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## Producing the Global Classroom: Exploring the Impact of US Study Abroad on Host Communities in San Jose, Costa Rica and Florence, Italy

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*Syracuse University*

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## **ABSTRACT**

This project draws attention to a disconnect between US higher education internationalization policy rhetoric which centers ideas of mutual cross-cultural exchange, and study abroad research, which focuses almost exclusively on the educational and experiential outcomes of the US based participant. Using neoliberalism as a theoretical framework, this comparative case study utilizes qualitative interviews with 57 host community members in the popular study abroad destinations of San Jose, Costa Rica and Florence, Italy, to focus on how those who engage with US study abroad students understand and are impacted by those encounters. Each descriptive case explores: a) what motivates locals to engage with US students; b) their modes of educative engagement; c) instances of harmony and dissonance that result; d) how they make meaning of these encounters; e) and what they see as outcomes of US study abroad in the community. Across these two diverse cases the findings suggest that many hosts perceive US students' aversion to linguistic (and cultural) immersion as a lack of respect for hosts; the presence of US students contributes to foreign (US) imperialism; and that study abroad program design choices have an impact on the study abroad host experience.

Producing the Global Classroom:  
Exploring the Impact of US Study Abroad on Host Communities  
in San Jose, Costa Rica and Florence, Italy

by

Julie M. Ficarra  
B.A. University at Buffalo, 2010  
Ed.M. Harvard University, 2011

Dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Cultural Foundations of Education

Syracuse University

May 2019

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Ubuntu* is a Zulu phrase meaning “I am because you are”, or that a person is who they are because of and through their relationship to other people. While I have felt an affinity for this concept since first learning of it when studying abroad in Tanzania in 2007, it has taken on new meaning on this journey towards completing my dissertation and PhD. Like with everything in life, “I am” and this project “is” because of the many people who have enabled it “to be” in so many ways.

### *Funders*

Beginning very practically with those who funded this dissertation project: The School of Education Research and Creative Activity Fund, the Moynihan Institute Summer Research Grant, and the University Teaching Assistantship and Fellowship. I am indebted to these funding bodies which enabled me to travel to Costa Rica and Italy to conduct my fieldwork. Further, the University Teaching Assistantship and Fellowship not only supported me financially throughout my PhD, it provided me with invaluable teaching experience which introduced me to brilliant, kind, and caring students – many of whom studied abroad, and engaged intellectually with me throughout the conceptualization of this project. A special thanks to former student Megan Gruver for her dedication to helping me with this project.

Thank you to Corrine Smith and the Himan Brown Trust Fellowship. Corrine, your interest in my project and support for international education at the School of Education served as an inspiration for this work. Thank you for your support and encouragement.

### *SU Advisors, Professors, Colleagues, and Friends*

To my advisor and dissertation chairperson Gretchen Lopez, thank you for teaching me that the process *is* the work. Your reflexive, organized, engaged, way of research, teaching, and scholarship has been inspirational to me throughout this process. Thank you to my committee member Barbara Applebaum, your lesson during my first semester in the program about the difference between the literal and the discursive was one of the most impactful lessons of my entire education. Your warmth and positivity have made this process such a pleasure. To my committee member Jeff Mangram, thank you for your interest in my project and for your invaluable feedback on drafts of my dissertation – your attention to methods has significantly strengthened this research. I would also like to thank department administrator Maryann Baker, the kindness with which you have helped to keep me on track with the many procedures and deadlines embedded within the PhD and dissertation process is so very appreciated.

I am also indebted to a number of Maxwell faculty members. To Professor Matthew Huber, our independent study on neoliberalism and the corporate university helped to form the theoretical framework for this project – thank you for your patience and support of my learning. Likewise, thank you Brian Taylor and the students in his Spring 2016 proposal writing class – even though I was the only student from outside of the Maxwell School you and your students were so kind and generous in your engagement with my work. The time we spent together in that class significantly contributed to the eventual design of this project.

I also received a great amount of support from colleagues at SU Abroad. Margaret Himley, you were one of the first people with whom I discussed this research project in the Fall of 2014 – thank you for your feedback and encouragement. To Petra Hejnova, thank you for taking the time to discuss my project on multiple occasions and for your help in arranging for me to present my research proposal to the SU Abroad directors. Those connections proved to be very valuable. Likewise, a big thank you to Lou Berends for graciously reading my substantive comprehensive exam, which informed the literature review for this dissertation. I so appreciate your mentorship and the example you provide of how to be a scholar-practitioner.

