

Research Article



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# Transformational Global Learning: Instructor Practices in Short-Term Study Abroad Programmes

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This study explores the impact of instructor practices on transformative learning in short-term study abroad (STSA) programmes. Combining statistical analysis of competencies with critical reflection reveals the nuanced role of instructors in fostering Civic Action, Perspective-taking, Cultural Awareness, and more. Results from t-tests highlight significant improvements, emphasising the effectiveness of well-designed STSA initiatives. The paper identifies key practices, including pre-trip preparation, in-country engagement, and reflective writing, as instrumental in enhancing competencies. While acknowledging study limitations, the findings underscore the transformative potential of STSA when coupled with strategic instructor interventions. This research contributes to the ongoing discourse on experiential learning and informs educators and policymakers on optimising STSA for comprehensive student development.

## INTRODUCTION

Short-Term Study Abroad (STSA) experiences are increasingly recognised as high-impact practices within higher education (Cotten & Thompson, 2017). The benefits of participation in such programmes extend beyond the acquisition of cultural sensitivity, addressing the escalating need to cultivate students comfortable with a global citizen perspective (Deacon & Miles, 2022; Matheus et al., 2017; Reuter & Moak, 2022). This underscores the necessity for higher education to adopt this transformative learning pedagogy.

While semester-long abroad programmes have traditionally been lauded as transformative, their cost and limited accessibility pose challenges for some students (Walters et al., 2017). Notably, structured STSA has emerged as an alternative with significant long-term educational value (Jones et al., 2023; Ruth et al., 2019). In the pursuit of providing students with opportunities to cultivate global competencies, the conventional classroom environment proves to be lacking when compared to a meticulously planned immersion in a host country.

Importantly, well-structured immersion programmes necessitate careful consideration of safety measures and are enhanced by reflective writing and discussions (Gilliland et al., 2016). This paradigm is further complicated by the imperative for additional safety planning brought about by the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the contemporary context, countering rising ethnocentric nationalism requires genuine exposure, particularly for students bombarded by Western media and relentless consumerist messages (Kim, 2019). Many critical learning objectives, such as diversity appreciation, global understanding, and spirituality, are challenging to achieve without a hands-on experiential component. Well-structured STSA courses present precisely the kind of learning opportunities necessary to fulfil these objectives (Pipitone, 2018).

Moreover, the evolving job market increasingly demands professionals capable of working within and understanding a global context. The conventional classroom, however, often falls short of imparting the depth of knowledge transfer required (Shraddha et al., 2020). To bridge this gap, there is a need for practical, “feet on the

ground” (Drijvers, 2019, p. 165) experiences complemented by reflective learning practices, shaping graduates into 21st-century health and behavioural workers (Pawar, 2016; Rosner, 2021; Sicora, 2019). In essence, to transform students, they must witness a different reality, and the well-structured STSA approach emerges as a high-impact method to provide this transformative learning opportunity (Atienza Casas et al., 2023; Cotten & Thompson, 2017; Glassburn & Reza, 2022; Jones & Miles, 2017; Moorhead et al., 2022; Walters et al., 2017).

Against this backdrop, this study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of an STSA programme conducted in the global south as a high-impact practice capable of achieving course objectives, specifically in deepening diversity understanding. The programme incorporated a range of instructional strategies, emphasizing safety maintenance, promotion of group cohesion, the significance of in-country partnerships, daily practices within the host country, and reflective writing approaches. Therefore, the research focused on utilizing pre and post-course or trip data to provide empirical support for instructor practices fostering the development of community-based global learners. The study critically examined the implementation of these practices to achieve transformational learning, considering the unique challenges presented by the global COVID-19 pandemic.

The objectives of this study were specific and focused as follows.

### **Evaluate the Impact of Short-Term Study Abroad Programmes**

This study sought to assess the transformative impact of an STSA programme venturing into the global south. It aimed to gauge the effectiveness of the programme in achieving specified course objectives, with a primary focus on enriching students’ understanding of diversity.

### **Examine Pre- and Post-Trip Data**

Through the analysis of pre- and post-trip data, this research aimed to capture and interpret shifts in students’ perspectives, knowledge, and attitudes. By doing so, it sought to measure the tangible changes that occurred after students engaged in STSA experiences.

### **Support Instructor Practices**

An essential objective was to provide empirical support for instructor practices that foster the development of

community-based global learners. This involved a comprehensive exploration of various instructional strategies, including safety protocols, methods for enhancing group cohesion, the strategic role of in-country partnerships, incorporation of daily practices within the host country, and effective use of reflective writing approaches.

