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Study Abroad Academic Pre-Departure Course: Increasing Student's Intercultural Competence Pre-Sojourns

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Abstract

Student enrollment in U.S. study abroad programs is at an all-time high, however, the majority of growth is in short-term programs. Some research has shown that short-term programs struggle to increase students' intercultural competence and can actually serve to reinforce preconceived stereotypes and biases. This study sought to discover if an academic pre-departure course focused on the following seven themes, with the intent to prepare students for their sojourns abroad, would increase students' intercultural competence: (1) culture, (2) cultural resolution, (3) worldview, (4) journaling and reflexivity, (5) cultural goal training, (6) applied techniques, and (7) a final cultural project. Data was collected using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Findings suggest that a pre-departure course taught in this manner can have a significant impact on students' intercultural competence, potentially helping to overcome limitations of short-term programs, namely, the limitation of time.

Keywords:

Intercultural competence, pre-departure preparation, study abroad

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Introduction

U.S. Study abroad enrollment has increased dramatically over the past two decades with the majority of growth being in short-term (8 weeks or less) programs (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2017). Research has shown that shorter durations often lack the time and depth of cultural content to increase students' intercultural competence (Engle & Engle, 2004; Kehl & Morris, 2008; Lemmons, 2015; Lemmons, 2013; Medina-López-Portillo, 2004; Vande Berg, Paige & Lou, 2012). Other studies suggest that these types of shorter programs can actually lead to the reinforcing of students' perceived stereotypes and biases instead of challenging them, and students may, therefore, return home less culturally competent than when they left (Scoffham & Barnes, 2009; Tiessen & Huish, 2014).

This paper seeks to bolster the research on the effects of academic pre-departure courses, and to discover the effects of such a course--as developed and taught by the author--on student's intercultural competence, in an effort to discover a way to increase students' intercultural competence at home, so that when they travel on a short-term program, they will be ready from the onset.

This academic pre-departure course is a course that uses interdisciplinary theoretical underpinnings, borrowing aspects from psychology, sociology, cultural geography, anthropology, and current research on intercultural competence. The academic pre-departure course is purposeful in instruction, a departure from common place pre-sessional orientation sessions, which often focus mainly on health and safety.

This study uses both a quantitative method (Intercultural Development Inventory or IDI) for assessing intercultural competence, and it explores a qualitative method (repeat photography) for doing so. This article describes a specific set of seven sections that were designed to help develop a student's intercultural competence. These descriptions are not meant to be exhaustive in detail, but rather provide a summary of pedagogical methods used in each section. The article is not an examination of these seven sections, rather of whether or not an academic pre-departure course taught in this manner might increase students' intercultural competence, better preparing them for a study abroad experience.

This article defines intercultural competence based on Byram's (1997, p. 34) definition, "knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and

relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others' values, beliefs, and behaviors; and relativizing one's self."

The growth in short-term study abroad programs has led researchers to study the effects of shorter stays abroad and how diminished time abroad relates to changes in students' intercultural competence. Some studies have shown that short-term programs can have a positive effect on students' intercultural competence (Anderson et al., 2006; Chieffo & Griffith, 2004). However, Heinzmann et al. (2015) suggest that this small increase could be due to a honeymoon phase (Lysgaard, 1955), that students who study short-term have superficial cultural experiences that have a positive affect at first, but that programs are often too short and keep students from "encountering intercultural difficulties," which, over time, would facilitate deeper intercultural learning.

These findings may be supported by a longitudinal study conducted by Ryan and Twibell (2000) on mental health and study abroad. The researchers found that a study abroad of at least one semester resulted in students being "more likely to view human beings in a positive way, accept responsibility for others, and have empathy for others" (pp. 423-424). However, when these same students were surveyed 8 weeks into their program, the responses were the converse of the final conclusions: 57% were concerned with their ability to form intercultural relationships, with one student reporting that "I've been abandoned by everyone, and all things familiar have disappeared" (Ryan & Twibell, 2000, p. 417).

This same concern is echoed across study abroad literature, namely that short-term study abroad does not provide enough time for students to navigate a new cultural landscape nor enough time to adapt to their new cultural surroundings, which, in turn, inhibits their ability to have meaningful cultural interactions (Engle & Engle, 2004; Kehl & Morris, 2008; Lemmons, 2015; Lemmons, 2013; Medina-López-Portillo, 2004; Vande Berg et al., 2012).

