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Alternative Breaks as a Context for Informal Interactions with Diversity

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Abstract
One of the most frequently touted benefits of higher education is the opportunity to interact with people different from oneself, yet these interactions do not automatically lead to positive outcomes. The purpose of this study is to explore how one particular context for diversity interactions, service-based alternative break programs, may provide the necessary balance of challenge and support for students to learn from diversity.

One of the most frequently touted benefits of higher education is the opportunity to interact with people different from oneself (e.g., Bowman, 2010, 2011; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Hurtado, 2007). There are a wide variety of positive outcomes associated with interactions with diverse peers, including increased sense of belonging (Hurtado et al., 2007; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005), cognitive skills (Bowman, 2010), and leadership development (Parker & Pascarella, 2013). These positive outcomes, unfortunately, do not happen automatically. Simply creating a diverse student body on campus does not necessarily lead to interactions among diverse individuals (Gurin et al., 2002), and even when these interactions take place, they are not uniformly positive experiences. Negative experiences with diversity without adequate support may lead to negative outcomes such as decreases in moral reasoning development (Mayhew & Engberg, 2010), need for cognition (Mayhew, Wolniak, & Pascarella, 2008), pluralistic orientation (Engberg, 2007), and increased intergroup anxiety (Engberg, 2007). These challenges point to the importance of understanding the context in which diversity interactions occur.

Alternative breaks (ABs) are one context that may provide an environment conducive to positive diversity interactions (Chaison, 2008; Jones, Rowan-Kenyon, Ireland, Niehaus, & Skendall, 2012). ABs provide opportunities for small groups of students to spend their academic breaks engaging in community service, often in a different region of the United States or abroad. Due to their nature as short, intense experiences that bring together diverse groups of students to travel to unfamiliar locations and interact with culturally different communities, ABs may be particularly well suited to promoting positive diversity interactions. Despite their potential, little is known about the ways in which ABs can promote positive diversity interactions or how practitioners working with ABs can best structure programs to promote student development. The purpose of this study is to explore the features of AB programs that contribute to positive diversity interactions.

Theoretical Framework

Gurin and colleagues' (2002) work on the relationship between diversity and student development provided the theoretical framework for this study. Within this framework, Gurin and colleagues (2002) identified three types of diversity that may facilitate college students' development. *Structural diversity* refers to the number of students from different racial and ethnic groups on campus. *Informal interactional diversity* "involves both the *frequency* and *quality* of intergroup interactions" (p. 333), and typically takes place outside of the classroom. *Classroom diversity* describes academic courses that facilitate learning about diverse racial and ethnic groups, and may also involve interactions with diverse peers. The authors theorized that "structural diversity is a necessary but insufficient condition for maximal education benefits" (p. 333), and emphasized the importance of students' interactions with diverse peers both in and out of the classroom. Research using this framework has supported the premise that informal interactional diversity best facilitates student development (Bowman, 2010, 2011; Gurin et al., 2002).

The reason why diversity experiences matter is because they are novel or challenge students' existing views of the world, causing the cognitive dissonance necessary for growth and development (Bowman, 2010; Bowman & Brandenberger, 2012; Gurin et al., 2002). Diversity experiences challenge students to "experience the unexpected" (Bowman & Brandenberger, 2012), but as the literature on negative diversity experiences shows, adequate support must also accompany these challenges for students to benefit fully (Engberg, 2007; Mayhew & Engberg, 2010; Mayhew et al., 2008).

Although Gurin et al.'s (2002) framework focuses primarily on race and ethnicity, the developmental approach to understanding diversity interactions can be applied more broadly, including diversity in "social class, national origin, values, religion, or political views" (Bowman & Brandenberger, 2012, p. 187) or "any [other] type of diversity with which college students are generally unfamiliar" (Bowman, 2010, p. 9). Much of the research on diversity in higher education does focus on racial diversity (Bowman, 2010), yet comparisons of students' experiences with racial and nonracial forms of diversity have found that both can be influential in students' development (Bowman, 2010, 2011).

