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* **Wood, C.** *

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Community Impacts of International Service-Learning and Study Abroad: An Analysis of Focus Groups with Program Leaders

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Abstract
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Introduction

While respect for community is central to the goals and values of international service-learning, and commitment to the development of strong cross-cultural partnerships is clear (Chisolm, 2003; Tonkin, et al), there has been little research to evaluate the actual and potential effects of ISL programs on host communities (Cruz and Giles, 2000, p. 29). Further, in the few cases where such effects are considered, they are limited to the direct impact of service on agencies and individuals served (see Tonkin at al, 2004, especially Deeley). However, there is reason to believe that unintended and indirect effects of international service-learning are such that some ISL programs may have negative social and environmental impacts on communities that outweigh the positive, especially in certain areas of the global South. Once the potential avenues for these effects are understood, best practices may be developed to reduce negative impacts and promote positive ones. The urgency of addressing these concerns is increasing, as the focus of international service-learning programs shifts to more vulnerable communities in Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Tonkin et al, 2004, 1; Koh Chin and Bhandari, 2006, p. 58; Woolf, 2006, p. 135).[1]

The obvious gap in the literature combined with our research team's strong belief in the value of international service-learning led us to our current project. Much can be learned about the unintended impacts of foreign visitors on host communities by reviewing research on the impacts of tourism (see Schroeder et al, 2009, p. 142). However, the experiences of program faculty are also an important and accessible resource. We were interested in whether faculty and staff who had actually been abroad with students thought about the potentially negative community impacts of their programs, and also if we could benefit from their insights into how our students affect communities and how we might improve standards for best practices in

[1] The general literature on study abroad similarly gives little attention to the effects on communities of international programs. Neither of the two professional journals in the field, *Frontiers or the Journal of Studies in International Education* has published an article on the topic. The Forum on Education Abroad's *Code of Ethics for Education Abroad* recommends that sending institutions and organizations demonstrate "awareness of the program's impact on the local community, a commitment to creating sustainable local relationships that are mutually beneficial, and an effort to minimize any negative effects on the host society" (2008b, p. 3). While this is a powerful statement, and indicates increasing discussion of the topic among professionals in the field, the examples of best practices with respect to host communities provided in the Forum's report target the regulation of student behavior, through orientations and codes of conduct (2008b, p. 7-8). They do not consider more systematic social and environmental effects of study abroad, which are likely to require institutional analysis and action based on a much deeper understanding of what can happen to host communities as a result of students' visits. A few articles have also touched on the topic (see Woolf, 2006; Elliot and Johnson, 2007; Ogden, 2007-2008; Sumka, 1999, 2001; and Stephenson, 1999). However, the focus of these brief discussions has been on host universities and home-stay families, rather than the broader community. There are promising signs of change: the Forum is working to revise its code of ethics to include new sustainability standards for best practice, via a subcommittee chaired by Daniel Greenberg, Director of the non-profit study abroad provider, Living Routes (Greenberg, 2010). To review the Forum's draft sustainability standards, see Living Routes, 2009.

light of a better understanding of these impacts. As part of this effort, we conducted a series of focus groups with program leaders at our university. Because the community impacts that most concerned us were not specific to international service-learning, we did not limit ourselves to the leaders of ISL programs, but included a large sample of other short-term study abroad program faculty as well.

The information gleaned from these focus groups suggest that, with a few exceptions, program leaders do not consider impacts on host communities during the design or implementation of their programs. If asked, they assume those impacts are positive. However, they are very open to considering ways to mitigate negative impacts and promote more positive ones, once the issue has been raised by their colleagues, and collectively they are able to generate many excellent strategies for doing so. Insights from faculty who do consider impacts can lead to a deeper understanding of potential concerns.

The focus groups also suggest that once awareness is raised on the issue, many of the potentially negative community impacts are obvious with relatively straightforward solutions. Others, however, are not as obvious. For some of these less obvious impacts, it seems clear what should be done once they are detected, but others (too many!) are neither easy to see nor easy to solve once they are seen. Thus we have no simple answers to many of the complex issues raised in our focus groups, and expect that in some areas there simply are no set answers. However, we feel comfortable with the following general conclusions, as well as the more specific ones discussed below: (1) the broader community impacts of international service-learning and other study abroad programs need to be considered and addressed if they are to be practiced ethically, as the potential for doing damage is high in many cases; (2) much of what needs to done lies in informed planning, thoughtful preparation, and regular discussion/reflection throughout the experience (see Galiardi and Koehn, this issue); and (3) institutional as well as personal commitment is necessary for these concerns to be addressed.

Methodology

Our research team for the focus groups was composed of two student development professionals who promote international service-learning on our campus, two faculty specializing in international development, both with service-learning experience, and another faculty member with research expertise in tourism. Each person on the research team had led or accompanied at least two short-term study abroad programs, the majority of which had service-learning content. The project initially arose in the context of discussions about the community impacts of international Alternative Spring Break programs.

