotiated ways to handle conflict and finally, the shift to student-centered learning, a necessary consequence of field research had yet to be fully executed. At the onset the dynamics of groups was of little to no concern. However, as decisions regarding meeting times, location for meals and other logistical arrangements were made and sometimes adjusted, it became apparent that the expected synergy was missing. Future

planning must necessarily give this dimension of the experience thought and attempt to infuse as a minimum, some group process work into the curriculum both before and during the trip.

The final point made here regarding pedagogical frameworks relates to the sociological tradition of activism and social change. The pages of *Liberation Sociology* remind every sociologist of the discipline's traditional roots (Feagin & Vera, 2001). The authors note in their historical examination of the discipline that beyond the canons of the three major theoretical paradigms there is need and indeed obligation to seek social change. Field work as was experienced in the Netherlands provided learners the opportunity to examine social problems, compare solutions to the problem and formulate policy recommendations for change. Readers will note in the selected journal entries that follow a demonstration of comparative ability. The students readily identified the ways that the Netherlands differed in approaches to the social systems and situations. The next step in the process of developing learners who are also agents of change presents a challenge to the process of experiential learning and critical pedagogy.

### **METHODS AND DATA ANALYSIS**

In this portion of the paper the discussion turns to the comments of the students at the conclusion of the research methods course, as well as brief discussion of the grading rubric used for the research proposal and subsequent grades on that paper, and samples of journal entries.

As part of an on-going effort throughout the university to standardize and stabilize assessment, grading rubrics are in use across a variety of disciplines. In this situation the instructor gave the grading rubrics for the final paper and oral presentation to students prior to their departure for the study abroad trip conducted during spring break. Both rubrics were previously and currently used in other sociology research methods courses. This was believed to maintain consistency across the methods courses requiring the same standard of performance for all students whether or not they elected to have a study abroad experience. One obvious shortcoming of the rubrics is that at best they are only able to assess the manifest outcomes of the project. Nonetheless, these products, namely, journal entries, a paper and oral presentation represent intellectual efforts on the part of the learners and are therefore an integral part of the study abroad experience. Final grades were equally distributed with four letter grades of "A", four of "B" and four of "C". At least two students had marginal final papers primarily because of their inability to separate themselves from the very real events of their everyday experiences and biases as well as an overriding desire to travel abroad without the responsibility and daily rigors of academic output. All journaling efforts were largely unstructured. To some extent this may have been an oversight on the part of this teacher whose pedagogy hoped for more reflective and analytical notations. Journaling is within itself a refined skill as is the creation of useful field notes. Both require some introspection. However, following are a selection of journal notes that represent some of the more thoughtful entries.

The first entry comes from the journal of a young woman who has travelled some and is being raised in a multi-racial, multicultural household. On this particular day one of the instructors has acted spontaneously and encouraged the group to venture to a local park. It is day two of the trip. The purpose of the outing is to collect data from willing passers-by. The information two of the students seek relates to single parenting and juvenile behavior. Here is what the young woman, one of the more serious as well as successful student records in her journal:

We are a group of fourteen Americans and we stand out like sore thumbs. It's great...On the way [to the park] we saw so many things. Dogs strapped onto the bikes. Dog without leashes who

never stray from their owners...We went to parks so that C & T could get their research... It was so great here today was simply incredible, simply magical. The parents never yelled; the kids were free to roam the park and jump in puddles. Very different from America. From what C & T said they are so respectful of their children and when T asked about the amount of TV. they allow their four-year olds, it was ½ hour or less a day. They read to their children. I was floored by this. How incredible!

This student is beginning to formulate a contrast between the Netherlands and the United States. She uses the structure of family to define differences in childhood experiences of Dutch children. Having defined these differences she will now need to relate them to larger social forces that shape family dynamics. If successful she can then begin to suggest ways to replicate conditions for family life in the United States where appropriate. Thus develops an opportunity for activism and social change. The relationship between identification of structural differences and initiation of social change is a subtle point and one that not every student is prepared to capture. This point was discussed earlier as a part of the pedagogical framework.

The next entry follows a pattern similar to the previous student. This student, also academically focused, develops comparisons about the nature of prison environments. Her career goals include law school. Unlike the previous entry the reader has a glimpse of her personal life, dimensions not frequently displayed in these journals.

Today was an extra special day because today is my 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday...In order to get to the prison we had to ride the subway. The subway was crowded! Besides the confusion of the subway, the tour of the prison was very interesting. Their [Dutch] prisons look nothing like ours. They are much cleaner. The Dutch truly believe in rehabilitation. The Dutch prison system offers many more opportunities than South Carolina's system. I was embarrassed in a way to know that we treat our inmates so cruel and yet the Dutch treat their inmates like true human beings. Later that evening my classmates took me out to eat for my birthday. They surprised me which was very sweet.