Literature Review

Research on ABs has shown that these experiences have the potential to facilitate exactly the informal diversity interactions that Gurin et al. (2002) argued promote development. In a study of short-term immersion programs (including ABs), Jones and colleagues (2012) found that students reported interacting with other students different from themselves who they never would have met on campus. These interactions enabled students to engage in deep conversations about issues such as race and religion. Unlike other higher education contexts where diversity interactions may be limited to peer interactions, ABs also give students the opportunity to interact with diverse community members and host site staff. Jones et al. (2012) found that a key learning opportunity for students was their ability to personalize social issues through their interactions with community members.

Although a great deal of research has pointed to the potential for ABs to facilitate interactions with diverse students, host site staff, and community members (e.g., Jones et al., 2012; Kiely, 2005; Lough, 2009), not all diversity interactions are positive experiences for students (see, for example, Butin, 2006; Piacitelli, Barwick, Doerr, Porter, & Sumka, 2013). Service-learning research has demonstrated the potential for students to have negative or "mis-educative" experiences (Dewey, 1938) with diversity, resulting in victim blaming and reinforcing stereotypes (Lough, 2009). To say that ABs provide the opportunity for students to engage with people who

are different from themselves in a variety of ways is not enough; identifying the ways in which ABs can be structured to promote positive interactions is important.

Prior research on ABs specifically, and community service in general, has shown that there are a number of elements that contribute to positive outcomes, and may also create an environment for positive diversity interactions. Quality service-placements and high-intensity programs can provide environments that challenge students, while reflection opportunities can provide the support needed to promote development.

First, the quality of the service placement matters, both in students' engagement and the involvement of community members in the service. Eyler and Giles (1999) defined placement quality as "the extent that students … are challenged, are active rather than observers, do a variety of tasks, feel that they are making a positive contribution, have important levels of responsibility, and receive input and appreciation from supervisors in the field" (pp. 32–33). Jones and Abes (2004) added that quality placements should include opportunities for students to develop relationships with individuals at the site. A quality placement goes beyond simply providing the opportunities to interact with diverse others; engagement in a shared service activity can provide a shared sense of purpose and a neutral foundation upon which students can build relationships (Young, 2007).

Second, research has pointed to the importance of *intensity* in ABs and other short-term service-learning experiences. Jones et al. (2012) identified the importance of "getting out of the bubble" in facilitating students' development. High levels of cultural difference between students and the host community can also provide a sense of program intensity (Malewski & Phillion, 2009). The physical and emotional intensity of the AB experience may be important in promoting development in that it facilitates the cognitive dissonance necessary for growth (Gurin et al., 2002). Kiely (2005) discussed importance of immersion, arguing that high-intensity dissonance, which included experiences such as "witnessing extreme forms of poverty, hunger, scarcity, and disease" (p. 11), is the type that "often causes powerful emotions and confusion and leads study participants to *reexamine their existing knowledge and assumptions*" (p. 11).

Quality service placements and high levels of intensity provide a sense of challenge for students, but the best service programs balance that challenge with support through structured reflection. Reflection is perhaps the most often cited characteristic of quality service-learning (e.g., Eyler & Giles, 1999; Jones & Abes, 2004). Eyler and Giles (1999) found reflection to be a predictor of decreased stereotyping, increased tolerance, personal development, problem solving, critical thinking, and citizenship. Reflection is particularly important in exploring contexts that facilitate students' ability to learn through diversity experiences; opportunities for students to reflect on negative diversity experiences in the context of service-learning (Bowman & Brandenberger, 2012) and intergroup dialogue courses (Mayhew & Engberg, 2010) have been theorized to provide the necessary support for students to make sense of negative experiences with diversity. Engaging in group reflection activities during an AB experience also might allow students the opportunity to share feelings and form the close interpersonal relationships necessary to bridge racial and cultural divides.

Purpose

As described above, ABs and other service-learning experiences provide opportunities for the informal interactions with diversity that have been shown to contribute to development, and research has also identified a number of best practices in ABs (placement quality, program intensity, and reflection). To date, no studies have explored the extent to which these best practices provide an environment that promotes positive informal interactions with diversity. Research

has identified that positive diversity experiences can contribute to a variety of important student outcomes (Bowman, 2010; Hurtado et al., 2007; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Parker & Pascarella, 2013), so understanding how different contexts promote positive diversity experiences can help student affairs practitioners better facilitate programs that promote interactions across difference. The purpose of this study was to explore the types of diversity interactions students report having through their ABs and to identify the features of ABs that may provide the necessary balance of challenge and support for students to learn from these experiences.