### **Navigate the Realities of a Global Pandemic**

This study acknowledged and addressed the unprecedented challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. It aimed to critically examine how instructor practices can be adapted to ensure the safety and efficacy of transformational learning experiences in the context of the global health crisis.

### **Contribute to Pedagogical Knowledge**

The primary aim was to contribute valuable insights to the pedagogical literature. By identifying and validating effective practices for instructors engaged in STSA programmes, this research aspired to enhance the scholarly discourse surrounding transformative global learning.

Through this comprehensive investigation, the study aimed to provide evidence-based guidance for instructors, educational institutions, and policymakers seeking to optimize the impact of STSA programmes in fostering community-based global learners in a safe and transformative manner.

## **METHOD**

This study used a mixed-method approach to evaluate the transformative effect of a STSA programme called Health and Human Services (HHS) 450/650, offered by the School of Health and Human Services at Nazareth University in New York. The study used a pre-post-study design for the quantitative part and critical reflection for the qualitative part.

HHS 450/650 Caribbean was a course designed to provide students with an immersive experience in the health and behavioural health delivery system in the Caribbean. It included a service-learning component in Kingston, Jamaica and was open to both undergraduate and postgraduate students in the School of Health and Human Services. Despite being run multiple times in the past, this study was conducted among the students who pursued it during the COVID-19 pandemic. Two batches were selected: Cohort I, which undertook the STSA in March 2020, and Cohort II in March 2022. There were 15

students in Cohort I and 14 in Cohort II, with different majors such as Communication Science, Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, and Social Work.

The Institutional Review Board of Nazareth College approved the study protocol. To conduct the quantitative part of the study, the researcher developed a 10-item, 4-point rubric based on the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) VALUE (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) rubrics (Rhodes, 2008), with prior permission. The items included in the rubric were Civic Action and Reflection, Perspective Taking, Knowledge of Cultural and Worldview Frameworks, Empathy Skills, Verbal and Nonverbal Communication Skills, Curiosity Attitude, Openness Attitude, Analysis of Knowledge, Global Self-awareness, and Knowledge of Cultural Self-awareness.

Participation in the study was voluntary and students were given a confidential number to protect their privacy. Before embarking on the study abroad trip, students rated their level of competency in each of the ten items on the rubric. Upon completing the course, the students completed the rubric again. The rubric could be completed in five to ten minutes and the data was analysed using IBM-SPSS 25. It was hypothesised that students' competency on each item on the rubric differed significantly before and after the STSA for both cohorts. The paired sample t-test was used to test the hypotheses.

The qualitative part of the study involved critical reflection on the instructor practices of the faculty members/instructors who were in charge of the programme. The researcher, who was one of the instructors, critically reflected on the practices adopted by them in the HHS 450/650 Caribbean programme. The results were collated and interpreted not only to provide evidence-based guidance for instructors and educational institutions but also to enrich the broader conversation on the transformative potential of STSA experiences.

## RESULTS

### Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

Table 1 provides a breakdown of the demographic characteristics of the study participants, categorised by two cohorts (Cohort I and Cohort II), with a specific focus on gender, course enrolment, and prior international experience.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants**

Variables	Cohort I (number)	Cohort II (number)
Gender		
Male	1	1
Female	14	13
Course		
Undergraduate	15	12
Postgraduate	0	2
Prior international experience		
Yes	0	0
No	15	14
Total	15	14

The data indicated a balanced gender distribution across both cohorts, with one male participant in each cohort and a predominant representation of females. Cohort I had 14 female participants, while Cohort II had 13. The study participants were primarily undergraduate students, with 15 in Cohort I and 12 in Cohort II. Notably, there were no postgraduate participants in Cohort I, while Cohort II included two postgraduate students. Interestingly, none of the participants in either cohort reported prior international experience. In Cohort I, all 15 participants had no prior international exposure; In Cohort II, 14 out of 14 participants shared the same characteristics.

### Comparative Analysis of Pre- and Post-Trip Competencies in Cohort I

#### *Hypothesis 1*

This study hypothesised that participants in Cohort I will exhibit significant changes in various competencies, including Civic Action and Reflection, Perspective Taking, Knowledge of Cultural and Worldview Frameworks, Empathy Skills, Verbal and Nonverbal Communication Skills, Curiosity Attitude, Openness Attitude, Analysis of Knowledge, Global Self-awareness, and Knowledge of Cultural Self-awareness, following their STSA experience.

Table 2 presents the paired sample t-test results comparing pre- and post-trip scores for various competencies in the assessment rubric within Cohort I. Each row represents a specific factor, while the columns provide information on the condition (Pre-Trip or Post-Trip), mean, standard deviation, degrees of freedom, t-value, and significance level. The significance level is notably set at  $p < .001$ , indicating a high level of statistical significance.