Focus groups were conducted in January 2008 with faculty and professional staff on our campus who have led or accompanied international service-learning or other short-term study abroad programs through our Office of International Education and Development during the 5

years prior to the study.[2] Our sample was not random but included a high proportion (37%) of all potential participants.

The team sought participants who had taken programs to what we considered potentially "vulnerable areas," places and communities we saw as more rather than less likely to be injured by such programs, and some who had gone to places deemed "not vulnerable" (Europe, New Zealand, and Australia). At least one program in New Zealand was conducted in part at Maori sites, so it was considered potentially vulnerable. When a choice was made, our bias was toward (1) full-time regular faculty or staff rather than adjunct or part-time; (2) those who had led more recent and multiple programs rather than less recent and/or a single trip; (3) those whose programs had larger rather than smaller numbers of students; (4) those from un(der)represented departments, colleges or geographic program destinations; and (5) faculty and staff with academic expertise in global or area studies and/or with other international experience.

In total, 41 faculty and professional staff were asked to participate, of whom 27 agreed; one of these 27 was unable to come due to illness, resulting in a participation rate of 63.4%. Records show that among them, the 26 actual participants had led or accompanied 63 short-term ISL or other study abroad programs in the 5 years previous to the focus groups. Several had led multiple programs before that time, so the combined experience represented in our study was even higher. 14 of the 26 participated in programs with a community engagement component, whether officially or unofficially "service-learning."

Programs led by focus group participants were conducted during spring and winter breaks as well as summer. All conferred academic credit, including Alternative Spring Breaks, which have academic preparation as a course requirement on our campus. Length of time abroad ranged from 1 week to 2 months, and most programs included classes held in advance of travel. Destinations represented included Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Belize, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Australia, Fiji, New Zealand, China, Japan, India, Ghana, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Poland, Slovakia, Italy, Spain, and Wales.

Most participants were known to one or more members of the research team, and most knew one or more of the other focus group participants in their group, which we believe enhanced discussion. We purposely mixed participants such that people in the same academic unit or program were not in the same focus group, when possible, in order to maximize diversity within each. A few participants were aware of our research and had discussed it with one or more of the team.

[2] On our campus, short-term international service-learning and other study abroad programs are generally developed and implemented by faculty and staff on campus rather than through vendors.

Participation was requested by email with follow-up by email and telephone. Participants were sent the questions they would be asked three days prior to the focus groups, and were given copies of these questions to refer to during the focus groups. The questions were made general enough to apply to all programs abroad, whether or not they included service-learning content, in part because we did not want to lead the direction of participants' responses:

> 1. As you think back on the trip(s) you have taken with students, what do you think were the effects of that trip on the local community (be as specific as you can)? Which effects do you see as positive, which negative, and which are you unsure about?
>
> 2. If you imagine the potential impacts of students studying abroad on local communities generally, or if you remember other student trips you have read or heard about (i.e. not necessarily your own trip), what negative effects on local communities would concern you? What positive benefits of students' study abroad could result for a community? What effects might be difficult to define in terms of whether they are positive or negative?
>
> 3. Did you think about the effects of your trip on the local community when you were designing or preparing for the trip? If so, what did you do? If not, is there anything you would do differently now?
>
> 4. If we want to create "best practices" for student trips abroad, which minimize harm and maximize benefit to local communities, what should we be thinking about? What specific steps do you recommend to others to achieve these goals?

In addition to these questions, a "statement of purpose" was read at the beginning of each focus group which included the following: "In these focus groups, we are interested in gathering trip leaders' impressions on the effects of study abroad programs on the host communities they visit. We want to emphasize that we are **not** concerned here with the effects of study abroad on students, but of students on local people." This is significant because it became clear as the focus groups proceeded that several participants were confused about what we meant by "community" in the emails we had sent to them. Several thought that the "community impacts" in our study were those on the community in which we live. In these cases, the confusion was addressed at the beginning of the focus group.

Four focus groups of about an hour each were conducted over 2 days and were recorded. Participants were assigned a number and are not identified by name, to protect confidentiality; they are cited accordingly below. Two members of the research team served as facilitators, each with 2 focus groups. At least one other member of the research team attended each focus group, and a graduate student took notes. The focus group facilitator read each question aloud and participants responded in turn, though cross-talk was encouraged. Some minor clarifying questions were asked, and it was sometimes necessary to say "what about the effect

on the community?" as participants veered into discussing impacts on students, but we kept to the written questions as much as possible and allowed discussion to proceed from those.