Methods

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through the National Survey of Alternative Breaks (NSAB), a multi-institutional study of students who participated in ABs during the spring of 2011. The NSAB survey instrument was based on the existing literature on ABs, service-learning, and study abroad; reviewed by content and survey methodology experts; and piloted during the winter of 2011. The survey included questions related to basic demographic information, the various components of respondents' AB experience, and the extent to and ways in which their AB experience influenced their lives in a variety of ways.

Staff at Break Away, an organization dedicated to promoting high-quality AB experiences, provided a comprehensive list of institutions with ABs, which was the basis for a random stratified sample of institutions based on institutional type, size, control (public, private, or religiously affiliated), and Break Away membership. This sampling ensures that the study would include a broad range of institutions. Gatekeepers at each participating institution e-mailed all students participating in ABs at their institutions with a link to the online survey within a few weeks of students' return to campus. Students generally responded to the survey within three weeks of their AB.

Participants

In total, 2,187 students representing 443 separate AB trips at 97 colleges and universities responded to the survey (an overall student response rate of 35%). Respondents were predominantly female (79%) and White (72%). The sample also included students identifying as Asian/Pacific Islander (9%), Multiracial (6%), African American (6%), Hispanic (5%), or another race (2%). Most students participated in AB experiences within the United States but away from the area in which their college was located (79%), while fewer participated in international trips (17%) or those within the same area as their college (5%). Although these numbers are consistent with other studies examining participation in service-learning activities (e.g., Gasiorski, 2009), a comparison of the NSAB sample with Skendall's (2012) findings on students who participated in short-term service-learning immersions (including ABs) from a national sample of college students indicated that the NSAB might have a slight overrepresentation of students who identified as White and female.

Variables

The NSAB included a series of questions related to students' experiences with other students, host site staff, and community members. In the survey, community members were defined as "those people who were the recipients or beneficiaries of the service provided by you or the community agency with whom you worked," and host site staff as "anyone working for the agency/agencies with whom you worked, either as a paid employee or a regular volunteer." Host site staff were distinct from university staff who may have accompanied students during the AB.

Consistent with previous research on the importance of students' perceptions of novelty or difference in defining a diversity interaction (e.g., Bowman, 2010; Bowman & Brandenberger, 2012), students were asked to rate how different they felt members of each group were from themselves, the ways in which they felt each group was different from themselves, and the amount they learned from each group. Students were also asked how frequently they interacted with community members and host site staff (assuming that students interacted with the other students in their group on a daily basis).

Table 1 provides a description of all variables used in this study, along with reliability scores when applicable. The outcome measures for this analysis were students' positive experiences with diverse students, host site staff, and community members, measured by the extent to which students perceived learning from each group. Students rated their learning from each group on a scale from 0 (*not at all*) to 4 (*quite a lot*). Although these measures do not directly assess positive diversity interactions, as Bowman (2014) found, student self-reports of their perceptions of learning are best considered affective measures, closely related to satisfaction. Asking students how much they perceived learning from a particular group of people can be a close proxy for their positive feelings about their interactions with that group.

Following a modified version of Niehaus's (2012) framework for studying AB programs, the independent variables were those program features that may provide optimal levels of challenge and support to facilitate learning—service placement quality, program intensity, and reflection. The quality of the service placement was operationalized through two scales measuring the extent to which students engaged in quality service and the extent to which students engaged with community members through their service. Intensity was operationalized through four individual items reflecting the extent to which students felt that they were physically or emotionally challenged by their experience, the frequency with which they reported interacting with diverse others, and the extent to which they felt that these diverse others were different from themselves. Reflection was operationalized through a single item reflecting how frequently students wrote in an individual journal and a scale measuring engagement in group reflection. For more information on survey design and scale development, see Niehaus (2012).

Due to the importance of gender and race in understanding students' diversity interactions and experiences in service-learning (Hurtado et al., 2007; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Malewski & Phillion, 2009), these variables were also included in the analysis (see Table 1).