I perhaps learned the most over the last four years from my fellow classmates, who pushed me to think radically about study abroad and international education. Conversations about race, gender, class, higher education, and the ethics of research have been invaluable to me as have your friendships throughout this process. So, to Jordan West, Kimberly Williams Brown, Laura Jaffe, Kelsey John, Michele Lopez Rivas, Penny Parson, Hetsie Veitch, Lauren Shallish, and others, I owe you a debt of gratitude.

I would like to especially thank Derek Ford for pushing me, from day one, to be strategic about my writing and to try to publish early and often. I would not have had the confidence to push multiple pieces of writing through the publication process without your encouragement. Likewise, to Mark Stern, your critical study abroad perspective and willingness to read drafts of my papers has had a huge impact on my work – thank you for helping me find theoretical connections between the work of CFE and study abroad.

#### *SUNY & Study Abroad Friends and Colleagues*

My undergraduate training in Anthropology at the University at Buffalo has had a major influence on the way that I think about the world and about qualitative research. I want to thank Professor Phillips Stevens Jr., my undergraduate advisor and chair of my undergraduate honors thesis, for inspiring me to be a researcher. Likewise, to Professor William Arens and the 2007 cohort of the SUNY Stony Brook Tanzania Program, especially Asif Alidina, Chris Bashinelli, and Alex Torres, as well as to our hosts in Maji Ya Chai, Tanzania – this project would never have come to be had I not participated in this program and had so many meaningful conversations with you all. To my “Oxford girls” Maria Seger, Carly Goldstein, and Shanna Ruelbach – your academic ambitions have served as such an inspiration to me. Thank you for your example, your brilliance, and your friendship.

I feel extremely privileged to have worked with some amazing colleagues in the field of study abroad over the last ten years, all of whom have played a role in my journey. Olga Crombie, my study abroad advisor and friend, you were the first to show me how I could take my love for study abroad and turn it into a career – thank you for always believing in me. To my colleagues at the University of South Florida, especially Amanda Maurer and Jim Pulos, thank you for helping me break into the field, I learned so much from you both about working in international education with style and grace. Likewise, thank you to Jeanne D’Arc Gomis, Elaine Acacio, and Betsy Ball – our work together on “First Do No Harm” helped to form the theoretical foundations of this project. Also, a special thank you to Jennifer Engel, your work with host families in Spain and conversations that we have had about that work was influential to this project.

To my friend, colleague, and fellow scholar-practitioner Mary Schlarb, I continue to learn from your thoughtful and gracious approach to international education. I feel so fortunate that I get to work with someone who understands and appreciates research informed policy-making, thank you for the many conversations we have had (and I hope will continue to have) about our dissertation work. I hope to be half the international educator that you are someday!

### *In the Field*

This project would never have come to fruition without the fifty-seven people in Costa Rica and Italy who generously agreed to open up and share bits of their life with me. I would like to especially thank Veronica Castro, Alejandra Barahona, and Sasha Perugini for your help in supporting me and this project through your assistance with recruiting participants and securing housing during my fieldwork. Your collegiality and interest in my research topic are the reasons I love working in this field.

### *Family & Friends*

I finally would like to thank my family and friends for all of their support. There have been many instances over the last four years that family and friends have checked in on the status of my dissertation and have sent love and encouragement, often times from afar. Thank you to my sister Catie Tarnacki, mother-in-law Jane Henion Avery, sister-in-law Abby Avery, friends Kellyn Carrierfenster, Mary Kate Hunt, Ali Giuffrida, Nora Davis, Shannon Sangster, Cate Griffin, and Addie Austen. Likewise, my Uncle Dominic and Aunt Mary Ficarra as well as my cousins Rosa and George Maxwell have consistently been encouraging of my PhD ambitions, a special thanks to George for gifting me your doctoral regalia. I will wear it proudly.

To my parents – Anthony and Carole Ficarra, you are the most selfless people I know. Thank you for always believing in my dreams and sacrificing so much to enable me to achieve them. This dissertation and PhD belong to you just as much as they do to me.

To my husband and best friend – Sam Avery, for all of the hours that you have so patiently listened to me drone on about my ideas for this project, for excitedly engaging with those ideas, and for following me around the world in pursuit of my passion, I will be forever grateful.