Vande Berg et al. (2012) suggest that short-term is too short because students are often left to their own devices, with little pre-departure preparation in regard to intercultural competence, and little in-country cultural guidance or tools with which to interpret their experience. This sentiment has been shared by other researchers and has caused a shift away from the hands-off "laissez-faire approach" of study abroad (Gray & Savicki, 2015), and a move toward what

Vande Berg et al. (2012) refer to as interventions in learning. Again, this is not to say that short-term study abroad is bad as it currently stands, Wong (2015) suggests that short-term study abroad isn't as limiting as the "interventionists" propose, and, anecdotally, many proponents of short-term study abroad say, regardless of mixed research findings, that "short-term is indeed better than no term."

With short-term study abroad numbers growing, and assuming that short-term is better than no term, researchers have focused on learning/cultural interventions for study abroad in an effort to give students tools with which to interpret their short experience abroad in hopes that these interventions will give short-term participants a similar, yet compressed, experience to long-term participants (Hanada, 2019; Jackson & Oguro, 2018; Lemmons, 2015; Root & Ngampornchai, 2013; Vande Berg et al., 2009). As Lemmons, Brannstrom and Hurd (2014, p. 87) stated, there is a "need for new and creative methods to increase students' cultural interactions on short-term study abroad programs." Some of this new research on creative methods and interventions is being done on reentry, focusing on helping students interpret the experiences they had abroad (Brathurst & La Brack, 2012; Gray & Savicki, 2015), and other research is being conducted on interventions while abroad, helping to coach students through their cultural experiences (Giovanangeli et al., 2018; Hout, 2018; Lemmons, 2015, Lemmons et al., 2014; Vande Berg et al., 2009). More recent research has been done on the effects of pre-departure training, relying on Cultural Intelligence models (CQ) and the use of individual cultural mentors (Alexander et al., 2021). This research found that pre-departure training via CQ learning plans, experiential learning and individual mentors increased participants CQ as compared to a control group. However, some universities and learning communities may not have the resources to implement CQ development plans and/or individual cultural mentors. This research in particular was done at a university which was described by Lemmons (2021b), as among "historically less diverse regional universities" with few resources dedicated toward intercultural competence. Therefore, there is a need for further research to be conducted on the effects of pre-departure preparation (Bathurst & Brack, 2012; Engberg & Jourian, 2015; Goldstein, 2017; Hepple, 2018; Uribe et al., 2014;) where resources may be limited.

Pre-Departure Courses/Orientations

This article seeks to understand the effects of an academic pre-departure course, but first we must examine what is traditionally taught in university-provided pre-departure courses. Pre-departure (also referred to as pre-sojourn or pre-sessional) study abroad instruction is commonplace across most universities sending students abroad. To understand what a typical pre-departure course looks like, this article will examine the practices at Texas A&M University, as this university sends more students on short-term study abroad programs than any other university in the U.S. (IIE, 2017b). At Texas A&M, pre-departure preparation consists of two orientation sessions with the study abroad office staff. The first orientation covers liability/insurance, university rules, host country laws, travel documents, and expectations that students will uphold the values of the university honor code while abroad. The second orientation covers the logistics of finances, how to communicate back home while abroad, time difference, how to pack, as well as tips for managing good physical and mental health while abroad. Briefly mentioned are culture shock, expectations, and encouragement to do research on the customs and history of the host country. This information is essential for a successful study abroad trip, and Texas A&M provides a good example of how pre-departure preparation is typically focused on the logistical aspects of health, safety, finances, and communication, with little to no focus on cultural, or intercultural competence (Texas A&M Pre-Departure, 2022). Oberhammer's (2016) research on pre-departure preparation echoes this same sentiment, that most university-provided pre-departure preparation is focused on risk management and logistics, with needed information lacking in the areas of personal reflection, culture, and language. The integration of culture into pre-departure preparation is particularly important for short-term programs "when students have less time to acclimate to a new culture" (Engberg & Jourian, 2015, p. 3). Rexeisen and Al-Khatib (2009) called for future research to be done on study abroad pre-departure courses focused on intercultural competence. Dewaele et al. (2015) suggest that pre-departure courses can potentially be very beneficial in preparing students for cultural interactions. Heinzmann et al. (2015, p. 205) state that "given the central role that students' starting conditions seem to play in their further development, it seems advisable to raise the students' awareness for their own expectations, attitudes and needs before they embark on an exchange." Kitsantas (2004) implies that pre-departure cultural preparation is essential for successful study abroad outcomes, and that "cultural goal-training"