The results presented in Table 2 offer a nuanced understanding of how participants' competencies evolved in response to immersive cross-cultural experiences. Notably, it is essential to mention that statistical significance is absent for Civic Action and Reflection, as well as Knowledge of Cultural and Worldview Frameworks. Despite this, the observed changes in the remaining spectrum of skills and attitudes in the rubric support the transformative impact of STSA experiences, aligning with hypothesised positive effects on cross-cultural competencies. The 95% confidence interval further enhances the robustness of the results.

**Comparative Analysis of Pre- and Post-Trip Competencies in Cohort II**

*Hypothesis II*

This study hypothesised that participants in Cohort II will demonstrate significant changes in various competencies, including Civic Action and Reflection,

Perspective Taking, Knowledge of Cultural and Worldview Frameworks, Empathy Skills, Verbal and Nonverbal Communication Skills, Curiosity Attitude, Openness Attitude, Analysis of Knowledge, Global Self-awareness, and Knowledge of Cultural Self-awareness, following their STSA experience.

Table 3 encapsulates the t-test results, comparing pre- and post-trip scores for various competencies within Cohort II. Each row represents a specific aspect of the learning outcome, providing information on the condition (Pre-Trip or Post-Trip), mean, standard deviation, degrees of freedom, t-value, and significance level. Significance is notably set at  $p < .001$ , underlining a high level of statistical significance. The 95% confidence interval further fortifies the reliability of the results.

The results of the study indicate significant improvements in all assessed competencies, providing evidence of the transformative impact of the STSA programme on the participants of Cohort II. These

**Table 2: Paired-Sample t-Test for Variables Scores- Cohort I**

Variable	Condition	Mean	SD	df	t	Sig.
Civic Action and Reflection	Pre-Trip	1.00	.000	14	-3.500	.004
	Post-Trip	1.47	.516	14		
Perspective Taking	Pre-Trip	1.00	.000	14	-31.553	.000
	Post-Trip	3.87	.352	14		
Knowledge of Cultural and Worldview Frameworks	Pre-Trip	1.00	.000	14	-4.000	.001
	Post-Trip	1.53	.516	14		
Empathy Skills	Pre-Trip	1.00	.000	14	-31.553	.000
	Post-Trip	3.87	.352	14		
Verbal and Nonverbal Communication Skills	Pre-Trip	1.27	.458	14	-14.697	.000
	Post-Trip	3.67	.488	14		
Curiosity Attitude	Pre-Trip	1.27	.458	14	-19.858	.000
	Post-Trip	3.87	.352	14		
Openness Attitude	Pre-Trip	1.00	.000	14	-31.553	.000
	Post-Trip	3.87	.352	14		
Analysis of Knowledge	Pre-Trip	1.00	.000	14	-31.553	.000
	Post-Trip	3.87	.352	14		
Global Self-awareness	Pre-Trip	1.00	.000	14	-26.192	.000
	Post-Trip	3.80	.414	14		
Knowledge of Cultural Self-awareness	Pre-Trip	1.00	.000	14	-21.192	.000
	Post-Trip	3.80	.414	14		

*Confidence interval: 95%*  
*Significance:  $p < .001$*

*SD-standard deviation*  
*df-degree of freedom*

**Table 3: Paired-Sample t-Test for Variables Scores- Cohort 1**

Variable	Condition	Mean	SD	df	t	Sig.
Civic Action and Reflection	Pre-Trip	1.00	0.000	13	-19.887	.000
	Post-Trip	3.64	0.497	13		
Perspective Taking	Pre-Trip	1.00	0.000	13	-21.663	.000
	Post-Trip	3.71	0.469	13		
Knowledge of Cultural and Worldview Frameworks	Pre-Trip	1.00	0.000	13	-19.887	.000
	Post-Trip	3.64	0.497	13		
Empathy Skills	Pre-Trip	1.00	0.000	13	-21.663	.000
	Post-Trip	3.71	0.469	13		
Verbal and Nonverbal Communication Skills	Pre-Trip	1.14	0.363	13	-14.381	.000
	Post-Trip	3.64	0.497	13		
Curiosity Attitude	Pre-Trip	1.64	0.497	13	-11.015	.000
	Post-Trip	3.64	0.497	13		
Openness Attitude	Pre-Trip	1.57	0.514	13	-10.333	.000
	Post-Trip	3.79	0.426	13		
Analysis of Knowledge	Pre-Trip	1.00	0.000	13	-21.663	.000
	Post-Trip	3.71	0.469	13		
Global Self-awareness	Pre-Trip	1.00	0.000	13	-21.663	.000
	Post-Trip	3.71	0.469	13		
Knowledge of Cultural Self-awareness	Pre-Trip	1.00	0.000	13	-21.663	.000
	Post-Trip	3.71	0.469	13		

*Confidence interval: 95%*  
*Significance: p<.001*

*SD-standard deviation*  
*df-degree of freedom*

findings are consistent with the anticipated positive effects on cross-cultural competencies. The comprehensive analysis, together with the confidence interval, enhances the credibility and depth of the study’s findings, emphasizing the various ways in which the participants of Cohort II benefited from their cross-cultural experiences.