What we report in this article conforms to what emerged from the focus groups themselves, though we realize that our opinion and research shaped both the questions asked and interpretations of answers. We have made no attempt to quantify responses beyond very general impressions, because in the context of the focus groups, interactions influenced comments as much as our questions did. Much of this report is therefore necessarily subjective. However, we believe it is an accurate assessment of what we learned from the focus groups as a whole.

Results

There were three overarching categories of community impacts of international service-learning and other study abroad programs identified by focus group participants. Economic and material effects, including those resulting from service, were raised most frequently and almost always presented as positive, but a few participants were more cautious in their evaluation. Social and cultural impacts were less frequently mentioned, with the exception of those resulting from student alcohol abuse. However, there was often agreement from others once additional social or cultural effects were raised, and some of these were seen as negative. Environmental impacts were raised least, we believe because of bias in our questions and participant sample.

Economic and Material Impacts

Multiple means of economic and other material effects of short-term ISL and other study abroad were raised in the focus groups, including money spent in the community, gifts, and service projects. These impacts were seen as unequivocally positive by virtually all participants at the beginning of each focus group. Money spent as part of study abroad is primarily program-related, and includes lodging, whether in hotels or home stays, food, transportation, and hiring gear, guides, guest speakers, or other support services. One participant pointed out that the program with which he was involved had spent $200,000 over four years, and because of the timing of the students' arrival, this meant that businesses could stay open past the usual "season" (A8). Another stated that according to research in the community hosting his program, 90% of all employment in the area was tied to tourism, and that "people have seen substantial increases in their standard of living" (B1). In addition to direct program expenditures, students spend money independently, on souvenirs and snacks, for example.

However, a few participants questioned the general belief in positive economic impact. One argued that the region hosting his students actually lost out economically, because their government invested money in order to develop the relationship with our university and the US (A2). Several participants feared that their programs reinforced or worsened inequalities in the host community.

> *[I]n terms of the financial impact on local economies, I think that can be a positive, but at the same time a lot of times…certain segments of the community experience that wealth, but it doesn't go into other sectors, and so you have inequality being created, being increased right there locally, and that can create serious tensions within a community (D4).*

Another participant believed that his program had contributed to worsening relationships of dependency in a community struggling with the repercussions of globalization on the local economy (C1). He saw this as a very negative impact he did not know how to address.

Gifts were another avenue of material impacts identified in the focus groups, generally seen as beneficial or harmless. Many students give gifts to the families hosting their home stays. Toys for children, such as art supplies or rubber balls, are common. Students might also give inexpensive gifts to people they meet or talk to during their stay, especially things that might be in short supply. Several programs brought gifts for the community as a whole, given to a school or community center, such as the computers brought as part of one program's service project. However, as with the direct economic impact of money spent in the communities, there were a few program leaders who questioned the positive effects of gifts. One participant said "you have to be very careful [when giving gifts]…it can be very demeaning, and it can also be used to bribe people" (A1). Another suggested that differential access to foreign visitors was another potential source of worsening inequalities; gifts her students brought were intended to be shared in the community, "but it was almost all funneled through the families that they knew" so there was a question of "whether or not it was reinforcing people who already had access [to foreigners] or were more likely to have access than others" (C3).

Service projects were generally seen as having a positive material impact. Among the projects participants' programs had engaged in were building an after school facility, a reforestation project, highway cleanup, book collection for a children's library, setting up a community computer lab, and teaching English in the public schools and an orphanage. One program had spent a week helping build houses, and the effect on the local community was seen as getting people out of "very poor living conditions into a better housing situation" (C6). Another program assisted in relief efforts bringing in food after a hurricane "to alleviate the periods of scarcity" in the community (C1). However, one participant was cautious about service projects, because "groups of students … [go in] with the mindset that we have all the answers, …we know what…it takes to help this community, to help this country," an attitude he saw as prevalent among Americans abroad (D4). Another participant raised a concern about projects dependent on being maintained over time.

> *I would like to think that that had long-lasting effects, but the reality is, we take laptops…to a very hot third world country, and they're not going to last long. It's a wonderful idea, for a little while…the kids that we teach computer skills…and then you have the issue of maintaining …the skills…I feel like it's good while we're there but then it's lost (D1).*

Cultural and Social Impacts

Cultural and social effects were initially seen as primarily positive in the focus groups, with the exception of those resulting from student drinking, a topic which raised a great deal of concern among program leaders. However, there were a few negative impacts raised, and once demonstration effects came up, there was extended discussion of this topic in several of the groups.[3]

The most common positive cultural/social effect mentioned in the focus groups was the promotion of international understanding. Participants saw students as good ambassadors for their country. It was generally believed that ISL and other study abroad provided the opportunity to break down stereotypes on both sides, as there was "just as much interest and inquisitiveness" from people in the host community about US traditions and culture as the reverse (A8). Similarly, opportunities for cultural exchange were seen as high and positive for communities visited during the programs. However, one participant believed that the people in the community his program visited "put on a mock ecotourism tribal dance ceremony just for us" and sold "native" masks, suggesting that the community was adapting cultural artifacts to meet the demands of US consumers, which he thought was a negative effect (C7).