Data Analysis

In order to provide a broad picture of students' interactions with diversity through ABs, descriptive analyses were conducted to determine how frequently students reported interacting with community members and host site staff; how different students perceived other students, community members, and host site staff to be from themselves; in what ways they thought each group was different from themselves; and how much students thought they learned from each group. Analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were also calculated to determine if there were significant differences in in the frequency of interaction or students' perceived difference or learning from each of the three groups; where overall significant differences were found, post-hoc analysis was conducted of all pairwise comparisons using the Tukey HSD technique.

Next, the characteristics of the AB program were explored to determine which might support positive diversity interactions. Due to the nested nature of the data (students were nested within ABs, which were in turn nested within institutions), hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) was employed (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). Three separate HLM models were constructed in order to explore the relationship between AB program features and how much students reported

Table 1. Descriptions of Variables Used in the Study

Independent Variables		
Variable Name	Level	Description
Gender	1	Male = 1, Female = 0
Race	1	Five dummy-coded variables with "White" as the referent group: African American, Asian American, Hispanic, Multiracial, and Other Race.
Physical Challenge	1	The extent to which students felt that they were physically challenged by their experience—from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much).
Emotional Challenge	1	The extent to which students felt that they were emotionally challenged by their experience—from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much).
Group Difference	1	The extent to which students felt that members of the group in question (students, community, or staff) were different from themselves—from 0 (not at all different) to 4 (completely different).
Journaling	1	How frequently students wrote in an individual journal—from 0 (never) to 4 (more than once a day).
Group Interaction	2	The frequency with which students reported interacting with the group in question (community members or host site staff)—from 0 (never) to 4 (more than once a day).
Service Engagement	2	Six-item scale (alpha = 0.806) reflecting the extent to which students felt that they were making positive contributions, had important levels of responsibility, were active participants rather than observers, engaged in a variety of tasks, and received input and appreciation from on-site supervisors.
Community Engagement	2	Five-item scale (alpha = 0.875) reflecting the extent to which students worked directly with and were able to develop relationships with members of the community, the community was involved in the design and execution of the project, and students felt that they were meeting community-identified needs.
Reflection	2	Four-item scale (alpha = 0.822) reflecting the frequency with which students spent time as a group reflecting on their experiences, discussed the impact of their service work with other students or student trip leaders, or engaged in other activities as a group that helped them reflect on their experiences.

Dependent Variable	
Variable Name	Description
Group Learning	Three separate items reflecting the amount that students reported learning from the group in question (students, community, or staff)—from 0 (not at all) to 4 (quite a lot).

learning from students, host site staff, and community members. In conducting the HLM analysis, one-way random effects ANOVAs were first calculated (in HLM 7.0) for each outcome variable in order to determine the partitioning of the variance for each level (the intraclass correlation, or ICC).

Next, the independent variables described above and in Table 1 were added to each model at the appropriate level of analysis. Gender and race are clearly Level-1 variables, but the program environment variables could be considered either at Level 1 or Level 2 (Level 1 indicating an individual's experience with that particularly variable, Level 2 representing an aggregate meant to approximate the "true" program environment). For this analysis, the predictor variables more personal in nature were included at Level 1 (the student level): emotional challenge, physical challenge, group difference, and journaling. Those predictor variables more group oriented, or the ones that groups of students were likely to experience together, were

included at Level 2 (the program level): service engagement, community engagement, group interaction, and reflection. As there was relatively little between-institution variance (see Table 6) and previous research on ABs has not identified many meaningful institution-level predictors (Niehaus, 2012), no institutional variables were included in the model. The third level was included in the analysis to appropriately partition the variance across all three levels (Niehaus, Campbell, & Inkelas, 2014).

One important note is that HLM analysis cannot tolerate missing data at Level 1; as a result, all respondents with missing survey responses on questions used to construct the variables in this analysis had to be deleted for the HLM analysis (although they were included in the frequency analyses), which resulted in an analytic sample of 1,503 students representing 405 AB trips at 94 colleges and universities. The only significant difference between the full sample and those included in the HLM analysis was program location; the 87 students who participated in local AB trips (just under 5% of the respondents) had missing data and were excluded from the HLM analysis.