Collectively, the findings suggest that STSA programmes contribute significantly to the development of cross-cultural competencies. Both cohorts experienced meaningful transformations in diverse skills and qualities in the rubric, emphasizing the holistic impact of immersive cross-cultural experiences. The results underscore the educational efficacy of STSA programmes in fostering a range of competencies crucial for effective engagement in a globalised world.

**A Critical Reflection on Instructor Practices in the HHS 450/650 Caribbean**

The HHS 450/650 Caribbean STSA programme stands as a testament to the potential for transformative learning experiences within the realm of global education.

While obtaining strong statistical results is encouraging, this critical reflection seeks to delve beyond the numbers, addressing the crucial questions: How did the STSA programme promote deeper learning? What transpired for the students to have a transformational learning experience? The unpacking of the data suggested a collection of practices that not only yielded robust statistical outcomes but also supported transformational learning, reinforcing a global perspective.

This critical reflection delves into the instructional practices employed to cultivate a rich and impactful learning environment for participants. The programme’s design intricately weaves together classroom preparation, safety protocols, group cohesion strategies, and immersive service-learning experiences in a high-poverty isolated community. As we scrutinize the instructor practices, this reflective analysis aims to unravel the pedagogical approaches that contributed to the programme’s success in fostering transformative learning among the participants. The journey unfolds through three distinct classroom sections that laid the groundwork for the transformative

experiences, guiding participants from trip preparation to the intricacies of service learning as a pedagogical method. Subsequently, the narrative transitions to the in-country programme, unravelling the multifaceted interactions with local health providers, clinics, hospitals, social justice sites, and, most profoundly, the immersive service work within a marginalised community. This exploration serves as a critical lens through which we assess how instructor practices played a pivotal role in shaping not only the academic content but also the profound personal and cultural transformations experienced by participants.

### *Pre-Screening Students for Physical and Mental Well-being*

In the intricate tapestry of a STSA programme, the instructor's practice of pre-screening students for physical and mental well-being emerges as a crucial thread, weaving together the safety, accessibility, and transformative potential of the entire educational journey. Drawing insights from scholarly perspectives (Morse et al., 2017; Niehaus et al., 2022), this practice underscores the imperative for educational institutions to adopt comprehensive medical disclosures and health histories, especially when the travel involves extended flights or high levels of in-country activity.

In the context of STSA experiences, where the temporal landscape may be condensed, the recognition of varying climates and foods as potential triggers for negative emotional reactions becomes paramount (Bathke & Kim, 2016). Recognising this, the pre-screening process becomes a proactive measure, allowing for the identification and mitigation of potential emotional challenges that might arise during the programme. This approach aligns with the overarching goal of enhancing safety and reducing the likelihood of having to send a student home due to unforeseen emotional challenges. Institutions have implemented various strategies to facilitate this pre-screening, such as engaging student health offices to conduct physical exams before travel (Lindeman, 2017). Another instrumental practice involves having students fill out medication cards in advance, providing essential information such as current medical diagnoses, prescription drugs, and emergency contact details. This meticulous attention to health details not only contributes to safety during travel but also serves as a foundational element in fostering a culture of well-being among students.

The delicate balance between ensuring safety and promoting accessibility was acknowledged in HHS 450/

650 Caribbean. The inclusion decisions, as guided by the pre-screening process, were consciously limited to considerations of physical and mental health challenges, reflecting a commitment to making STSA experiences accessible to a diverse student body. Beyond the immediate safety considerations, this practice had unintended positive ripple effects. The heightened focus on student health opened a meaningful conversation about well-being, particularly in the context of a pandemic. The discourse extended beyond the confines of the pre-screening process, fostering an environment where students learned not only to safeguard their health but also to appreciate the importance of daily habits in protecting themselves and others.

In essence, the instructor's practice of pre-screening students for physical and mental well-being transcended the realm of safety protocols. It encapsulated the broader educational ethos of perspective-taking and openness attitude, as advocated by the AAC&U. The development of students' own sense of wellness becomes foundational, equipping them not only to navigate the complexities of international travel but also to cultivate a mindset that promotes well-being, both personally and globally.

