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Laurie Kutner

*University of Vermont*, [Laurie.Kutner@uvm.edu](mailto:Laurie.Kutner@uvm.edu)

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

# Undergraduate Education Abroad in Community Settings:

## Pedagogical Opportunities for Librarians

Laurie Kutner

### Introduction

As undergraduate possibilities for study and service abroad increase and develop strategically to address local community needs in settings in the Global South,<sup>1</sup> there is greater opportunity for academic librarians to contribute expertise in supporting and facilitating student learning and engagement with research and information concepts and processes. Education abroad experiences are considered high-impact educational practices<sup>2</sup> and, as such, provide excellent vantage points from which to consider contextualizing engagement with the expanded construct of information literacy as described in ACRL's Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education.<sup>3</sup> Utilizing a case study of a pilot project, this chapter focuses on initial work to incorporate critical information literacy concepts into international applied learning settings. The setting for this case study is the Monteverde Institute (MVI) in Costa Rica, a Costa Rican non-profit organization that provides a teaching and learning setting and essential infrastructure for North American education abroad programs.

Throughout this chapter, the term “education abroad” is used predominantly to describe American student learning experiences abroad that happen in a variety of venues. Consistent with the most recent iteration of the ACE (American Council on Education) national survey entitled “Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses,”<sup>4</sup> the term “education abroad” is favored over the term “study abroad” to reflect the range of American student international experiences that may include research, service-learning,

internships, and other activities that all contribute to student learning and development.<sup>5</sup> The Monteverde Institute hosts a variety of research-based and service-based education abroad programs of varying durations, as well as student internships and shorter-term travel study programs.

This chapter focuses on work done on-site in the summer of 2017, when the author participated in activities in two education abroad programs at the MVI and subsequently presented and facilitated a one-hour long discussion in each program entitled, “Equity Issues in Scholarly Access and Production: A View from Latin America.” At the beginning of the discussion, students were given a directed reflective question to consider during the course of the presentation and asked to form a written response that was handed in at the end of the session. The content of the presentation, a summary of student reflective responses, and the author’s reflections on the experience are presented below.

## Background/ Literature Review

There are several trends in higher education that set the context for this work and demonstrate that a timely opportunity exists for academic librarians to leverage their skill set to make meaningful pedagogical contributions to education abroad programs. By considering the interrelationships of these disparate trends, new possibilities emerge for librarian contributions to education abroad instructional content, including

- pedagogical opportunities created by engaging with the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy, with a focus on the external social, contextual aspects of information;
- increased emphasis in higher education on high-impact practices such as global education, undergraduate research, and service;
- increasing numbers of students in education abroad programs;
- expansion of education abroad locations to include more community settings in the Global South;
- impacts of international service-learning and research activities on host communities and the need for equitable distribution of benefits; and
- academic library contributions to campus internationalization efforts.

According to the latest Open Doors Report released by the Institute of International Education in 2016, the number of American students studying abroad has continued to increase. Students engaging in education abroad experiences have more than tripled in the past ten years, though more recently the rate of growth is slowing. Destinations for education abroad in Latin America are also increasing, and Costa Rica is leading the way with a growth rate of 8 percent in the past year, hosting approximately 9,300 students.<sup>6</sup> The Monteverde Institute alone hosted approximately 500 students participating in community-based education abroad programs in varying capacities in their most recent fiscal year.<sup>7</sup>

In 2008, American Association of Colleges & Universities published George Kuh’s seminal study entitled, “High Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter.”<sup>8</sup> Based on decades of research, he substantiated that “participating in certain high-impact educational practices correlates with higher levels of student performance.”<sup>9</sup> In his study, Kuh identified ten high-impact practices, including diversity/global learning, service-learning, community-based learning, undergraduate research, internships, and capstone courses and projects,<sup>10</sup> all of which fall under

the realm of MVI programmatic offerings. Though these practices are not new, after the publication of Kuh's research, there was an effort to systematically document the impact of these practices and view multiple high-impact practices as important elements of an undergraduate education.<sup>11</sup>

A 2013 study done by Riehle and Weiner examined incorporation of information literacy competency development into five specific high-impact educational practices and confirmed that these are excellent vantage points from which to engage students in information literacy-related themes. Through the literature they examined, they provide substantial evidence of this occurring within the context of high-impact educational practices, though they note that the term "information literacy" is not necessarily used in disciplinary literature to describe the set of abilities and habits of mind that our profession refers to as IL.<sup>12</sup> Their research was conducted before the adoption of the current ACRL Framework for Information Literacy, which provides potential for further articulations of intersections of information literacy with high-impact learning practices.