Limitations

Before moving on to the results, noting a few limitations of this study is important. First, the focus of this study on positive diversity interactions, operationalized through the amount students reported learning from students, host site staff, and community members.

The NSAB does not include data on what students learned, only their assessment of how much they learned. Although this can be a good proxy for students' satisfaction with or positive feelings towards these interactions (Bowman, 2014), future research will be needed to better understand the content of this learning. Second, although the program elements included in the study are well supported by the previous literature, there are other features of AB programs that were not included. The results of this study should not be taken to indicate that these are the only important elements of AB programs but rather to inform some of the ways in which ABs can be structured to best support positive diversity interactions. Finally, although a 35% response rate is within an acceptable range for surveys of college students, it is possible that students who responded to the survey were those who had the most polarized AB experiences, positive or negative. The overall NSAB sample was slightly overrepresentative of White, female students, and the analytic sample for this study excluded those who participated in ABs in their local community, limiting the generalizability of the results. The results of this study can point to possible trends in AB participants, but more research is needed to determine whether or not these results are generalizable across all AB participants.

Results

Table 2 outlines the frequency with which students reported interacting with community members and host site staff during their AB experiences. The majority of students reported interacting with community members and host site staff more than once per day. On average, students reported interacting slightly more with host site staff than with community members ($F = 158.10$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2_{partial} = 0.04$). There were also overall differences in how different students perceived other groups to be from themselves ($F = 348.39$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2_{partial} = 0.10$). Students generally felt that host site staff (M = 1.68, SD = 1.10) and students (M = 1.70, SD = 1.06) were only moderately different from themselves, and that community members were most different from themselves (M = 2.47, SD = 1.10; p < 0.001 for both pairwise comparisons) (see Table 3). Table 4 details the ways in which students identified that each group was different from themselves.

Table 2. Frequency of Interactions

	Community	Staff
Never	3.7%	1.4%
Once or twice during the week	14.7%	7.0%
More than once or twice but less than ever day	11.4%	7.4%
Once a day	17.3%	16.1%
More than once a day	53.0%	67.2%
Not applicable	–	1.0%

Table 3. Extent of Difference

	Community	Staff	Students
0 Not at all different	4.7%	15.5%	12.0%
1	16.8%	30.6%	35.4%
2	22.5%	29.5%	26.4%
3	39.1%	19.5%	22.8%
4 Completely different	16.9%	4.9%	3.5%
Mean	2.47	1.68	1.70
Standard deviation	1.098	1.102	1.055

Finally, students overall reported learning from all three groups. On a scale of 0 to 4, with 0 being *nothing* and 4 being *quite a lot*, the majority of students responded that they learned either a 3 or 4 from community members (86%), students (86%), and host site staff (78%) (see Table 5). There were significant mean differences ($F = 38.64$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2_{partial} = 0.01$) among the three groups. Overall, students reported learning the most from community members (M = 3.40, SD = 0.90) and other students (M = 3.35, SD = 0.85), and slightly less from host site staff (M = 3.16, SD = 1.04; $p < 0.001$ for each comparison).

The results of the HLM analysis showed that a significant amount of variance in the amount students learned from each group (i.e., the ICC) could be explained at the student and program levels. Between 72% and 84% of the variance in each outcome was at the student level, between 14% and 24% at the program level, and between 3% and 4% at the institution level (the institution level did not explain a statistically significant amount of variance for any of the outcomes; see Table 6).

Further HLM analyses showed a number of significant predictors for each of the three outcome variables (see Table 7). The extent to which students were engaged with the community ($\beta = 0.062$, $p < 0.001$), the frequency of interaction with community members ($\beta = 0.199$, $p < 0.001$), the extent to which students felt community members were different from themselves ($\pi = 0.100$, $p < 0.001$), and the extent to which students were emotionally challenged by the experience ($\pi = 0.200$, $p < 0.001$) were all significant, positive predictors of the amount students reported learning from the community. Interestingly, African American students, on average, reported learning more from the community than did White students ($\pi = 0.172$, $p = 0.049$).