established in pre-departure workshops may increase students' intercultural competence. Engberg and Jourian (2015, p. 16) suggest that pre-departure preparation is foundational to cultural learning on a short-term study abroad program, saying "classes that intentionally push students to examine and explore their beliefs and values from multiple perspectives may be important antecedents in fostering later desires to explore new habits and behaviors while studying abroad." The literature suggests that academic pre-departure courses are needed, therefore the purpose of this study is to explore the effects of a pre-departure academic course on students' intercultural competence, to determine whether or not academic pre-departure instruction on intercultural competence is warranted, and to develop a pre-departure curriculum based on previous research and findings. It is hypothesized that an academic pre-departure course can increase students' intercultural competence, developing their "own devices" into a tool set so that students are prepared at the onset, overcoming some of the limitations of short-term programs which often do not offer students enough time to develop these skills and competencies on their own.

Methods

Pre-Departure Program Description

The pre-departure course described below was developed over the course of four years, with the course taught every spring semester, academic year 2014/15 to 2017/18. The pedagogy was derived from literature focused on various aspects of culture and study abroad, and across myriad disciplines including geography, psychology, management, sociology, and foreign languages. The foundational literature upon which the course is based will be detailed in each section. The course is divided into seven sections: (1) culture and intercultural competence, (2) cultural resolution, (3) worldview, (4) journaling and reflexivity, (5) cultural goal training, (6) applied techniques, and (7) the culminating final project.

Section 1: Culture and Intercultural Competence

According to Foote et al. (1994, p. 18) "culture is and has been one of the most difficult concepts to define in the social sciences." This article is not an attempt to define culture but to study a course which strives to give students a basic understanding of culture, and to describe the possible misconceptions that they may have of culture. One of those misconceptions is due to the growth of

nationalism, or “methodological nationalism,” that has enforced false boundaries on students’ views and understanding of culture (Beck & Sznajder, 2006). This has led to an understanding and overuse of stereotypes, where students see all people from a certain nation as the same. This oversimplified view of culture inhibits students’ understanding of the potential complexities of culture (Beck & Sznajder, 2006). To overcome this misconception and to define culture in a more accessible manner, the course presented here adopts the critical cultural theory from Holliday (1999, 2011). Holliday defines culture as being “large” and “small,” where large culture

signifies generalized, monolithic concepts of ethnic, national, or international cultures, while ‘small’ refers to the multiple cohesive social groupings we engage with daily...maintaining a ‘small culture’ perspective acknowledges the multiple identities and complex identifications of the individuals who interact interculturally, offering a more nuanced and agentive perspective (Hepple, 2018, p. 20).

In this course this definition of culture has facilitated student understanding, where their pre-conceived notions of culture can be understood through the sense of large culture, and the need to search for and understand the intricacies of culture at the small scale are established. This in and of itself is of course not enough, but it forms the beginning of understanding, where further cultural practice and exploration takes place throughout the following sections of the course.

Assessing Personal Intercultural Competence

To give students an understanding of their own cultural competency, and a baseline upon which to operate for the course, they are given the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI). The IDI is a developmental measure of intercultural competence, which means that it can be used to assess cultural competency gains over time. This aspect of the assessment is very important as students are given the IDI again at the end of the course to show them how or if they have improved and what they can do further to continue to develop greater intercultural competence. The IDI will be described in more detail in the methods section.

Section 2: Cultural Resolution

Cultural resolution is described as the basis for the development of intercultural competence (Hammer, 2008; Bennett, 2004). Cultural resolution is

being grounded in your own culture, understanding your collective identity (“large” culture) and the influences that have attributed to your “small” culture. Bennett (2004, p. 67) states that intercultural competence comes about by taking “the perspective of another culture without losing your own perspective.” Hammer (2008, p. 205) adds to this by saying that one needs to have an “understanding of cultural differences without giving up one’s own cultural values and principles.” Therefore, it is important to essentially know who you are to understand and take the perspective of another culture.