Another effect mentioned as positive was the building of personal relationships between students and people in the host community, some of them longstanding. Some participants also believed that ISL and other study abroad programs could promote community esteem, because "the fact that somebody cares here in the US to travel to… these places" is impressive and touching to some in local communities (D4).

Some negative cultural and social effects on host communities were generally agreed upon in the focus groups. An annoyance, but one most were sensitive to, was the perception that US students are loud, and when traveling together, such a large group can "turn into a herd of elephants!" (A1). One participant in a program with a service-learning component in the public schools thought that it was "probably hard on those students to have these volunteers kind of drop in and out" (C2).

The most commonly raised impact (and one seen as negative impact by all participants who stated an opinion) was student drinking, or rather, bad behavior from student drinking, including general rudeness, being overly rowdy, and vomiting. Discussion of student drunkenness was quite heated; it was seen as something that local people should not have to put up with, and many program leaders had clearly put considerable effort and thought into mitigating this aspect of student behavior during their programs, some only after they had led one for the first time.

[3] Demonstration effects refer to a pattern of local people copying the behavior, attitudes or spending patterns of visitors or tourists (Fisher, 2007, p. 569).

A negative impact mentioned in one focus group could be classified as a human rights concern, perhaps specific to the destination of the program. A focus group participant said that police appeared on every corner of the street where the program was being housed by they end of the day they arrived, something that "intimidated local people" (A1). When a student in another program housed nearby became ill, it "struck terror into the people that were living in the house" that they were going to have trouble with the license authorizing them to work with foreigners.

The demonstration effects of US students were mentioned as generally negative, but were not seen as a serious concern by many of the focus group participants until others discussed them. Some of these effects were social. One participant mentioned that among his program's students were two women smokers (B7). He was approached by community leaders asking if the students could stop smoking publicly, because the community had been "working with folks to reduce smoking." The most important negative, however, was seen as that resulting from the wealth displayed by students, both in what they had and how they spent. According to one participant, "we furthered the idea that we were wasteful Americans," in part by "little things like being on the streets" and paying for fried pastries that cost a penny with large denominations, "asking for change what would be a month's salary for the local" (C6). Another was concerned that even by their presence, students showed their wealth.

> *[W]e're going to communities in many cases, where just $800, $1000 to buy a plane ticket is more than the average person is going to make in a year…that, and … the gear we bring with us, the backpacks, and the material wealth that we show….when you're going into some of these areas, you see the look in peoples' eyes when you show up, "wow"…relatively speaking, we're rich, we're very wealthy, compared to a lot of these communities we're going into (D4).*

Another participant in the same focus group pointed to possible effects of this display of wealth for the host community, worrying that his ISL program increased local peoples' dissatisfaction and desire to move away from the smaller village they were visiting.

> *[I was] dismayed by the comments that [local] people said, 'it's so terrible here, why would anyone want to come here, you must be so bored'… the host family that I stayed with brought that up, they were very concerned about young people moving away, being dissatisfied with the lifestyle in this small community (D6).*

One participant pointed out that these negative impacts could occur even when other effects are positive.

> *[P]eople … value their jobs, they value the opportunity for increased education, but at the same time, what they see is a change in community dynamics and family dynamics, and anyone who visits is contributing to that, so whether it's less reliance on the traditional values, less reliance on community interaction and traditional ways of relying on one*

> *other for support whether it's financial, agricultural, or emotional and spiritual, people generally reported that those values had decreased as economic opportunity had increased, as other people were in and out of the community regularly… most of the respondents …indicated those were changes in values and they were very concerned about how that was going to change the community in the future (B1).*

Environmental Impacts

Surprisingly, environmental impacts were not raised as a major issue by many of the focus group participants. The concerns are straightforward enough, as one participant pointed out: a group of 22 people "brings noise and it brings trash and it brings pollution" (A8), not to mention emissions from air travel. The research team was aware that several of the focus group participants attempt to calculate the carbon emissions of their programs, and incorporate offsets into program costs; at least one program leader offers the opportunities to buy offsets in the host country. However, they did not discuss this during the focus groups. While the research team considers the environmental impacts of ISL and other study abroad on communities to be a serious issue, we suspect that the phrasing of our questions to focus groups in terms of "the community" rather than "the environment" may have pushed focus groups away from this avenue of discussion. It is also possible that the small number of scientists in our sample may have biased this result.