Table 4. Types of Difference

	Community	Staff	Students
Religion	32.0%	22.4%	48.8%
Political Views	18.9%	13.3%	40.7%
Race/ethnicity	53.3%	21.6%	39.5%
Gender	6.3%	12.4%	42.1%
Sexual Orientation	4.3%	3.2%	14.9%
Language	30.0%	12.3%	9.9%
Culture	67.5%	35.4%	28.1%
Values	33.5%	21.5%	40.9%
Beliefs	27.8%	21.0%	43.1%
Social Class	61.8%	17.6%	22.4%
Major/Academic Interests	N/A	N/A	66.7%
Other	4.8% (included age, [dis] ability, accent, life experience, citizenship, education, health, drug use, worldview)	3.8% (included age, background, commitment to service, education, life experience)	2.3% (included background, experience, attitudes, commitment to volunteering, interests, campus involvement, family, maturity, life goals, personality, humor, work ethic)

Table 5. Amount of Learning

	Community	Staff	Students
0 Nothing	1.4%	2.7%	0.6%
1	3.8%	6.0%	3.5%
2	9.2%	13.8%	10.4%
3	24.8%	28.3%	31.1%
4 Quite a lot	60.8%	49.3%	54.4%
Mean	3.40	3.16	3.35
Standard deviation	.903	1.042	.847

When considering host site staff, the frequency with which students interacted with host site staff ($\beta = 0.456$, $p < 0.001$), and the extent to which they engaged in the service activities ($\beta = 0.067$, $p < 0.001$) and were emotionally ($\pi = 0.137$, $p < 0.001$) and physically challenged ($\pi = 0.053$, $p = 0.012$) by the experience were all significant, positive predictors of student learning

Table 6. Variance at Each Level for the Amount Students Reported Learning from Each Group (ICCs)

	Community	Staff	Students
Level 1	0.724**	0.788**	0.836**
Level 2	0.239**	0.180**	0.135**
Level 3	0.037	0.032	0.029

** $p < 0.001$

from host site staff. Finally, the extent to which students engaged in service activities ($\beta = 0.041$, $p = 0.003$) and were emotionally ($\pi = 0.138$, $p < 0.001$) and physically challenged ($\pi = 0.042$, $p = 0.016$) by the experience, and the frequency with which they participated in group reflection activities ($\beta = 0.049$, $p < 0.001$), were all significant, positive predictors of student learning from other students. Interestingly, the extent to which students reported engaging with the community through their service was a significant, negative predictor of learning from other students ($\beta = -0.018$, $p = 0.036$)—the more students felt that their service activity allowed them to engage with community members, the more they reported learning from community members but the *less* they reported learning from other students.

Discussion

The findings from this study support much of the qualitative work on ABs (Chaison, 2008; Jones et al., 2012) in suggesting that ABs do facilitate multiple opportunities for students to interact with people they perceive as being different from themselves. Also consistent with this previous research, students reported learning most from other students and from community members. This study makes a unique contribution in pointing to the role that host site staff can play in facilitating student learning through ABs and in identifying the features of ABs that facilitate positive diversity interactions. Consistent with Gurin et al.'s (2002) finding of the importance of actual interactions with diverse others, the frequency with which students reported interacting with community members and host site staff were significant predictors of perceived learning from each of these groups. Student learning is not just about simply interacting with diverse others; as noted in the literature review, the context within which these interactions take place matters a great deal. The findings from this study point to the importance of placement quality, program intensity, and reflection in providing an environment conducive to positive diversity interactions.

The fact that placement quality (measured by community engagement and service engagement) was a significant predictor of students' perceptions of learning from diverse others supports the idea that high-quality service placements may create a foundation upon which positive diversity interactions can occur. Community engagement in service was positively associated with students' reported learning from the community—having the opportunity to work side-by-side with community members facilitates interactions and allows for the formation of personal ties that are necessary for positive diversity interactions (Bowman & Denson, 2011). The quality of the engagement in the actual service project was positively associated with students' reports of learning from other students and host site staff. That quality service projects create a shared sense of purpose among students and between students and host site staff and provide a neutral activity through which meaningful interactions could take place is likely. As Young (2007) noted, interacting with others different from ourselves is difficult—having something to talk about and a neutral forum can help overcome the barriers to interacting across difference.