And finally, to the newest love of my life, my son, Sullivan Ficarra Avery, your impending arrival served as the ultimate countdown for finishing a complete draft of this document. I hope that my work and the work of all of those trying to address global inequality will help to create a kinder and more peaceful world for you and your generation.

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# Producing the Global Classroom: Exploring the Impact of US Study Abroad on Host Communities in San Jose, Costa Rica and Florence, Italy

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Problem & Rationale

Internationalization efforts within higher education are meant to represent the hope for what education could be – the promulgation of cross-cultural understanding and mutual exchange amongst peoples of the world. Indeed, colleges and universities across the United States continue to place great emphasis on internationalization as a strategic way forward, often captured in institutional strategic internationalization plans, missions, or visions that center the idea of promoting mutual understanding. Catchphrases such as *mutual understanding*, *mutual exchange*, *global citizenship*, and the *global classroom* often go undefined, and are therefore operationalized through the sending of US students abroad and the recruitment of international students to US campuses.

While things like *mutual understanding* and *mutual exchange* are assumed outcomes of the study abroad experience, the vast majority of the evaluative research on US study abroad programs is one-sided, focused, almost exclusively, on the US participant. Claims of mutuality are often made casually with very little, or in many cases no data collected to explore the experiences of those who are largely responsible for producing the global classroom – that is, the people, places, and structures with which US students interact while they are abroad. Research suggests a great deal about the nature of how the global classroom is *consumed* by US students; from their motivations to go abroad to their change in attitudes upon return. However, very little is known about the experiences of those who produce their many opportunities for learning while students are overseas. If US higher education takes seriously the intention of study abroad as a way of promoting mutual understanding

and good will, why have host communities, the other side of the study abroad encounter, been largely ignored in study abroad program evaluation and research?

This dissertation attempts to problematize the assumption that the sending of US students abroad increases mutual understanding. It does not, conversely, assume that the sending of US students abroad does not increase mutual understanding, but rather argues that it is impossible to claim that study abroad increases mutual understanding without the inclusion of host community perspectives in the evaluation of study abroad programs. So, this project takes a first step in that direction by using qualitative methods to better understand the study abroad encounter from the perspective of 57 local study abroad administrators, local university staff, local faculty, and host families in two popular US study abroad destinations; San Jose, Costa Rica, and Florence, Italy.

Flipping the script on typical, student-centered, study abroad evaluation research by focusing on the perspectives and experiences of host community members will begin to fill a gaping hole in study abroad evaluation literature and discourse. Hosts' varied perspectives offer important insight into the work of constructing and maintaining the global classroom, as well as host-side outcomes of engagement that often go ignored. This project represents a foundational step in moving towards addressing the larger question of the extent to which US study abroad is increasing mutual understanding amongst people of the world.

### Research Questions

This project focuses on five primary research questions:

1. What motivates intentional hosts to engage with US study abroad students?
2. In what ways do intentional hosts engage with US study abroad students?
3. How do intentional hosts make sense of their engagement with US study abroad students?
4. What do intentional hosts see as outcomes of engaging with US study abroad students?

5. What, if any, overarching factors or discourses influence the engagement between intentional hosts and US study abroad students?

## Defining Key Terms

### *Study Abroad*

For the purpose of this research, study abroad is defined as “education that takes place outside of a participants’ home country that results in process toward an academic degree at the student’s home institution” (Forum on Education Abroad Online Glossary). Host community member participants in this study have engaged with students who are in their country on different types of study abroad programs. The Forum on Education Abroad’s Online Glossary delineates five general study abroad program types based on pedagogy and program format. These include:

1. *Field Study Programs*, defined as “a study abroad program type whose pedagogy revolves around experiential study outside the classroom setting. Examples include field research programs, internship programs, service-learning programs, archaeological field schools, and field biology programs.”
2. *Integrated University Study*, defined as “a study abroad program type in which the predominant study format is participation in regular courses alongside degree-seeking students from the host university. May be either via direct enrollment or enrollment facilitated by a study abroad provider organization.”
3. *Overseas Branch Campus*, defined as “a separate campus of a college or university whose main campus is in a different country. Formal accreditation is typically through the country where the main campus is situated, and the academic structure typically mirrors that of the main campus. Unlike study abroad programs, overseas campuses offer degrees. They may be aimed primarily at host country students or at students from the country of the sponsoring institution.”
4. *Study Abroad Center*, defined as “an education abroad model in which the predominant study format consists of classroom-based courses designed for non-host country students. Centers may be operated independently, be special units within a host country university, or be sponsored by a college or university in another country or by a study abroad provider organization. Many study abroad centers have permanent staff and facilities.”
5. *Travel Seminar*, defined as “a program in which students travel to many different cities or countries and receive instruction in each location, often regarding a designated, unifying topic. Examples include shipboard education programs or European cultural studies tours.