While the theme of student learning is a predominant focus of the education abroad literature, there is a growing body of literature which focuses on impacts of education abroad and international service experiences, both positive and negative, on host communities in the Global South.<sup>13</sup> Increasingly, there is recognition that education abroad experiences should not only be evaluated from the student learning perspective, but also from home and host institution programmatic perspectives, and as well from the host community perspective.<sup>14</sup> An unexplored theme in the education abroad literature is the potential value of new information and knowledge generated by students that can make long-term contributions to a host community knowledge-base, particularly in community-based settings. This theme was explored in the library literature in an article that discusses the importance of providing open access to student research-based information generated through local community research in Monteverde, Costa Rica.<sup>15</sup>

The ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education, formally adopted in January, 2016, provides six "interconnected core concepts," or frames, that are a set of "conceptual understandings" with which to develop in students the increasingly complex understandings of our information ecosystem, both as consumers of information and as active knowledge producers.<sup>16</sup> While the previous ACRL Information Literacy Standards for Higher Education focused on the development of individual, reproducible skills, developing an understanding of the larger external social context of information is inherent in the new framework.<sup>17</sup> The importance of the social contextual aspect of information to the pedagogy behind the framework additionally encourages consideration of critical questions to develop a nuanced understanding of our information environment that preferences some and marginalizes others.<sup>18</sup>

The framework represents engagement with the growing area of critical information literacy. Early critical information literacy proponents elucidate the importance of developing a criticality in teaching about information by engaging with its larger, socio-political contexts.<sup>19</sup> "Critical information literacy ...looks at the cultural, social, and economic structures that underlie all of information production and dissemination" and asks students to critically reflect on this larger underlying context of information, both as information producers and consumers.<sup>20</sup> As critical information literacy has developed, the literature demonstrates both an increasing depth and breadth of engagement with its constructs, both from theoretical and practitioner perspectives.<sup>21</sup>

When conversations ensued surrounding development of the framework, proponents of creating a separate frame on social justice elucidated the importance of engagement with underlying issues of “unequal distribution of power, privilege, and authority” in developing a complex, critical understanding of our place in the information universe.<sup>22</sup> Though the framework ultimately emerged without social justice as a separate frame, opportunities for engagement with related concepts that are woven into it may be considered a result of those conversations, and the case study presented below is reflective of this.

As colleges and universities have become increasingly engaged in internationalization-related initiatives, library support and participation has been documented across all library functions.<sup>23</sup> Though the largest body of related literature focuses on supporting and working with international students,<sup>24</sup> there is a small body of literature on the roles of librarians supporting and interfacing with students in education abroad programs. Themes explored in this literature include provision of library resources and services for students in education abroad programs, ways in which to improve student awareness of utilizing their home institution libraries from abroad, opportunities for librarians to directly interface with students at all phases of their experience through both face-to-face and electronic means, and support for the dissemination of education abroad students’ work.<sup>25</sup>

Librarians have also had the opportunity to partner with disciplinary faculty to lead education abroad programs<sup>26</sup> and to lead their own international service-learning programs.<sup>27</sup> More recently, there has been an emerging recognition of the potential for engaging with the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy in the context of high-impact educational practices such as education abroad experiences.<sup>28</sup> However, there has been no evidence to date of specific ways this has been accomplished at the time of student active engagement in education abroad. The case study outlined below begins to fill that gap.

## Setting

The Monteverde Institute is located in Monteverde, Costa Rica, an area with a population of roughly 7,000 that is situated on the continental divide in the province of Puntarenas.<sup>29</sup> Monteverde is a rural Costa Rican community and a small North American Quaker community. Best known as an international eco-tourist destination due to its spectacular natural beauty, easily accessible high elevation cloud forest ecosystem, and extraordinary biodiversity, Monteverde sees about 250,000 tourists pass through each year.<sup>30</sup> Because of the area’s unique history, its biodiversity and multiple tropical ecosystems, an early commitment to conservation and sustainability, as well as challenges associated with being both a small, rural community and a significant eco-tourist destination, it has additionally become an area that hosts a high number of international education programs.