### *Pre-Departure Sessions*

The pre-departure phase is an opportune moment to set the stage for transformative learning by addressing cultural nuances and preparing students for the challenges and opportunities inherent in international experiences. Comprehensive pre-departure orientations contribute significantly to the success of study abroad programmes. These classes are more than logistical briefings; they serve as a forum to instil cultural sensitivity, resilience, and a global perspective (Lemmons, 2023). Pre-departure sessions can enable students to better understand the diversity and complexity of themselves and others in intercultural interactions (Holmes et al., 2015).

In HHS 450/650, pre-departure classes emerged as a critical and multifaceted instructor practice. These preparatory sessions served as a linchpin, shaping the trajectory of students' experiences, fostering transformative learning, and building a foundation for meaningful cross-cultural engagement. These sessions, comprising three distinct class sections, were meticulously designed to navigate a spectrum of crucial aspects, ranging from logistical readiness to the cultivation of a robust

understanding of the host nation, the intricacies of service learning, and the specifics of the impending in-country service project.

The deliberate focus on trip preparation within these sessions laid the groundwork for a well-informed and resilient cohort. The inclusion of safety protocols went beyond mere formality, instilling a sense of security and well-being among participants, crucial for a successful and positive study abroad experience. Moreover, promoting group cohesion within the pre-departure sessions was a strategic move that transcended the traditional boundaries of classroom education. These sessions became forums for fostering connections and building a supportive community among participants. The emphasis on social bonds recognised the profound impact that a cohesive group dynamic can have on the overall study abroad journey, fostering collaboration and shared learning experiences.

The inclusion of content on the host nation delved beyond the surface, seeking to instill cultural sensitivity and a nuanced understanding of the local context. These sessions acted as cultural gateways, preparing participants for the complexities and diversities they were about to encounter. By offering insights into the cultural nuances, customs, and mannerisms, participants were primed to navigate cross-cultural interactions with grace and respect. On the other hand, the incorporation of service-learning pedagogy into the pre-departure curriculum was a visionary approach. It not only introduced the theoretical underpinnings of service learning but also set the stage for a meaningful engagement with the impending in-country service project.

In essence, the pre-departure sessions served as a compass, guiding participants through the complexities of the impending study abroad journey. The deliberate attention to logistical, cultural, and service-learning dimensions reflected a commitment to nurturing a cohort poised for transformative learning. These sessions, beyond being preparatory steps, laid the foundation for an enriching and impactful study abroad experience, fostering a mindset of openness, cultural sensitivity, and collaborative learning among participants.

### ***Safety Practices***

Ensuring the safety of students during STSA programmes demands a proactive and all-encompassing strategy. Therefore, this critical reflection meticulously

examines the diverse safety practices advocated, covering pre-trip guidelines, student-to-faculty ratios, group dynamics, and considerations surrounding specific circumstances like romantic involvement and alcohol consumption.

The emphasis on establishing safety expectations from the outset of the programme resonated with the best practices outlined by Buddan *et al.* (2014). The incorporation of dos and don'ts established a framework that not only imparted information but also nurtured a culture of safety consciousness among participants. The suggestion to formulate institutional safety guidelines, with manageable student-to-faculty ratios, reflected a keen understanding of the pivotal role faculty play in ensuring a secure and enriching experience.

The adherence to a six-to-one student-to-faculty ratio, in contrast to the observed challenges of a 25:1 ratio, underscored the significance of maintaining a manageable group size for effective supervision. Recognizing that an overloaded course could compromise safety and detract from the educational experience emphasized the need for a well-balanced approach. Furthermore, the promotion of group activities and the implementation of a buddy system emerged as practices that enhanced safety. These measures, combined with vigilance against unstructured night activities in crowded settings, contributed to the overall safety of the group. The consideration of specific circumstances, such as romantic involvement and alcohol consumption, demonstrated a nuanced approach to potential challenges, emphasizing prevention and pre-emptive discussions.

The integration of mental health considerations within safety practices signified a progressive stance. Daily check-ins, nightly debriefings, and the use of a pre-trip medication sheet exemplified a commitment to holistic well-being. Destigmatizing mental health challenges and promoting open communication aligned with contemporary approaches to student support. The acknowledgement of the COVID-19 context further underscored the dynamic nature of safety considerations. The proactive approach to designing a group plan for navigating public spaces and attending to students with specific needs demonstrated adaptability and a commitment to the welfare of all participants.

In essence, the instructor's safety practices transcended a mere checklist, embodying a philosophy that

integrated physical, mental, and contextual dimensions. By adopting a proactive stance, fostering open communication, and tailoring safety measures to the unique challenges of each study abroad experience, the instructors made significant contributions to creating a safe and conducive learning environment. This holistic approach aligned with the overarching goal of promoting positive civic action and reflection, ensuring that the study abroad experience became not only educational but also a transformative and secure journey for all participants.