Table 7. HLM Results

	Community Members			Host Site Staff			Other Students		
	Coefficient	Standard Error	*p*-value	Coefficient	Standard Error	*p*-value	Coefficient	Standard Error	*p*-value
Gender (L1)	−0.005	0.047	0.906	−0.052	0.061	0.397	0.048	0.050	0.342
African American (L1)	**0.172**	**0.088**	**0.049**	−0.072	0.113	0.527	0.053	0.094	0.571
Asian American (L1)	−0.078	0.073	0.287	0.124	0.096	0.196	−0.006	0.079	0.938
Hispanic (L1)	0.033	0.093	0.725	0.029	0.121	0.812	0.118	0.100	0.237
Multiracial (L1)	0.053	0.076	0.488	0.143	0.099	0.150	0.075	0.082	0.362
Other Race (L1)	0.266	0.151	0.077	−0.204	0.196	0.300	−0.030	0.161	0.854
Emotional Challenge (L1)	**0.200**	**0.019**	**<0.001**	**0.137**	**0.024**	**<0.001**	**0.138**	**0.020**	**<0.001**
Physical Challenge (L1)	0.011	0.016	0.477	**0.053**	**0.021**	**0.012**	**0.042**	**0.017**	**0.016**
Group* Difference (L1)	**0.100**	**0.018**	**<0.001**	−0.021	0.023	0.355	−0.014	0.020	0.488
Journaling (L1)	0.003	0.014	0.808	−0.029	0.018	0.115	0.019	0.015	0.208
Service Engagement (L2)	−0.016	0.012	0.189	**0.067**	**0.016**	**<0.001**	**0.041**	**0.013**	**0.003**
Community Engagement (L2)	**0.062**	**0.010**	**<0.001**	−0.007	0.010	0.472	**−0.018**	**0.009**	**0.036**
Group** Interaction (L2)	**0.199**	**0.034**	**<0.001**	**0.456**	**0.045**	**<0.001**	n/a	n/a	n/a
Reflection (L2)	0.010	0.009	0.260	−0.007	0.012	0.584	**0.049**	**0.010**	<0.001

Significant findings ($p < 0.05$) are presented in **bold**.
* "Group" in these two variables refers to the group referenced in the outcome.
** For students, there was no measure of the frequency of interaction due to the fact that students would be interacting with one another multiple times each day.

The importance of placement quality reinforces the point that "structural diversity is a necessary but insufficient condition for maximal education benefits" (Gurin et al., 2002, p. 333)—exposing students to diverse others is not enough, but interacting with them is important, and to do so in a context conducive to learning. In the context of ABs, having shared activities, common goals, and opportunities to form personal ties helped facilitate positive diversity interactions. These are conditions that can be replicated in a number of other contexts, such as residence halls, intermural athletic teams, and study abroad programs.

Beyond simply working side-by-side with diverse others, ABs also provided intense, challenging environments. One way that program intensity facilitates student learning is through providing the cognitive dissonance needed for learning to occur (Gurin et al., 2002; Kiely, 2005). Because of the immersive nature of the experience, students are not able to "escape" this cognitive dissonance by disengaging from diverse peer, community, or staff interactions or retreating to a more comfortable setting.

Finally, contrary to expectations, the extent to which students engaged in group reflection activities was only significantly associated with the amount they reported learning from other students. Prior research has pointed to the importance of reflection in service-learning in general (e.g., Eyler & Giles, 1999; Jones & Abes, 2004; Jones et al., 2012), and in particular in making meaning of negative diversity experiences (Bowman & Brandenberger, 2012; Mayhew & Engberg, 2010). In this study, reflection was not associated with students' perceptions of learning from either community members or host site staff. If the main role of reflection in facilitating learning about diversity in service-learning is in helping students make sense of negative diversity interactions (Bowman & Brandenberger, 2012), it is possible that with the short period of time of the AB (typically one week), students were just not engaging deeply enough with community members or host site staff to have negative experiences. It is also possible that if these negative experiences did occur, reflection activities may not have addressed them. The value of reflection in ABs may have more to do with enabling students to form close personal ties with one another than with making meaning of their experiences with host site staff or community members. Also possible is that reflection benefitted students in other ways that would not be reflected in this study's focus on diversity.