The importance of this point is illustrated in the establishment and eventual shuttering of the University of Wisconsin Experimental College. Dr. Alexander Meiklejohn was a famous educator and the President of Amherst College from 1913 to 1923 until eventually founding the Experimental College at the University of Wisconsin in 1928. The purpose of the Experimental College was to help the student “form [their] ‘scheme of reference’” (Meiklejohn, 1932, p. 71). To establish this “scheme of reference” the Experimental College sought to break down the incoming students’ cultural identity through various methods. The result was one of the main reasons for ending the experiment, as students eventually digressed into a stage of anomie, or identity crisis, with no cultural base or identity upon which to develop a perspective (Lemmons, 2013). Cultural resolution is a difficult task for college students, as this experience at college usually constitutes their first long-term experience away from home. Students may often feel like they are still figuring out who they are. Students in this study participated in an experiential learning activity which crucially helped them understand aspects of their cultural identity. The cultural resolution exercise seeks to help students understand who they are by identifying the big and small cultural influences that have helped shape their identity. Through this exercise students begin to ground themselves within a cultural identity, which will help them understand, later in the course, plausibility structures and perspective.

Section 3: Worldview and Increasing the Student’s Global Perspective

Building on cultural resolution, helping students understand how they have developed a worldview facilitates their knowledge of how to expand their worldview. Worldview, in a sociocultural context, can be defined as one’s plausibility structure (Hiebert, 2008). Plausibility structure is not just the way in which we see the world, it is the circumference of influence with which we surround ourselves, it is the bubble in which we live. Facilitating learning about

students' "bubbles," how they developed the structure, and how they continually inform that structure, helps students understand how to expand their worldview, and/or how to compartmentalize structures. Engberg and Jourian (2015, p. 1) suggest that study abroad provides the ideal environment to expand worldview as long as students have an underlying curiosity to seek out new experiences and have a "willingness and capacity to deal with discomfort and disequilibrium," or what the authors refer to as "intercultural wonderment." Engberg and Jourian (2015, p. 2) continue their compelling argument for study abroad being an effective means of broadening students' global perspective stating:

By engaging in unfamiliar environments and experiencing differing values, students encounter "provocative moments" (Pizzolato, 2005, p. 629) that trigger the disequilibrium needed to develop their "capacity to define [their] beliefs, identity, and social relations" and achieve self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2008, p. 269). Piaget (1985) further posits that the process whereby individuals assimilate discrepant or foreign information into a particular cognitive schema can foster the type of disequilibrium necessary to enlarge and recalibrate an underlying cognitive structure. Moreover, Kegan (1994) suggests that students' ability to "construct meaning" (p. 199) in more developmentally complex ways requires periods of stability and instability that forces them to continuously reconstruct their relationships with their surrounding environment. Thus, intercultural wonderment encapsulates a number of "provocative moments" in which students are intentionally moving outside their comfort zones and exploring new relationships, contexts, values, and perspectives that concomitantly stimulate growth and development.

This process of essentially experiencing two different realities through studying in a foreign environment causes dissonance. This dissonance causes students to reflect on their reality and compare their home environment to the foreign environment in which they are studying. This process can facilitate the expansion of plausibility structures/worldviews (Engberg & Jourian, 2015).

Section 4: Journaling and Reflexivity: Teaching Students How to See

Glass (2015, p. 554) defines the practice of reflexivity as "acknowledging and critiquing one's complicity in producing and reproducing knowledge."

Reflexivity is a challenging endeavor for undergraduate students, as it asks them to understand how their background might affect their worldview and biases toward other cultures and environments. Over the course of four years this aspect of the course proved to be particularly challenging, as students need much more than just a definition to be able to implement reflexivity and be taught “how to see.” First, students are taught how to implement reflexivity through journaling (Paige, Cohen, Kappler, Chi & Lassegard, 2014; Nelson, 2015; Salibrici et al., 2018;), and they practice reflexivity and journaling by participating in five cultural activities of their choosing during the first two months of the course. Second, students are taught ethnographic research methods through an experiential learning participant observation exercise (Jackson, 2006; Li & Karakowsky, 2001). In this exercise students spend time at a public place, such as a park, or restaurant, and conduct ethnographic observations using ethnographic research methods to identify and count folk and pop cultural representations of individuals. The exercise is meant, as the title of this fourth section suggests, to help students develop different methods of “seeing.” Third, students are taught about the cultural landscape, and how to see the impacts of culture on the human environment/landscape (Birdsall, 2003). Fourth, and discussed further in the methods section, is a robust and comprehensive experiential learning repeat photography activity where students are taught about the “lens” through which they see (Lemmons, et al., 2014). This repeat photography activity serves as the qualitative assessment for this paper and is used as a comparison with the quantitative results.