### *Promoting Group Cohesion*

The significance of group cohesion as a predictor of student learning is well-supported by research (Gupta & Bakker, 2020; Thornton et al., 2020). Moreover, the AAC&U underscores the pivotal role of instructors in developing students' empathy skills, with a specific focus on promoting group cohesion during STSA programmes. Recognizing that positive group cohesion is integral to both safety and creating a conducive learning environment, this critical reflection explores the multifaceted strategies employed to enhance group dynamics and foster empathy development among study participants.

Instructors of HHS 450/650 played a pivotal role in shaping the group dynamic, fostering empathy, and ensuring a transformative learning experience for participants. By prioritizing group cohesion through intentional practices, including shared meals, talent recognition, and collaborative activities, instructors created a positive and supportive environment that enhances the overall safety and educational impact of the study abroad journey. The process began from the inception of the group, urging instructors to invest time in discussing past travel experiences and assessing group dynamics. Activities such as sharing hopes, and worries, and engaging in team-building icebreakers contributed to establishing a positive group atmosphere. One noteworthy practice involved sharing a reflective meal before travel, featuring the cuisine of the host country, as a bonding opportunity.

Delegating and rotating faculty roles during travel was identified as a key strategy to enhance group cohesion. Recognizing and showcasing students' unique talents, such as map-reading, technological skills, or photography, further contributed to strengthening the group's bond. Innovative activities like the "Iron Chef" competition, where students collaborate to prepare a meal using local

produce, not only encouraged teamwork but also fostered community cohesion through shared experiences. Efforts to instil punctuality and timeliness within the group were identified as crucial to eliminating potential frustrations. Daily verbal reflections emerged as a particularly effective practice, providing a platform for participants to discuss highlights of the day, share positive and negative experiences, and collectively strategize improvements. This daily ritual not only reinforced learning but also deepened the instructor's understanding of each student on a more profound level than traditional classroom interactions allow.

### *Fostering Interprofessional Collaboration*

Incorporating faculty leadership from multiple disciplines in interprofessional study abroad trips is an approach that extends beyond mere representation, actively modelling interprofessional principles throughout the journey. This critical reflection delves into the significance of such multidisciplinary engagement, emphasising its impact on safety, group cohesion, and the unique learning opportunities it affords participants.

Faculty leadership drawn from diverse disciplines not only served as a living illustration of interprofessional principles outlined in the course syllabus but also allowed students to witness collaboration across varying disciplinary perspectives (Gilliland et al., 2016). Leveraging the strengths of each discipline contributed to a safer and more cohesive trip, enhancing both the learning experience and the efficient execution of daily tasks. Effective communication among faculty members emerged as a crucial element for ensuring safety and group functioning. Daily and frequent exchanges were essential for reporting schedule changes, updates on students' physical health, coordination for meals, and determining appropriate downtime. The dynamics of faculty personalities, coupled with their professional expertise, directly influenced the students' experience, providing a model for the multidisciplinary approach. Sustainable work opportunities, such as in-home hospice visits and health screenings in high-poverty areas, served as platforms for faculty to lead multi-professional teams, exemplifying interprofessional collaboration in action.

The incorporation of faculty from diverse disciplines in STSA programmes presents a unique opportunity to model and practice interprofessional collaboration. Beyond



theoretical discussions, the experiential learning afforded by such trips allows students to witness the value of working outside siloed professional approaches. This holistic and multidisciplinary approach not only enhances safety and group cohesion but also enriches students' curiosity attitude by exposing them to the practical benefits of interprofessional team dynamics.

### ***Cultivating In-Country Partnerships***

The HHS 450 / 650 Caribbean offered a unique opportunity for students to gain a deeper understanding of cultural and worldview frameworks, beyond what a traditional college classroom could offer. However, this experience was not just about travel - it was greatly enhanced through purposeful partnerships established in the host country. These partnerships not only contributed to cultural immersion but also served as an important foundation for safety and emergency support.

To build successful partnerships, trust had to be established through reciprocal exchanges and consistent engagement with in-country professionals and fellow instructors. Leveraging technology allowed for real-time communication, which fostered continuous collaboration and understanding. High-impact partnering practices included regular discussions, written memorandums of understanding, and shared experiences such as meals and glimpses into personal lives, all of which fostered meaningful connections.