The Monteverde Institute is the largest of three institutions that support education abroad programs in the area. Since its inception in 1987, the MVI has hosted almost 10,000 students, with a client base of over approximately 130 universities, high schools, and study programs.<sup>31</sup>

Study, research, and community are the three cornerstones of the MVI mission, and it is the interplay of these three facets that facilitates pedagogical opportunities for incorporating interaction with the information literacy frames elucidated in ACRL’s Frame-

work for Information Literacy. There is a commitment on the part of the MVI to share with the local community the results of research conducted under its auspices. Additionally, the MVI is home to a small library that supports its educational programs, and the author has worked closely with that library for over ten years.<sup>32</sup>

The author's strong connection with the MVI and a history of successful initiatives there enabled further opportunities to engage more directly with their courses and programs. In Summer 2016, the author proposed to MVI administration ideas and opportunities for utilizing her instruction librarian skill set to contribute more directly to MVI course content, pedagogy, and assessment. There was much support of the idea and, at the time, a decision to host a pilot project in Summer 2017.

The unique opportunity to be directly involved with international applied learning experiences at the time of active student engagement has provided an initial opportunity to participate in activities, listen to students, lead discussions, and provide reflective exercises to reinforce engagement with information literacy concepts for two courses. The remainder of this chapter focuses on the information literacy aspect of this pilot project.

## The Courses

As a pilot project, the MVI staff and the author collectively decided which two courses would be best suited for incorporation of active information literacy engagement, based on course content and itinerary, the willingness of university instructors, and timing. The MVI staff were instrumental in facilitating the logistics involved in adding this into the courses, scheduling, and communication. The names of the courses and associated home institutions are not identified here due to the nature of this work as a pilot project. Instead, they are identified as Course A and Course B.

Course A was an international service-learning program with contextual activities and a research component incorporated into it, coming out of a private internationally known US research university. Participants were twelve undergraduates who had to go through a competitive application process in order to be selected for participation. The duration of the program was almost two months.

In Course A, the author participated in a number of learning activities with the students before leading an information literacy-focused activity, including an interpretive naturalist-led cloud forest ecology hike and two participatory lectures, one delivered by the resident expert naturalist educator and the other by an internationally known local scientist. Students were required to keep reflective journals and after these activities were asked to write a reflection about their preferred learning styles for active engagement with new information, considering the different ways that information was delivered to them in the first couple weeks of the course. Students were told that responses would be anonymously shared with the librarian. Their reflections were very helpful when considering how to best deliver the information literacy-related presentation and additionally framed the expectation that the librarian was an active participant in the course content.

Course B was a one-month program focused on learning about tropical ecology, collecting ecological field data, engaging with contextual and cultural Costa Rican background information, and creating a final presentation based on data collected in order to teach the processes involved in conducting ecological field research in an international setting. Interestingly, the course participants included fifteen undergraduates from the home institution, a small, private undergraduate university in the US, and three Costa Rican

students who were selected to receive scholarships to participate in the course. The course was an upper-division biology course. In Course B, the librarian initially met the students by attending one participatory course activity focused on understanding Costa Rican cultural context. Because the duration of Course B was shorter than Course A, this was the only opportunity to engage with students before delivering the information literacy-related presentation to them. In retrospect, it was a sufficient opportunity to establish a connection to the program before leading the IL-related presentation and discussion with them.

## Engaging Students at the MVI in an “Information Conversation”

The ACRL Framework for Information Literacy provides increasing recognition by our profession that there are important critical learning processes related to developing an understanding of information access and production processes from broader social, cultural and historical perspectives.<sup>33</sup> Concurrently, there is recognition that high-impact learning practices create excellent opportunities for engagement with information literacy concepts.<sup>34</sup> With this in mind, a program was created for students in the two MVI courses described above to consider questions related to equity issues in access to scholarly information as well as in scholarly production. Approaching these issues from the perspective of being actively engaged in experiential learning in Latin America, the hypothesis was that “a rich and timely pedagogical opportunity existed for students to engage with information social justice issues from a different perspective than when they are at their home institutions. International education programs, particularly in community-based locations in the Global South, provide excellent vantage points for impactful conversations regarding global and local inequities in access and production of scholarship.”