Section 5: Cultural Goal Training, Combating Cultural Shock

Many articles mention the importance of motivation, or students’ reasons for studying abroad, as an important factor for student success while abroad, and that “higher” motivations tied to cultural learning outcomes prove to be the most influential (Chirkov et al., 2008; Isabelli-Garcia, 2006; Nyaupane et al., 2011). However, students’ motivations for studying abroad are not always “higher” and sometimes their motivations are more closely linked to “having a good time” (Pedersen et al., 2010). Kitsantas (2004) suggests that students can be encouraged to have “higher” motivations through pre-departure cultural goal training. Goal training includes having students establish goals to learn more about the people and culture in the host country, then reinforcing goals that encourage students to become more cross-culturally sensitive, to “change students’ social goals into goals which focus on gaining cross-cultural sensitivity

and understanding” (Kitsantas, 2004, p. 448). This type of cultural goal training helps students focus their attention on cultural outcomes and reduces disruptive incidents that can occur on study abroad programs (Kitsantas, 2004).

Cultural goal training can also help with navigating through the stages of culture shock, focusing the students’ efforts and motivation on the stress points that often influence it. Theories of culture shock have different variations (Zhou, 2008), but the most widely used example is the five stages of culture shock (Pedersen, 1995). Students are taught that everyone experiences culture shock differently, but that familiarity with the stages of culture shock and the transition between stages is helpful in establishing goals and expectations.

Section 6: Applied Travel Techniques

The preceding sections have focused on internal/mental structures and strategies toward facilitating meaningful cultural experiences. The last section of the course focuses on applied travel techniques because it is not enough to teach students the theoretical without the practical. In this section students are taught about the path of least resistance (Lemmons, 2015) and the importance of small groups. The path of least resistance research has shown that students, while traveling abroad, are more likely to interact with those that are more culturally akin to themselves, thus limiting students’ interactions with the host culture and often leading to a tendency of students to travel in large groups of five or more. Students are taught that this is a potential hindrance, and encouraged and reassured that it is okay to travel in smaller groups of two or three. Students are taught how to use Google Streetview and photos to research the host country in which they will reside. Through this practice students are taught how to research what to wear, so that they can dress according to the cultural norms of the host country. Students are introduced to language apps that will help them learn the basics of a language if traveling to a country that speaks a foreign language, and they are taught the importance of language acquisition in having meaningful cultural interactions. Students are shown various platforms and websites and taught the importance of knowing cultural background and history, so that they can perform research to understand more about the country in which they will be traveling. Students are taught where to stay if making weekend excursions on their own.

Section 7: Culmination of Knowledge and Practice – Final Project

The breadth and depth of content covered in this class make it difficult to proverbially step back and see the greater whole. Therefore, a culminating project is implemented that requires the student to examine what they have learned and forces them to use the tools in a practical sense. The final project is a creation of the ideal trip. Students develop an itinerary of their study abroad destination or their ideal trip if not studying abroad immediately, along with how they will implement the viewpoints, perspectives, journaling, introspection, validation, tools, and applied techniques along the way to enable meaningful cultural experiences.

Research Methods

Background and Demographic Data

This research was conducted at the “historically less diverse regional university” described in the 2021 Lemmons article (2021b). A total of 58 students participated in this study, and all students enrolled in the course consented to participate. The study received IRB approval. Of the 58 students, 38 were female and 20 were male. None of the students had traveled abroad previously. Being enrolled in a study abroad program was not a requirement to participate in this study. The university is in the southwest region, is a Hispanic-Serving Institution, and had a student population of approximately 14,000 at the time of study. The university at which this study was conducted has made the strategic decision to invest in short-term (4 weeks or less in this circumstance) study abroad programs.

Participants in this study were enrolled in Geography 3301: Intro to Travel, Cultural Experience, and Study Abroad, which fulfilled an upper-level elective for most majors. Most of the students were juniors and seniors majoring in Political Science, Geography, English, Communications, or Business. The course was taught as a three-credit semester long course.

Methods

Mixed methods, including collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell, 2014), were used in this study to measure the effect of the academic pre-departure course on students’ intercultural competence. Quantitatively, students’ intercultural competence was measured using the Intercultural Development Inventory (Hammer, 2011). The IDI is a widely used and validated instrument in assessing intercultural competence (Wiley, 2016).