Reciprocal international partnerships provided diverse learning opportunities, such as hosting professionals from the host country in the USA for training exchanges and cultural visits. State grants played a crucial role in easing financial burdens and supporting reciprocal hosting, deepening partnerships. Designing trips that included attending conferences held by each institution, building scholarships, and facilitating faculty exchanges also contributed to sustaining and enriching partnerships.

It was important to navigate economic differences and leverage campus resources as an equalising factor, particularly for institutions with varying cost structures. Engaging higher education institution leadership was key to promoting growth and garnering institutional support. Identifying committed faculty as champions of the partnership ensured sustained commitment, as they played a pivotal role in conveying the partnership's value to higher-level administrators and securing necessary resources.

Having dedicated faculty as points of contact helped prevent a drift in commitment amid competing institutional demands. The program embedded in for-credit courses on a regular schedule contributed to the success and longevity of partnerships. In essence, the deliberate cultivation of in-country partnerships emerged as a vital practice, not only enhancing cultural learning but also fostering safety, institutional support, and long-term success for STSA programmes.

### ***Nurturing Intercultural Learning***

One of the key objectives of the author's teaching philosophy is to develop global self-awareness and cultural knowledge, which aligns with the AAC&U competencies. The STSA programme offered numerous learning opportunities, which were challenging to comprehend in a traditional classroom setting. Travelling to different places provided a unique learning experience, as one is exposed to different norms and standards. For instance, in the USA, the general practice is to drive fast to reach the destination as soon as possible. However, in the host country, people tend to drive slowly, honking their horns to let others know of their presence, which is not seen as an act of aggression. The students, especially Gen Z students with shorter attention spans, learned a lot from the simple act of driving on the roads.

One of the challenging areas for students from the Global North was the integrated healthcare approach in the Global South. Many students were initially sceptical of the Global South's medical practices, perceiving them as inferior to Western medicine. However, when interprofessional health students immersed themselves in the Global South's medical systems, their perception shifted from "less than" to "value-added" understanding. This shift was facilitated by reflective writing, which helped expand their belief models and internalize new perspectives.

### ***Daily Student Check-Ins***

One of the pivotal daily activities involved diligent check-ins with each student. Establishing robust communication channels between instructors and students emerged as a cornerstone of effective safety practices in this STSA programme (McCarthy, 2016). While short-term study abroad received a commendation for its high-impact nature, this acclaim was, in part, attributed to the

intentional disruption of students' comfort zones—placing them in unfamiliar environments with unknown cuisines and significant distances from their loved ones. These variables posed considerable challenges for students to navigate. The rigours of intercontinental travel, coupled with adjustments to diverse factors like diet, climate, and hygiene, had the potential to destabilise students. Students underwent a dynamic process wherein excitement about exploring new facets of the destination one day could transform into profound homesickness the next.

Regular check-ins with each student became imperative for instructors. Prior efforts to acquaint oneself with students before departure significantly facilitated the assessment of emerging challenges. Implementing practices such as rotating breakfast companions daily and intentionally mingling with different students during activities fostered stronger relationships with each traveller. Mindfulness about potential disconnections and proactive efforts to deepen those relationships were emphasised. Additionally, incorporating an evening group processing time, featuring a brief “best part/worst part of the day” circle, not only promoted cohesion but also provided valuable insights into each student's well-being.

In instances where a student faced difficulties, direct communication was pivotal. Despite students' initial reluctance to come forward, they often became forthcoming when asked about their needs. Recognising the inevitability of students encountering medical or emotional challenges, preparedness was key. Faculty were ready to delegate responsibilities among themselves to ensure that the students received the necessary attention. These practices gained renewed significance in the context of the ever-changing demands posed by the COVID-19 situation. In essence, instructors actively demonstrated the AAC&U competency of perspective-taking, not just as a principle but as a method of effective teaching.

### ***Promoting Experiential Learning***

Instructors play a crucial role in maximizing learning outcomes in STSA courses by effectively integrating experiential components with course learning objectives (Harrison & Palmer, 2019; Wilson et al., 2016). Acknowledging the time constraints inherent in such programmes, a strategic pedagogical approach has evolved over the past two decades to structure learning effectively. HHS 450/650 by leveraging pre-trip classes to deliver content and prepare students for in-country experiences

proved instrumental in mitigating potential “culture shock.” A key aspect of this preparatory teaching involved cultivating self-awareness and priming students for meaningful interactions within the host country.

To ensure optimal learning, students ventured beyond the confines of the tour bus and engaged directly with local communities. Developing both verbal and non-verbal communication skills became a transformative opportunity inherent in STSA experiences. While prioritizing safety, instructors were encouraged to facilitate meaningful interactions within the country, mirroring local practices. Emphasizing active engagement with diversity was paramount, directing students to sites relevant to their professional disciplines. Actively posing questions to students during visits served to seamlessly integrate experiential knowledge with academic understanding. Instructors anticipated these opportunities in advance, recognising the evolving development of students throughout the trip and adjusting the depth of understanding accordingly.