Discussion

In evaluating the potential for negative effects of short-term international service-learning and other study abroad programs on local communities, three issues came up in the focus groups, either explicitly or implicitly, as most important. First, these programs have effects on local communities, whether those effects are intended or not, and whether or not the programs are designed to have an impact; some effects are direct, while others are indirect. Consciousness about this is more likely to make possible a critical evaluation of the impacts of these programs on host communities.

Second, some communities are more vulnerable than others to potentially negative impacts. One participant argued "if we do not take 25 students… to Madrid, Madrid is going to continue being what it is" (A6). Another suggested that even "when we would go out into the rural areas [in China], we were just a tourist, like thousands and thousands of other tourists," so there was not really a serious impact (D3). However, another participant was very concerned about the effect of his program on a rural indigenous community in Bolivia that had little experience with foreign visitors (D4).

This points to a third point which arose in focus groups, that the potential for negative community impacts of ISL and other study abroad programs are highest where there are substantial "disparity of income, disparity of lifestyle, disparities in values" between students and hosts (B1). These disparities were seen as less likely to exist in affluent areas, large urban

centers, and destinations with substantial exposure to foreign visitors. According to one participant,

> *there's a different impact sending students to Jamaica than sending students to Germany. Germany is not a third world country,….they're all affluent, and there's really not much… imprint you can leave on a society like that (C4).*

However, participants suggested that there were vulnerable communities in richer countries, such as immigrant groups in Germany, and not all poorer destinations were seen as vulnerable. Bangalore, India was mentioned as less vulnerable to small groups of students simply because of population density. One participant argued that the power of the Cuban state to set some controls on student visits made Cuba both less vulnerable to negative impacts and more likely to experience positive impacts, despite that fact that it is not a rich country. In part this was related to "the ability of the community around it to give feedback and say this is … what we need" (C3). Environmental vulnerability is not necessarily related to any of these disparities, since it might derive from particular physical features of the program destination.

What to Do?

While our focus groups revealed that most program leaders had not thought very much about the effects of their programs on host communities, they also showed that once concerns were raised by others in the focus groups (and perhaps by the obvious interest of the research team), virtually all participants were quite interested in considering these questions and were enthusiastic as they discussed ways to mitigate negative impacts and promote positive ones.

What most participants lacked – even those with substantial international experience – was a comprehensive understanding of how their programs affected host communities, and what to do about it if those effects are discovered to be negative or could be made more positive. The focus groups demonstrated the benefit of collective discussion of this topic, as participants raised concerns, posed solutions, argued about the potential effectiveness of proposals, and applied their creativity, experience, and academic expertise to the question of community impacts of international programs. Many excellent suggestions were raised in the focus groups, which we present here, knowing that much remains to be discussed.[4]

1. Preparation

Three aspects of preparation were suggested as important in promoting international service-learning and other study abroad that takes into account effects on host communities. First is the program leader's preparation in designing and implementing his or her program. Knowing as much as possible about the specific program destination allows the leader to better

[4] The appendix provides a list of questions that facilitate discussion of these topics.

evaluate potential community impacts. Are there issues of inequality, culture, human rights, or the environment that should be considered in determining whether or how to visit a potential study abroad destination? Research as well as good local contacts are both very important in this process, and faculty expertise on campus is likely to be a good resource. Planning which takes into account the potential impact on communities can be applied not only to logistics of travel, but also to student assignments.

Student preparation is also very important, not only in making the students more knowledgeable, but also to invest them in the process of considering community impacts as part of their experience abroad. Many participants viewed academic knowledge of the destination as vital to this process, in advance of travel when possible. Most had students do reading and other assignments on the history and culture of the program destination as part of course content, which might also enable them to understand possible avenues of negative community impacts. Many participants also considered cultural preparation important. One participant has a "lifeways" class as a prerequisite for the study abroad program he leads (A2). Most already discussed culturally sensitive issues such as student dress and customs in the host communities; several thought this aspect of student preparation could be deepened. Language preparation is another aspect of student preparation that many thought was very important for improving community impacts, and several mentioned the need for students to consider likely questions they would be asked about the US, so that they were prepared to give sophisticated answers.

When there is no literature on the specific program destination, reading and discussing material on the impacts of tourism generally might be a way of getting at potential impacts on communities hosting international programs.

> *One thing we do on our trips is to read the relevant literature on impact of tourism and student travel on communities and then we consider it in context of where we're staying…we talk to locals…and we largely find that what you read in the literature is in fact exactly what's happening (B1).*

In light of what they learned during the focus groups, even those who had prepared students to think about cultural issues thought it was important to discuss that material more explicitly in terms of the effects of their program on the local community.

Several participants believed that building and maintaining group cohesion among students, including negotiated group contracts, was an effective means of making students active in addressing the program's effects on the community. This process must begin before travel, and so is an important aspect of program preparation. A group contract that includes a component on community impacts entails a voluntary commitment on the students' part. As a result, they are more likely to feel invested in improving community impacts, through changing behavior when that would help, or bringing potential problems to the attention of program leaders and other students (see Galiarid and Koehn, this issue, for more on how to do this).