The IDI measures intercultural competence on a developmental continuum (see Figure 1) from an ethnocentric/mono-cultural mindset (starting at a score of 55) to an intercultural mindset or adaptation (ending at a score of 145). However, Wong (2015) strongly suggests that studies using the IDI should supplement findings with other means of measuring cultural competency gains, making the research findings more robust. Deardorff (2006, pp. 257-258) also suggests that “it is best to use multiple assessment methods and not just one method, such as an inventory. Recommended assessment methods are primarily qualitative in nature.”

Students were assessed using the IDI on the second day of class, and again on the penultimate day of class, for a pre- to post- measure of change.

Due to constraints with funding, it was only possible to run a control group during one of the semesters in which this course was taught. In the spring 2017 semester an upper-level history course was used as a control group against the spring 2017 pre-departure course. Of the 11 students in the course, 10 of them completed the pre- and post-course IDI assessment on the same corresponding days as the pre-departure course. Due to constraints of time and course workload, the students in the control group did not do the qualitative assessment of the repeat photography assignment.

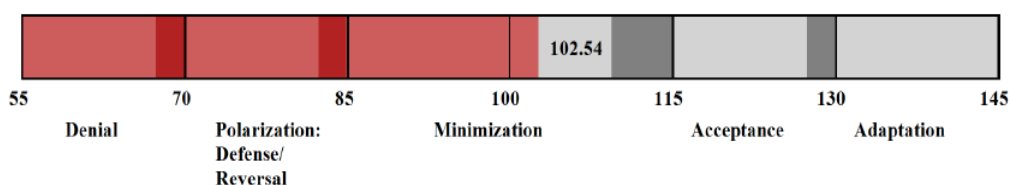


FIGURE (1): THE FIVE CATEGORIES OF THE IDI. THIS IS AN EXAMPLE OF A 102.54 SCORE ON THE IDI, PUTTING THE TEST TAKER IN THE CATEGORY OF MINIMIZATION (HAMMER, 2008)

Two different statistical analyses were performed to compare the pre- and post-course IDI scores. Previous research involving pre- and post-measurements of the IDI have used Paired Sample T-Test (Janeiro, 2009; Keefe, 2008), and others have used the nonparametric Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test (Lemmons, 2013). Therefore, this project used both measurements to test for levels of significance.

Qualitative assessment content analysis was performed on the repeat photography assignment because it was the highest weighted and most robust assignment of the class and came toward the end of the semester after the

students had received all of the academic intercultural competence instruction. The repeat photography assignment serves as the last step of teaching students “how to see.” The assignment is based on the Lemmons, et al. (2014, p. 93) article, where the authors describe the form by saying:

No photographer can escape the prejudices and influences which frame their photographic production, and no photograph is a completely neutral record. Photographs may seem to “furnish evidence” but they ‘are as much an interpretation of the world as paintings and drawings’ (Sontag, 1977, pp. 5, 7) ... It is imperative that students realize that every photograph is taken for a specific purpose and reflects the ideologies of its creator. Likewise, it is as important for students to rediscover why certain locations were photographed as to rediscover the locations themselves.

The course content, supplemented with further clarification from the Lemmons et al. (2014) article, provides the students with enough information to complete the assignment effectively. Students are given three historical photographs, two taken on campus, and one off campus, dating between 1950 and 1972. As part of the assignment students were asked to find the location of the original photograph and “re-photograph” the same area. Students were then asked to answer the following questions:

- 1) Why did the original photographer take this photo, what was their motivation? What was the photographer trying to show, what might they have excluded from the frame? Make sure to understand, historically, what was occurring during this year, politically and world events in order to fully answer this question.
- 2) What can you interpret about the culture in the original photo? Look at people, interactions, building architecture.
- 3) How are you taking this new photo, through what “lens” are you seeing the present culture and cultural landscape?
- 4) Print off the new image and compare it to the old image. Allow time to reflect on the historic image and the image taken, allowing them to “communicate” to you. In your opinion, what caused the changes in the culture and cultural landscape from then to now?

The content analysis for this study focuses on the first of the three photos. Taken in 1954 on the university’s campus, the picture (see Figure 2) is of a

student in uniform who belongs to the corps of cadets (university ROTC program), holding hands with a woman, walking through the university's gates. The students find this location and take a new photograph from the same viewpoint and angle (see Figure 3).