The following comment comes from a young man, a senior at the university who aspires to be a Wal Mart manager when he graduates in May. He has been adventurous, almost fearless in his independent late night exploration of Amsterdam which he equates with the lifestyles of all Europeans. He says:

Overall I love Europe. On our trip we had our ups and downs but that all got resolved. We did a lot of walking, that was the worst part and some days it was raining...But it['s] all good...Before I started working on this paper I thought it was going to be hard to complete But as I do interviews and take surveys it makes my research much easier. My abstract has come together good and my introduction sounds amazing and now I need to start on the other sections and just put this paper together.

Clearly he is goal oriented in his intensity to complete the research proposal, the final required product. In some ways he has surprisingly emerged as an informal leader among a portion of the group. The next student makes some reflective comments about the usefulness of group interaction in the learning process. In her comments the reader can begin to see the beginnings of a developing collegial relationship. Here is what she had to say about that relationship:

The group helped us open our eyes to the different cultures in the way we do things. If we miss something then someone else in the group can help point it out. I think that doing it with a

group made it better. It (?) sometimes hindered us because it felt that we were rushed and could not complete the research in a timely fashion.

A second entry from the same student makes observations about what she views as Dutch family dynamics.

...people have their children a lot older. ...just walking you notice that families are more important and just the quality time that they spend with their children. Not only that the fathers play a more positive and active role in the children ['s] lives. ... when I was interviewing the parents for my research questions that dads actually take time out on a Saturday to go to the park. One male was out with his friend on a Saturday while pushing his...son. It really helped with my project because the parenting responsibilities are taken very seriously so their values are to teach their children one-on-one and not let the TV. teach them.

The young woman's exchanges with this instructor were most frequently formulated as questions. As evident from her journal entries she made reasonable observations. However, she seemed reluctant to trust her often insightful moments. In addition, she struggled with a tendency to over generalize. Statements such as "the fathers play a more active and positive role..." reflects this tendency. In this environment it was possible to frequently discuss what constitutes bias. Her final paper however, reflected neither ambivalence nor bias. In the last analysis it was among the best of the group.

The final journal entry is the contribution on a young man, a rising senior involved in number of on-campus activities. He has most recently been selected to oversee and coordinate the efforts of all on-campus resident aides. Given his level of social interaction the following comments concerning community involvement seem in character.

Back home! Now that I am back in S.C. I have noticed the changes in my views of many issues. Before going to Amsterdam I feel that I was sheltered to American values and beliefs. I was not as open to issues as I am now. I have definitely learned to be open to try new things and meet new, different people. I encountered different cultures and people while in Amsterdam. One aspect of their culture that I admire is their communitarian views. They believe in helping the community as a whole instead of just looking out for individuals. Another aspect that I am more appreciative of now is their openness. For example, before going to Amsterdam I thought the Red Light District and the coffee shops were taboo topics. But after I experienced both I know now that is the way their society is structured. Now that I am back in American society I have learned not to cut my experiences short. I want to do new things and live life to the fullest. Now that I have studied abroad I want to do it again. In the future my next destination will be either Africa or Paris.

This final entry once again illustrates how some students formulated their Netherlands experience to contrast their experiences in the United States. These consistent comparisons certainly indicate an understanding of both the manifest and latent intent of this study abroad trip and its associated academic requirements.

A final observation about the journal entries relates to the challenge such a requirement presents to both student and teacher especially in the mobile learning environment of studying abroad. The density of our schedule and low energy levels made timely feedback about journal entries an insurmountable hurdle. In the future it may be useful and desirable to: 1) carve out specific times to discuss journal input; 2.) Discuss journal entries in a group forum. As previously noted in one journal



entry groups interaction was a useful learning tool. Such a process though formalized may model and create additional opportunities for student-centered learning.

At the conclusion of the course and following completion of all written and oral requirements the twelve participating students completed a questionnaire. Admittedly the questionnaire was an afterthought. However, immediately after returning to the traditional classroom environment, group dynamics made it evident that openly and collectively processing the experience was not going to occur. It then became a matter of some urgency at least for this teacher that some closure was necessary. Below is the questionnaire that all students completed on the last day of class and following the submission of their final research proposal and oral presentation. The questionnaire is followed by a chart that provides an analysis of their input. The purpose of soliciting their input was twofold. First and foremost the request for their input follows an adopted pedagogy. Specifically, such input from learners once again shifts the learning focus from teacher-centered to student-centered which has already been noted as a way of developing empowered learners who are not restrained by hierarchical classroom structures. In the future a revised questionnaire might be useful in establishing correlations between questionnaire responses and earned grades. The original survey instrument is included below.

Please answer the following questions regarding your study abroad experience. Your responses are held in confidence and without personal identification. They will be used to evaluate the experience. Thanks for your time.