Students in both courses participated in a one-hour long presentation and discussion, entitled, “Equity Issues in Scholarly Access and Production: A View from Latin America,” that focused on consideration of the following overarching questions:

- Is the production of scholarship and access to information equitable across the world?
- Who benefits?
- Who loses?
- Why should we care?

Three basic learning outcomes were established which both guided development of the presentation and were driven by background research for the presentation:

1. Students begin to understand the economics of access to scholarly information and their privileged vantage point as North American university students. Concurrently, they develop an understanding of the implications of non-access to the body of proprietary scholarly resources.
2. Students begin to understand that production of scholarship is impacted by complex societal forces and consider this from a Latin American and global perspective, specifically with regard to advancing knowledge of complex global issues such as global climate change.
3. Students begin to understand the potential and importance of open access resources in the advancement of scholarship from a Latin American and global perspective.

See the Appendix 24A for a list of frames from the ACRL Framework and the connected knowledge practices and dispositions that were touched upon in the sessions. Additionally, in the Appendix, the three learning outcomes listed above are mapped to these knowledge practices and dispositions. A strength of the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy is that it is not meant to be prescriptive; the relationship between the learning outcomes and the framework developed organically through engagement with the presentation content.

## Presentation Content

After presenting a brief introduction, context, and background information, the intent was to have a participatory conversation that would allow for collectively grappling with complex questions. We would frame and consider the issues from a local perspective, using local examples wherever possible.

Additionally, students were asked at the beginning of the session to consider themselves as the next generation of researchers that have the potential to work toward changing the way scholarship is produced and disseminated into the future. They were each given a copy of the following question on a slip of paper and were asked to write down two ideas that emerged for them during the session and hand them in upon leaving at the end as a reflective and reinforcing exercise.

As future potential contributors to the scholarly information universe as the next generation of researchers ...what can the next generation of researchers do to work toward leveling the global information playing field?

Responses were compiled and are discussed in detail at the end of this section.

The first slide presented to the students was a screenshot of a Web of Science search using the keywords “monteverde costa rica” with search results arranged by “Times Cited.” The search yielded 264 results; we noted that 263 of them were in English and one in Spanish, and 242 results were not in open access publications. A lively discussion immediately ensued as we deconstructed the search results and students made observations about language, accessibility,

journal titles represented, and the inherent irony in a highly cited author from whom they had received a lecture, who, by virtue of lack of a university affiliation, does not have the ability to afford a subscription to the journal in which he had published. We discussed ballpark figures for journal costs and for access to core scholarly databases such as Web of Science. We discussed local researchers losing the ability to access locally based research when the scholarship is exported and published in cost-prohibitive publications. But because of the vantage point from which we were discussing this, this was not an objective academic exercise. There was a personal connection to the place, the research, and the local researchers who students had met through various lectures and presentations. We then looked at a visual depiction of what major North American universities pay for Springer, Wiley, and Elsevier journal bundles. We turned to the local researchers present in the room to ask what they do when they need to get access to a journal article that they do not have the ability to access. Not surprisingly, local researchers make use of their social networks to individuals associated with Northern institutions to acquire the information they need.



The next question that we explored was where the researchers are coming from that are contributing to these core scholarly, peer-reviewed journals, and we looked at data presented in a 2017 article that was published in *Nature Climate Change* entitled, “Steps to Overcome the North-South Divide in Research Relevant to Climate Change Policy and Practice.”<sup>35</sup> Close to 90 percent of the researchers included in this study came from OECD Northern countries, indicating a striking North-South divide in climate change research published in what has been established as the core scientific journals. This led to examining in some detail the question of what the implications are for Northern researchers clearly dominating the research arena of a truly global issue. What gets left out? How does this affect research priorities? How does this affect climate change policy? And what are the underlying societal forces that result in Southern countries’ capacities to do research? With large international collaborative research projects, Southern countries may be represented but, almost without fail, lead authors tend to be from Northern countries. What are the overall effects of this unequal flow of information?