FIGURE (2): THE GATES OF TARLETON ARE ALWAYS OPEN, 1954

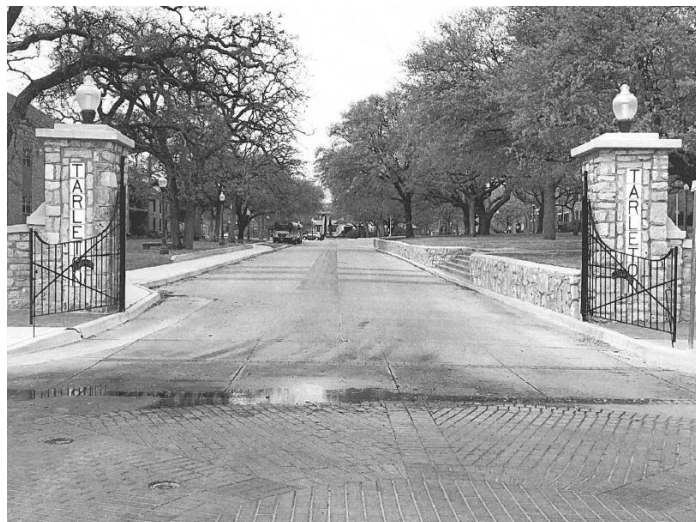


FIGURE (3): THE GATES OF TARLETON, 2018

Content analysis was conducted by the author, with limitations of bias being controlled for by anonymizing the assignment being evaluated so that the author was unaware of which student's paper was being "assessed." To also help

control for potential confirmation bias of the author in evaluating the qualitative assignment, the author was purposefully unaware of IDI scores at the time of scoring this assessment. The rubric used for assessing the qualitative assessment had three categories for scoring. Each category carried a weight of 33.33 points. First, the students received a score out of 33.33 on their ability to understand the original photographer's cultural point of view. Second, the students received a score out of 33.33 on their ability to understand culture through cultural landscape analysis, and cultural observation of the subjects in the photo. Third, the students received a score out of 33.33 on their ability to understand their own cultural lens/bias/cultural point of view. The three category scores were combined to create an intercultural competence score out of 99.99 points, which was rounded to 100. In doing content analysis there was no "right or wrong" answer, rather, answers were judged on the demonstrated ability to understand the deeper meaning as shown by the photograph. The scores were then compared to IDI post-course scores using statistical tests described in the following results section, to evaluate whether or not the findings from qualitative measures mirrored the IDI quantitative scores.

Results

Quantitative analysis of the IDI developmental orientation scores across the four years ($n = 58$) shows that the average pre- score was 87.76, putting students on the cusp of Polarization and Minimization orientations within the IDI, with a median score of 87.21. The standard deviation was 13.83. The average post- score was 95.76, showing that students, on average, progressed past Polarization and into Minimization, with a median score of 97.86. The standard deviation was 15.3. The average IDI score change pre- to post- was over eight points. Results of the Paired Sample T-Test showed a t -value of -5.410, and a df of 58, with a significance level of .000. The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test also showed a significance level of .000, meaning that students' scores pre- to post- were statistically significant as measured by both tests. Conversely, the spring 2017 control group ($n = 10$) scored 88.3 on the pre-test and 85.5 on the post-test for a total change of 2.8 points lower, with a standard deviation of 11.6 on the IDI after the same period of time (a semester), but that change was not statistically significant (0.298) as measured by the same tests. To provide context, the United States Military Academy at West Point uses the IDI to assess their cadets pre- and post- a semester long study abroad program with no pre-

departure training. In 2013 the Academy published results that compiled four years of data, showing that cadets increased by 3.68 points on the IDI pre- to post- (Watson, Siska, Wolfel, 2013).

Content analysis of the repeat photography assignment showed that students, on average, scored a 67.3 out of 100. A statistical linear regression with the repeat photography assignment score as the dependent variable as compared to students' IDI post- test scores resulted in an F-value of 15.183, a total df of 14, with a significance level of .002, meaning that the IDI post- score on average is significantly related to the students' performance on the repeat photography assignment.