The final aspect of preparation raised in the focus groups was that of the community itself. Some participants thought it would be helpful for the community to understand more about the culture of the students before they arrived. Others thought it was important that there be some commitment from the community, so that the program was more of a mutual exchange. One participant suggested that program leaders should "invite the community to tell us what they would like to see of our students, and are there ways this presence can be of benefit to them" (A4), though care needed to be taken in this process so that community members felt able to give substantive answers to these questions and didn't just say what they thought the leader wanted to hear.

2. Importance of Long-Term Relationships

Many in the focus groups pointed to the importance of long-term relationships in creating positive impacts for communities, both because it built trust and because it developed a knowledge base that made possible a better evaluation of the effects of the program on the community over time. One participant suggested that going to the same place over and over "sends a more positive message that you're just not going to come and take and leave, … it shows commitment [and a] larger message of really truly caring" (D1). Another argued that

> *with repeated trips, the other side gets more savvy…this is what we expect….please do this, not that…if [you] tend to go back to the same place, you know,…[how] to minimize impacts or to improve impacts on local community (C1).*

One program leader argued that the relationship should be maintained with local communities between visits, via email or other means; if necessary, the university should invest in ways of making this possible for the host community (C5). However, another participant pointed to the relationship of dependency that developed in the community hosting his program (C1). This dependent relationship came about in part through his program's reliable return visits and his own ongoing contact with the community. But it was his deep knowledge of the community that also enabled him to see the negative impacts the program was engendering.

3. Directed Spending and Gift-Giving

With respect to economic and other material impacts, focus group participants argued that spending and gift-giving should be directed toward local people and specific groups within the community insofar as possible. This meant, minimally, avoiding hotel and restaurant chains, often owned by multinational corporations that send their profits not just out of the community but also out of the country. On the other hand, program spending may be used to promote positive development in communities:

> *[O]n the economic side of things I'm very careful to use only local vendors, we stay only in lodges that are owned by local people, never stay in any type of chain, I know the people who own the lodges and hotels that we stay in, we use local guides, we intentionally try to make our money effective by making sure that our economic impact*

> *isn't limited to the lowest level of the economic ladder, in other words we're paying people for their expert knowledge in the case of guides, as opposed to just paying people who are cooking our food and cleaning our rooms, for example…what we do is try to reward expertise and we…contribute money after the trip… to organizations that are benefiting the local environment and that are helping training people to work (B1).*

Another participant made sure to hire guides from the community rather than work with commercial groups in the capital; his program had contributed to local guides' equipment, such that it was comparable to what students brought (D4). Other programs directed student spending on souvenirs toward local artists and non-profit agencies. Several participants suggested that money or gifts given to a communal entity such as the local school or community center went to everyone; when donated discreetly through a local organization, it also avoided negative demonstration effects or the appearance of charity.

Gifts could be directed as much as money. Giving to kids rather than adults was seen as less likely to be problematic, though gifts should be small. Gifts that acknowledged a special relationship with students, such as home stay hosts, were thought necessary and important. One program brought photographic supplies, which were in short supply locally and gave them to artists who contributed to the program by critiquing student work (A1).

4. Don't Go to Vulnerable Places

An accurate assessment of the potential or actual community impacts of ISL and other study abroad programs means that some destinations must simply not be visited because they are too vulnerable. One participant would no longer take programs to poor indigenous areas of Latin America that "are not on the main tourist path," despite his belief that there are tremendous benefits to students going to such places, "because there are negative impacts no matter how…well you can tailor things" (D4). As such, he considered the likely effects of international programs communities to which he had never traveled, on the basis of previous experience in other communities and research. Another program leader, considering actual impacts on a known community, called a halt to students going there, in response to what he saw as negative effects of his program (C1).

5. Promote Areas of Mutuality and Equality

Though there are often real differences in power and wealth between hosts and students and faculty in ISL and other study abroad programs, even the poorest communities possess skills, knowledge, and talent that can become a foundation for promoting relations of greater mutuality and equality. Such relationships may produce more positive cultural and social effects on the community. Several of the programs led by focus group participants incorporated cultural exchanges in music and other arts. These are areas in which local people can excel in comparison with students, regardless of their socioeconomic status. When students present their own artistic endeavors, these can be appreciated by the community as the result of work and commitment rather than something that could be bought.