We looked at a couple of other studies that provided more support for these main themes and turned our discussion to implications of English being the dominating language of global scholarship.<sup>36</sup> We discussed questions of who is favored in a competition-based model of scholarship, what research questions are not being addressed, and thought about the range of good science that is potentially being missed and the implications of this. Throughout the discussion, which was supported with Latin American examples, students were actively engaged and recognized that these were important and compelling issues that they had never before considered.

The conversation then took a more positive turn as we moved on to discuss the possibilities afforded by an open access model of journal publication. Latin America has more open access journal publications than any other region of the world, and we discussed reasons for this.<sup>37</sup> We focused on the regional Latin American repository approach to providing a common platform for housing open access journals and discussed the two large regional repositories, ScieLO and Redalyc. We considered the potential implications of a sub-set of ScieLO journals that are now searchable through the Web of Science interface. We finished by looking at world internet access statistics and noting that in Latin America and the Global South, price is only one obstacle in the ability to access research and scholarship. The discussions were vibrant with wide student participation; if it were not for our time constraint, we could have continued in both presentations. At the end, students took a few minutes to compose their written responses to the prompt:

As future potential contributors to the scholarly information universe as the next generation of researchers ...what can the next generation of researchers do to work toward leveling the global information playing field?

## Student Reflective Responses

The reasons for incorporating an exercise for students to create written suggestions to this prompt were multi-fold:

- It provided an opportunity for students to reflect on and critically apply information they had engaged with during the session.
- It provided a scenario that was relevant to them, particularly from being present

in the Latin American vantage point and allowed them to consider their defined priorities and verbalize them.

- It enabled students to provide an active voice for their opinions regarding shaping the future of the way scholarship gets produced and disseminated on a global scale.
- It provided an immediate reflective assessment tool for the instructor and the Monteverde Institute staff to understand how students engaged with the topics discussed.

A total of twenty-six responses were collected. Many of the responses at least partially focused on the importance of open access publications for the widest dissemination of scholarship. But they went beyond articulating a passive importance to playing a direct, more active role:

- “Submit work to open access journals. Try to convince institutions to submit articles to open access.”
- “Contribute as peer-reviewer for open access journals.”
- “Help with the language barrier by doing some translation work.”
- “Work within open access publications. As editor? As translator?”

There was also a strong theme of the importance of making research available in multiple languages:

- “Publish articles in languages in addition to English.”
- “Translate into more languages.”
- “As a Spanish speaker, make sure that my research is available in more than one language.”
- “Publish in a way that can be translated easily into other languages.”

Finally, a strong concern for inclusion of local researchers and for making results of research available to local populations was articulated:

- “Share it with the community where the research takes place. Implement programs at schools and high schools to share with them all this info.”
- “Requirement for open access publication in [the] country that research study is being done in.”
- “Publish research in the country in which it was conducted, not just the country where your university is.”
- “Collaborate with local researchers.”
- “Rely more on local workers for research assistants; try to keep research local so it can maintain a local presence.”
- “Science that is conducted abroad needs to be published abroad first.”
- “Publish new findings in [the] local newspaper using local high schoolers to rewrite what was found in a fashion that locals would be able to comprehend. Take local students into the field when collecting data.”
- “Researchers (should) do more to present and contextualize their work for the populations under study.”

## Reflections/Future Plans

ACRL’s Framework for Information Literacy has provided the pedagogical basis for engaging in conversation with students about inequities of access to and production of scholarship from a Latin American perspective. The unique vantage point and willing-

ness on the part of program instructors provided an excellent opportunity to engage students in a focused, critical discussion of the broader contextual aspects of the global scholarly information ecosystem in ways that would be extremely challenging, if not impossible, to replicate while at their home institutions during the course of a regular semester. An overarching theme of information social justice permeated the discussion but with an additional experiential, place-based connection.

The reflective responses presented above demonstrate that students processed the information presented and discussed and were able to synthesize and further articulate ideas for working toward future greater equity in access to and production of scholarship. Based on oral feedback from course instructors, students, and staff at the Monteverde Institute, this small pilot project has supported the initial hypothesis that “international education programs, particularly in community-based locations in the Global South, provide excellent opportunities for impactful conversations regarding global and local inequities in access and production of scholarship.” It has confirmed the value in further and wider subsequent engagement with the presented content.