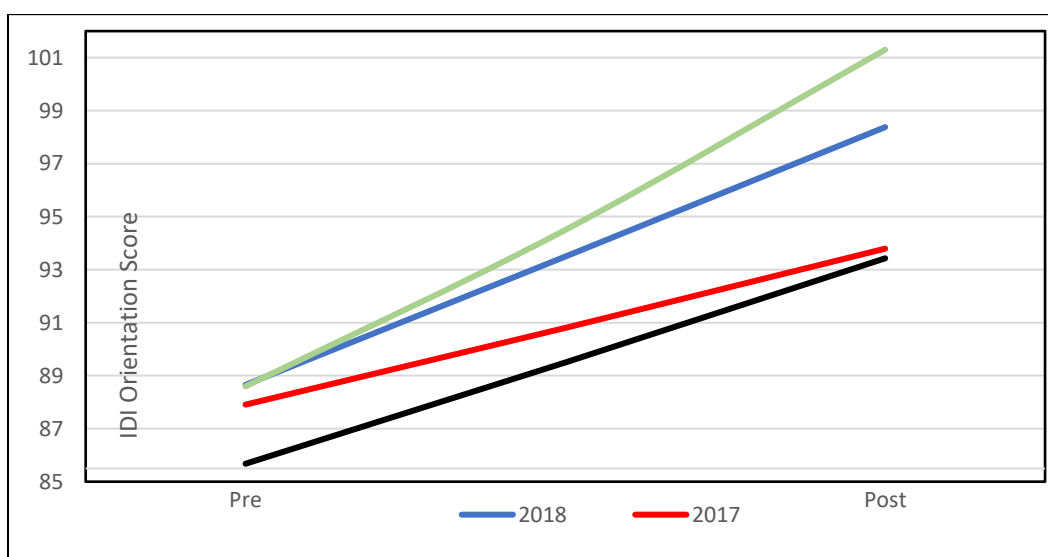


FIGURE (4): IDI PRE TO POST SCORES

Discussion and Conclusion

These quantitative and qualitative findings are significant, not only in a manner of statistical interpretation, but in demonstrating how an academic pre-departure course can increase students' intercultural competence (as measured by the IDI), and how that is related to their ability to express intercultural competence (as demonstrated in the repeat photography assignment). The IDI results show that the students scored, on average, in the polarization orientation of the IDI at the beginning of the course, which means that they were more likely to be defensive, seeing the world and other cultures in an "us versus them" paradigm. Sending students abroad with this perspective could mean that they are more likely to reinforce their prejudices and biases, often seeing their home culture as better and superior to the host culture (Heinzmann et al., 2015). The

fact that this course was able to increase the average IDI scores of participants by 8 points into the Minimization orientation means that students may have a greater capacity and more tools to understand the host culture.

The qualitative findings show a significant relationship between post-IDI scores and students' repeat photography assignment scores, meaning that the students who demonstrated a greater capacity to shift cultural perspectives through their end of course repeat photography assignment, also had concomitantly higher IDI scores on average. This shows that students not only demonstrated greater intercultural competence through a 50-question survey, but that those who scored higher on that survey at the end of the course also demonstrated a legitimate ability to shift cultural perspectives through a rigorous qualitative assignment that pushed their capacity to use introspection and interpretation.

These research findings show that an academic pre-departure course incorporating sections of instruction on (1) culture, (2) cultural resolution, (3) worldview, (4) journaling and reflexivity, (5) cultural goal training, (6) applied techniques, and (7) a final cultural project can have a significant impact on students' intercultural competence. It is assumed that with increased intercultural competence students will get more out of their short-term study abroad experiences, being able to make the most out of their compressed time in a foreign country, helping to overcome the hurdle of a shorter duration.

There are several limitations to this research that need mentioning. First, although constructs were put in place to eliminate bias, the author of this article was also the instructor of the course, evaluator of the work, and scored the qualitative assessment. Second, the n used in this study is relatively small and representative of only one institution, which limits the ability to extrapolate these findings to a larger population. Third, this study did not survey the race/ethnicity of the participants, previous research has shown that race/ethnicity can have a significant impact on cultural evaluations (Engberg and Jourian, 2015). Fourth, the inability to have a control group over all four years of this experiment, and that the control group did not participate in the qualitative assessment. Fifth, this study only measured students across the academic pre-departure course and did not measure students during their study abroad programs. Therefore, further research would be needed to measure the effects of an academic pre-departure course on study abroad outcomes.

Research is currently being conducted (Lemmons, 2021a) to determine the effect of pre-departure course length on students' intercultural competence, with semester long pre-departure courses being compared to half semester long courses and eight lesson courses.

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