Such exchanges might be as simple as students and communities teaching each other songs and dances from their respective cultures, though it is possible that more substantive exchanges produce greater benefit for the community. One participant brought a choir from the community hosting her program to perform at our university (A4). Another took students who were learning to play locally inspired music on locally developed instruments to poor rural communities, which boosted community esteem as well as relations with the students themselves:

> *[T]he minute people in the rural areas find we play [their music]…it's a different look at the United States… [they think] 'these people do play our music, they do make our instruments' [and] …they take us in like they've known us for years (A5).*

Arranging for local people to engage in a teaching relationship with students in a program emphasized the existence of local talents and skills for the community as well as for students. Several focus group participants incorporated local teachers or university professors into their program's schedule of classes, either formally or informally. However, teachers do not have to be elite or professional. A program might ask local farmers to help students learn about agricultural practices in the community, emphasizing their skills and knowledge in relation to the students.

Several other means of promoting mutual and equal relationships emerged in the focus groups. Working together on local service projects was one; the give and take involved in such projects was seen by several participants as putting people in the community on a level playing field with students. Play was another, whether organized games of soccer and baseball or spontaneous games of tag. Nonmaterial symbols of appreciation like printed proclamations or sister city relationships emphasized connection without requiring consumption. Many participants believed that personal touches like sharing photos of the students' family and home town can be a "great way to create a really mutual positive interaction that's two way" (B3).

The promotion of mutuality and equality in areas such as these may open up the possibility of mutuality in other areas that might otherwise have remained closed. Local people who feel they are on a more equal footing with students or program leader may also feel able to help guide future developments of the program in ways most helpful or desirable for the community. This possibility should not be overstated. Where there are real inequalities, treating someone as your equal will not make those inequalities go away, and people in the community will feel this even if students and program leaders do not. But finding areas where there are real equalities may diminish the dominance of those inequalities in the relationship between students and the community.

6. Drinking

There was a division of opinion in how to deal with problems emerging from drinking. Alternative Spring Breaks were successful with a "no drinking" policy; many of these programs also established a group contract system, negotiated by and with the students in advance of the trip. However, several program leaders were adamant that forbidding drinking was not enforceable and probably had worse results than if there was no policy at all. Participants agreed that it was bad behavior from drinking that was the problem rather than drinking *per se*, and it was this behavior that they believed needed to be addressed. One strategy was punishment, such as hefty fines. The major threat, however, was sending students home, and participants argued that program leaders needed to be ready to do this, have funds available for that purpose, and make sure that students knew they were serious about doing so, or it was not a threat at all.

However, sending students home was a last resort, and only used in the worst cases. Several participants used other means to encourage students to limit drinking. Talking with them about the leader's relationships with local people may be effective; "use guilt!" (B1). Building the program itinerary to make it harder for students to drink, especially on weekends or the last night was also touted as effective. One participant made sure that the last meal abroad was in an isolated restaurant without a bar, so students had to make additional effort to go drinking (B3). Another was particularly ruthless:

> *I give the final exam on the morning of departure in every course, plus they are absolutely exhausted by then…and have a review either right before dinner or right after dinner (B1).*

7. Institutional Commitment

Several participants argued that the university itself needed to make a commitment to the issue of community impacts in its study abroad policy, since many of the questions raised here are best addressed at the institutional level and should not be personal ethical decisions. One participant suggested that "another step for the university might be to have you consider...the impacts or the footprint that you're leaving in the community" as part of the approval process for such programs (D1), perhaps modeled after IRB review for human subjects research. Institutions that use vendors might set a similar policy as a requirement for receiving a contract. Another participant pointed out that long-term relationships needed institutional commitment in promoting continuity, as program leader fatigue or declining interest is a common reason for ending programs to particular areas (C3). Experienced leaders might be encouraged to mentor younger colleagues, who could accompany programs and take them over or alternate with another leader in order to maintain ongoing relationships with host communities. The general sense that focus group participants needed help developing programs with a more positive impact on communities suggests that institutions will need to provide training and other support to program leader development in this area.

Better preparation of program leaders, deeper and longer-lasting relationships, as well as serious attention to the effects of international service-learning and other study abroad on vulnerable communities, are likely to mean that institutions should reduce the number and frequency of programs as well as the number of students going abroad, just when there is increasing pressure to expand in these areas (see Lincoln Commission, 2005). The recommendations above will only be effective if the institution's commitment is substantive; universities must be prepared to prohibit or require changes in programs in response to deep analysis of impacts on community. These are changes which are not likely to be well-received by program leaders if mandated from above, or perhaps when initiated by university administration. However, our focus groups suggest that program leaders are very willing to consider making changes as they learn more about community impacts, and are themselves a good resource for the university in understanding these issues. At our university, the supportiveness of our Office of International Education and Development (OIED) for this research suggests that administration may also be quite willing to consider these issues as part of their efforts in promoting ISL and other study abroad.[5] It is likely in any case that substantive institutional commitment to addressing community impacts can only emerge through joint efforts by faculty, professional staff, and administration involved in promoting international service-learning and other study abroad.