### ***Using Reflective Writing for Deeper Learning***

A vetted high-impact teaching practice involves the use of structured reflective writing to enhance the depth of learning (Williams, 2017). The essence of reflective writing lies in connecting experiences to course learning, prompting students to contemplate their impact on thinking and professional practice upon returning home (Savicki & Price, 2023). In reflective writing, students construct meaning rather than regurgitate facts or ruminate about experiences.

In HHS 450/650, in-country reflective writing, facilitated through devices like tablets or laptops, proved enjoyable for students and aligned with diverse disciplines. Instructors were encouraged to anticipate learning opportunities in the itinerary and craft reflective questions accordingly. Assignments addressed aspects of diversity, global citizenship, and interpersonal engagement, ensuring a comprehensive reflection on personal growth. Upon returning home, instructors were advised to implement a larger reflective assignment, synthesizing all acquired knowledge and tying it to course objectives and professional practice. This final reflective assignment serves as a capstone, solidifying the learning from the trip and providing an avenue to address the AAC&U competency of knowledge analysis.

### Limitations of the Study

It is important to note that the study's findings might not apply to a broader student population or different study abroad programmes with distinct structures and objectives due to the limited sample size and specific cohorts studied. The research focuses on a certain set of STSA programmes, making the results context-specific. Various programme structures, destinations, or cultural settings could lead to diverse outcomes. Additionally, the use of self-reported data may result in social desirability bias. Students might provide responses that align with expectations, potentially leading to skewed data. The rubrics used to measure competencies might have their limitations, and the tools may not entirely capture the complex nature of transformative learning or subtle changes. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into the influence of instructor practices in short-term study abroad programmes on student competencies. Future research could address these limitations through more extensive and diverse samples and longitudinal designs.

### DISCUSSION

STSA programmes are powerful tools for transformative learning, and the instructors' practices play a pivotal role in shaping the diverse competencies outlined in the rubrics. Practices such as group activities, buddy systems, and structured reflective writing have contributed to civic action and reflection. Both cohorts have shown enhanced civic engagement, highlighting the significance of intentional practices that foster reflection and action in response to global experiences. Communication strategies, daily check-ins, and diverse group interactions have helped instructors model and encourage perspective-taking among students. The cohorts have demonstrated an increased ability to consider diverse viewpoints, showcasing the effectiveness of instructor practices aimed at fostering empathy and understanding. In-country partnerships, pre-trip classes, and engagement with local cultures have contributed to students' understanding of cultural and worldview frameworks. Both cohorts have shown improved cultural awareness, suggesting that intentional instructor-led practices have significantly contributed to expanding students' cultural competencies.

Regular check-ins, addressing individual circumstances and encouraging open communication, were

found to contribute significantly to the development of empathy skills. Both cohorts displayed increased empathy, demonstrating the success of such strategies. Additionally, direct teaching on how to engage with diversity, immersion in local settings, and regular communication were shown to contribute to the development of effective communication skills. Both cohorts exhibited improved verbal and nonverbal communication, showcasing the impact of practices that involve students in authentic cross-cultural interactions.

Initiatives such as intentional trip design, reciprocal international partnerships, and fostering a curiosity attitude were found to contribute to students' openness to new experiences. Both cohorts displayed heightened curiosity and openness, indicating that instructor-led initiatives play a crucial role in shaping students' attitudes towards exploration and learning. Structured reflective writing, post-trip assignments, and integration of experiences into course learning objectives were shown to contribute to analytical skills. Both cohorts demonstrated an enhanced ability to analyze knowledge, emphasizing the impact of instructor practices that encourage critical reflection and synthesis of experiences. Interdisciplinary leadership, cultural immersion, and reflective writing were found to contribute to global self-awareness and knowledge of cultural nuances. Both cohorts exhibited improved self-awareness in a global context, emphasizing the success of instructor-led initiatives that encourage introspection and understanding of cultural differences.

### CONCLUSION

This study highlights how instructors play a vital role in shaping the transformative learning experience of students in STSA programmes. The research shows that well-designed programmes and adept instructors can significantly influence progress in competencies like Civic Action, Perspective-taking, Cultural Awareness, and more. Although there are some limitations to the study, the findings offer valuable insights for educators and policymakers, emphasising the importance of a holistic approach to STSA initiatives. The study also underscores the significance of integrating cross-cultural competencies to prepare students as empathetic, and globally aware individuals. Future research can build on these insights to further explore the dynamics of instructor practices in STSA programmes.

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