1. What was your **primary reason** for going to the Netherlands?
  - a. Pleasure
  - b. Cultural enrichment
  - c. Academic interest
2. Would you go again if you knew that there were academic requirements?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
3. Was the cost of the trip a major concern for you or your family?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
4. What were your major concerns before you went on the trip?
5. Were you adequately prepared for the trip? (Please circle all that apply)
  - a. I understood the academic requirements
  - b. I did some research about the country
  - c. I packed appropriate clothing
  - d. I had enough money to meet my needs
  - e. I was able to talk to my family from the Netherlands if I wanted
  - f. Any additional comments about preparation:
6. I used my journal entries to: (Select all that apply)
  - a. Record observations for use as data
  - b. Express my feelings about personal matters
  - c. Meet the requirements of the class
  - d. Other\_\_\_\_\_ Please be specific.
7. Would you recommend this or similar trips to other students?
  - a. Yes, why?
  - b. No, why not?

8. How did you spend your time in the Netherlands? Please estimate this by using percentages (e.g. studying, 50%)
  - a. Tours
  - b. Free time
  - c. Academic (this includes trips to the prison, hospital and the Hague)
  - d. Sleeping/Resting
  - e. Other activities (Please name those activities)
9. Indicate one thing you liked most about this trip.
10. Indicate one thing liked least about this trip.
11. Please make recommendations for future study abroad trips sponsored by the department of Political and Social Science.

The table below summarizes the student input from the questionnaire. Following this table is a summation of recommendations that the student make for future study abroad experiences.

Question	Positive Response	Negative Response
#1 -Primary reason for going	Academic(2)	Pleasure, enrichment (10)
#2- Go again with academic requirements	Yes (12)	
#3 – Concern about cost?	No concern (7)	Concerned (5)
#4 – Concerns before leaving		Flying, organization, money, workload, adaptation
#5 – Adequate preparation	4 or more responses (11)	Fewer than 4 responses (1)
#6 – Use of journal	3 or more responses (12)	
#7 – Recommend to others	Yes (12)	
#8 – Use of time (Academic)	30-50% (7)	Less than 30% (5)
#9 – Liked most	Free time(1);tours (4);culture (5); doing actual research (2)	
#10 – Liked least		Walking (5);behavior of classmates(4); tours (2); organization (1)

n=12; ( ) =number of student responses

For the most part students indicated they were satisfied with the experience. They indicated that not only would they do it again they would also recommend such an experience to others. From the data it is clear that their stated reasons for going on the trip were less focused on the academic dimensions of the experience. Yet the numbers suggest that better than 50% of them used their time in academic pursuits. At least two students noted that “doing the actual research” was their favorite part of the trip. Question #11 asked the students to make recommendations for future study abroad experiences. They made two recurring points that bear closer examination in preparation for the next trip. First, five of the twelve students stated there was a need for more organization (4) and communication (1). They did not expound on this position. The best that can be deciphered from those comments is purely speculative. However, one of the five students did suggest that communication was not would it should have been. In this respect in future efforts to improve perceptions of organization it may be useful to devote several hours of class time to building group cohesiveness that in turn will develop communication. This would provide the opportunity to discuss the details of itinerary, transportation and appropriate behavior.

Some scattered comments related to these as items of concern. Interestingly, three students viewed serious commitment to academics and behavior as matters for concern. In short, communication of logistical details may enhance the experience for all concerned.

In addition to the questionnaire students were also asked to provide an assessment of their overall performance in the course and suggest the letter grade they believed they had legitimately earned. The statement of self-assessment was: "What letter grade do you believe you have EARNED in this class and why? Consider such things as attendance, participation, cooperation, involvement and effort as well as the quality of our work." Based on these criteria 75% of the learners accurately predicted their final cumulative grade. This correlation may merit future study. Collaboration between learners and teachers regarding grading as well as learning may prove to be a useful during all phases of the learning process.

### CONCLUSION

The study aboard experience presents an opportunity to explore if not push the boundaries of pedagogy. It challenges both learner and teacher in ways not typically experienced in the tradition classroom setting. This is particularly true when considering the constant close proximity of both student and teacher where traditional boundaries may no longer be effective or even appropriate. In a retrospective analysis of the study abroad experience this examination of pedagogy has included application of an experiential learning model to contextualize the manifest outcomes or products of the students' academic work. The concern for assessment that in part includes student input regarding the logistical dimensions of the experience as well as grading has also been a portion of the pedagogical dialogue. It remains a challenge to remain true to student-centered learning without also inclusion of the student in the evaluative process. And finally, the linkage of the research project to social action has been given some attention. The challenge here remains to develop strategies that assist the sociology student in the transfer of their field experience to one of social action. In future study abroad experiences it may be valuable to include students in pre-planning, assessment and group development.

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