Conclusions

Much remains to be done if we are to understand the actual and potential impacts on communities of international student programs and build this understanding into a more ethical practice. The participants in our focus group were quite knowledgeable, but some of their insights require further research. Is China unaffected by students abroad because so many travel there, or does the cultural distance between people from the US and China mean that there is damage regardless? Is there any way to mitigate the negative impacts of demonstration effects of student wealth in comparison with people in poor communities? What positive impacts might be built upon to make programs more beneficial to communities as a whole as well as to individuals in those communities?

Some of what we also understand is that many of community impacts will remain unclear and some are likely to be irresolvable. We may realize that the effect of student home stays in nicer houses promotes inequality in poor rural communities, but we are unlikely to choose to

[5] The Office of International Education and Development (OIED) at our university has been very helpful, open, and encouraging of this research, for which we are grateful. Indeed, we could not have done it without them, and we have benefited greatly from discussions with them on this topic. Their deep understanding of study abroad and commitment to its ethical practice is a great resource for us and for our university's efforts in this area. However, our research is independent of the OIED, and in order to avoid any potential conflict of interest, we have received no research funding from that office.

counter this by placing students in the very poorest homes, for example. The solution to this problem may be not to go to poor rural communities, not to stay in those communities, or to try to balance negative impacts by compensating action with positive effects on the poorest, if that is possible.

It may be enough for the overall impact on the community to be positive in order to support a student program going there; no doubt that depends on what the negative effects are. It also may be that the more radical position taken by some advocates of responsible tourism applies here as well: given the known and potential damage that results from any travel, especially by comparatively wealthy students from the US to poorer places, we should consider simply not going unless there is a very good reason for doing so; going abroad is not a student right, to be conducted without regard to its effects on people or the environment (Mclaren, 2006, p. xiv). These are difficult questions that must be discussed at all institutions of higher education engaged in study abroad.

However, we are very optimistic. Our research indicates that many of these questions have answers, which can be used to create guidelines for evaluating the effects of international service-learning and other study abroad programs on host communities, as well as suggestions for how to bring about more positive impacts. Many of these will be relatively easy to implement. Equally important, our focus groups demonstrate that program leaders are very willing to consider these questions, and also are an existing resource available to any institution engaging in such programs. In particular, we believe that the expertise and experience of professionals and faculty involved with international service-learning can contribute to improving community impacts of all study abroad programs (e.g., Galiardi and Koehn, this issue). Though the complexities of the endeavor are real, so too are the possibilities for change.

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Appendix

Questions to Consider for Mitigating the Negative Impact of Students Abroad

Student's Basic Needs

- Where does the food/water/housing for our students come from?
- Do we impose any hardship on local people, such as water shortages?
- What about garbage disposal and pollution?
- Is land being used for visitors' rather than local needs?

Preparation

- What can you teach about your impact on a place before the program leaves campus?
- How can you use class time and individual reflection to make student aware of their impact while in the host community?
- How does debriefing the students after their return help them to better understand their experiences?
- How can the host community be involved in designing the program?

Cultural Impact

- Are students well-behaved and respectful in terms of the local culture?
- Do they dress inappropriately or commit offenses that will shock people in the community?
- Do students see local people or their culture as commodities to be consumed?
- Are expressions of privilege demonstrated by students during their visit, such as doing things "our" way, eating "our" food, playing "our" music, requiring things to be done on "our" schedule?
- Does anything about the students' presence or activities reinforce a negative self-image for local people, for example that Americans are smarter, more competent, prettier?

Economic Impact

- Do the economic impact of international service-learning or other study abroad programs promote economic inequality in the community?
- Do foreigners or local elites own or manage the hotels that students occupy during their visit?
- Do "home stays" privilege the middle-class?
- Are guides and drivers outsiders or wealthier members of the community?

- Do local prices go up as a result of the student visit?
- Does the giving of gifts increase inequalities?
- Can non-material gifts be given instead, or gifts to the community as a whole?
- Do students contribute to economies of dependency on outsiders?
- Is there a "tourist season" such that we contribute to a "boom and bust" cycle in the local economy?
- How do service projects differentially impact the community?

Demonstration Effects

- Does high-end travel gear, lots of clothes, spending money, gifts, etc. create the desire in local people to leave the community so that they can make money to buy similar products?
- Do students smoke, drink, or do drugs during their visit? The effect of these behaviors can range from being poor role models for local youth to bringing new addictions to the community.

Human Rights

- Are local people excluded from any of the areas where students are encouraged or allowed to go?

Overall

- Is the host community vulnerable enough that negative effects are very likely such that you should reconsider going at all?
- How can we evaluate programs to mitigate negative and enhance positive impacts?
- What institutional changes at our university might be necessary to promote ethical and positive relationships with communities hosting our students?