Conclusion and Implications

In the United States, college students frequently come from relatively homogenous home environments (Gurin et al., 2002); college may be the first time many of these students truly have the opportunity to interact with people different from themselves in a variety of ways. Unfortunately, simply creating a structurally diverse campus is not enough to guarantee interaction (Gurin et al., 2002), and simply creating opportunities for interaction is not enough to guarantee positive learning (Engberg, 2007; Mayhew & Engberg, 2010; Mayhew et al., 2008). The findings from this study identify potential for ABs to facilitate positive diversity experiences and provide implications for other contexts in which diversity interactions occur.

This study has a number of implications for practitioners working with ABs and other service programs. First, practitioners should pay attention to creating opportunities for students to interact with community members and host site staff. One important finding from this study was that students interacted least frequently with community members (only about half of the students reported interacting with community members more than once a day), yet this was the group they perceived to be the most different from themselves and one of the groups from

whom they reported learning the most. Certain types of AB trips may be more conducive to community interaction than others (for example, delivering food to people living with HIV may facilitate more interaction than engaging in habitat restoration work), so practitioners working with those trips that do not easily lend themselves to community interaction may want to think creatively about how to facilitate this. During an AB focusing on habitat restoration, students might meet with local residents to hear their perspectives on how the habitat restoration project will affect their lives. Practitioners organizing AB programs, alternately, might focus on partnerships with community agencies that involve community members in the service activities. Programs that are not as conducive to community interactions also may be perfect forums for capitalizing on the potential of interactions with host site staff, a group that is often over looked in both research and practice.

Practitioners working with ABs and other service-learning programs may also be interested in the findings from this study regarding the importance of program intensity. Practitioners should pay attention to creating emotionally and physically challenging experiences, which is not to suggest that practitioners should ignore the health and safety of student participants, but this does point to the importance of pushing students out of their comfort zone and providing opportunities for cognitive dissonance. Practitioners should also look to create programs in communities and with host site staff that are very different from the students who will be participating. Although it may be common to consider the demographics of the community when planning ABs, practitioners may also want to consider the diversity of the staff in potential partner organizations.

Finally, the findings of this study support the previous literature on the importance of engaging students in reflection activities with one another, as this was a significant predictor of how much students learned from the other students on their trip. The fact that reflection did not predict students' perceptions of learning from community members or host site staff suggest that practitioners may not be fully capitalizing on the potential of reflection to facilitate learning. Practitioners may want to consider including community members and host site staff in some reflection activities, for example by holding end-of-day reflection discussions at the host site and inviting staff and community members to share their perspectives on the day with students. This would also provide another forum for students to interact with community members, particularly in ABs where that does not happen naturally. Separately, practitioners may also want to encourage students to reflect on any negative experiences they may be having in order to provide a forum where students can make meaning of these experiences in a positive way.

Outside of the context of ABs, this study also has implications for our understanding of student learning from diversity interactions in higher education more broadly. Although Gurin et al.'s (2002) theoretical framework and much of the existing research on diversity in higher education (e.g., Bowman, 2010; Mayhew & Engberg, 2010; among others) highlight the importance of informal interactions with diverse peers, the results of this study regarding community members and host site staff point to the need to consider diversity interactions beyond students' peer groups. Students interact with a wide variety of people during their time in college—e.g., faculty, staff, and community members off campus—who can all be sources of learning. Higher education institutions should consider how to capitalize on the many diverse communities in and around their institutions, and future research should look beyond students for sources of diversity interactions.

The results of this study also have implications for how institutions might structure other cocurricular environments in order to best promote positive diversity experiences. First, institutions should look to create opportunities for diversity interactions that are *not* focused on

diversity—intermural sports teams, study abroad programs, and other service-learning programs may all provide the same neutral setting, shared sense of purpose and easy conversation starters that high-quality service placements do within the context of ABs. Second, although the intensity of an AB experience might be difficult to replicate, other types of immersion experiences (e.g., short-term study abroad or leadership retreats) might be able to achieve similar levels of intensity to facilitate cognitive dissonance and student learning. Future research should explore the role of intensity in these experiences to determine if the relationship between intensity and learning holds across multiple contexts.

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