The Monteverde Institute staff member present at the second session has since adapted the content for her own presentation to the summer internship students at the MVI. She plans on continuing to foundationally present it to other student groups at the MVI. From her perspective, the context provided in this presentation creates important meaning for students who are asked to leave the final products of their research behind so that the MVI can make it openly accessible in its digital library collections. An important intent of this conversation has been for students to further understand that the research they conduct while in the area is potentially valuable to the host community, and that access to the information they generate and dissemination of that information is their lasting contribution.

The success of the pilot project was impacted by the author’s previously existing relationship with the MVI and the resulting confidence with which the MVI enabled and facilitated its logistics. The digital library projects that the author directed at the MVI over the years were focused on creating greater accessibility to locally based research through open access venues and were framed with an information social justice perspective that the MVI leadership was familiar with. Therefore, they recognized the importance and relevance of discussing this with students. MVI staff that attended the presentations were active, engaged participants that brought important perspectives to the discussion.

Current plans are to expand and update the content next year when the author is again on-site and to deliver it to an increased number of programs during that time. More formal mechanisms of assessment of the session’s learning outcomes, as well as related wider programmatic outcomes, will also be further discussed next year as part of a larger project to develop systematic assessment strategies for determining long-term impacts of MVI programs.

In conversations thus far, an information literacy lens from which to contribute to programmatic content and assessment efforts has proven to be relevant and valued. From a librarian perspective, it has been extremely heartening to hear instructors and administrators of education abroad programs refer to “information literacy” as something relevant to what they do. Though this chapter presents one case study in a unique location with a unique set of circumstances, it hopefully points to further possibilities for unique librarian pedagogical contributions to education abroad.

## Appendix 24A: ACRL Framework knowledge practices and dispositions addressed in the session with associated learning outcomes

### *Frame: Information has Value*

(Knowledge practices). Learners who are developing their information literate abilities

- understand how and why some individuals or groups of individuals may be underrepresented or systematically marginalized within the systems that produce and disseminate information (learning outcomes 1, 2);
- recognize issues of access or lack of access to information sources (learning outcomes 1, 2, 3); and
- decide where and how their information is published (learning outcomes 1, 3).

### *Frame: Information Creation as a Process*

(Knowledge practices). Learners who are developing their information literate abilities

- articulate the capabilities and constraints of information developed through various creation processes (learning outcomes 2, 3);
- recognize that information may be perceived differently based on the format in which it is packaged (learning outcomes 1, 2, 3); and
- monitor the value that is placed on different types of information products in varying contexts (learning outcomes 1, 2, 3).

### *Frame: Authority is Constructed and Contextual*

(Dispositions). Learners who are developing their information literate abilities

- develop awareness of the importance of assessing content with a skeptical stance and with a self-awareness of their own biases and worldview (learning outcomes 1, 2);
- question traditional notions of granting authority and recognize the value of diverse ideas and worldviews (learning outcomes 1, 2); and
- are conscious that maintaining these attitudes and actions requires frequent self-evaluation (learning outcomes 1, 2, 3).

### *Frame: Scholarship as Conversation*

(Dispositions). Learners who are developing their information literate abilities

- recognize that systems privilege authorities and that not having a fluency in the language and process of a discipline disempowers their ability to participate and engage (learning outcomes 1, 2, 3).

## Notes

1. The term “Global South” is used here to refer to the lower income, more impoverished areas in the world that lie predominantly in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Oceania. It is used as an alternative to the stigmatized terms “developing countries” and “Third World.” For further discussion about the term, see: Nour Dados and Raewyn Connell, “The Global South,” *Contexts* 11, no.1 (2012): 12–13; United Nations Development Programme, “Forging a Global South: United Nations Day for North-South Cooperation” (2004), accessed October 4, 2017, <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/china/docs/Publications/UNDP-CH-PR-Publications-UN-Day-for-South-South-Cooperation.pdf>; “North and South, The (Global),” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. William A. Darity (Detroit: MacMillan Reference U.S.A., 2008), 5: 542–44.
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