This is a distinct program type and differs from field trips or excursions within other program types/subtypes.”

Program length is another important program distinction. The Institute of International Education’s Open Doors Report (2017), defines short-term programs as lasting up to 8 weeks, mid-length programs which last one semester, and long terms programs which last an academic or calendar year. Field study programs and travel seminars tend to be short-term and led by a professor from the home institution, whereas study abroad centers, branch campuses, and integrated study programs tend to host mid-length and long-term program and hire mostly local faculty and staff.

### *US Students*

For the purposes of this research, US students refer to students based at US colleges and universities. While the majority of whom are US citizens, some may have varying forms of immigration status in the US. Representing a very small percentage of the overall US student study abroad population, there are some students who come to US universities from different countries and then study abroad while they are there. And while these students may be different, culturally, and linguistically, from students who were born and raised in the US, they may be interpreted as US students by host community members and so for that reason, they are being grouped together. Further, according to the 2017 Open Doors Report (Institute on International Education) during the 2015/2016 academic year 87% of US students who studied abroad were undergraduate students, 60% of whom were either Juniors or Seniors. Sixty seven percent of US study abroad participants are female and 72% of all US study abroad participants are white.

### *Host Community*

For the purposes of this research, the host community refers to people living in a geographic location which hosts US study abroad students. It draws a distinction between “intentional hosts” or, people who in some way choose to engage with US students, either by nature of their work as

study abroad administrators, university staff, or faculty, or through hosting US students in their home, and “unintentional hosts”, which can be defined as people who live in the host community but do not purposely engage with US students. Recognizing that in many ways this is a false dichotomy, and that the amount of “choice” involved in engaging with US students in the tourist-driven economies of San Jose and Florence, is also questionable, the distinction provides a way of narrowing the focus of the research.

### *Host Type*

Within the category of intentional host, four “host types” are delineated. These are: 1) study abroad administrators, or people who work for a university or study abroad center and contribute to the implementation of study abroad programs; 2) university staff, or people who do not work directly in a study abroad office but who, by nature of their work, engage with US students – this includes, an admissions officer, a dean, a director of service learning and a cafeteria worker; 3) professors, or people who teach US (and in some cases local and other international students) in a classroom or lab setting; and 4) host families, or people who host US (and in some cases other international) students in their home for payment. While, as discussed in Chapter 3, host *families* were invited to participate in the study, all twelve host family participants were in fact, host *mothers* specifically.

### *Host Participants*

It is important to make clear that of course, this study only engaged a small number of intentional hosts as research participants, and therefore throughout the dissertation, the term host participants will be used in order to avoid overstating trends, themes, or conclusions. While, in some ways, it is expected that themes drawn from interview data may be representative of broader trends in perspectives amongst other intentional hosts, the term host participant is intended to honor and specify the individual voices of participants.

### *Study Abroad Engagement & Study Abroad Encounter*

Study abroad engagement is meant to signify mutual, intended, communication or interaction between a US study abroad students and members of the host community. Whereas, the study abroad encounter suggests two or more parties interacting with each other, but not necessarily with the same mutual intentionality as engagement.

### *Global Classroom*

While there are lots of current definitions of this term, for the purposes of this project I consider the global classroom the spaces within which study abroad engagement takes place. This includes the actual classroom and instructional spaces abroad where US students study, but it also includes the cities and homes within which they live while they are studying abroad.

### Historical Context

#### Study Abroad in the Age of Neoliberalism

In 2012 President Obama pleaded with governors to increase funding to public higher education contending that “countries that out-educate us today, will out compete us tomorrow” (Block, 2012, para. 1). This competition agenda, purported from the highest level of national government, trickles down to individual institutions of higher education and is then taken up by administrators across universities. Competition manifests at various levels – between universities which compete for students, tuition dollars and grant monies; between departments which compete for student funding and faculty lines; as well as between student affairs offices, which compete for many of the same things. In order to remain relevant at a contemporary US university, no matter your position – administrator, faculty, or student, you must embrace a spirit of competition (Giroux, 2002).

Paul Treanor (2005) defines neoliberalism as:



“a philosophy in which the existence and operation of a market are valued in themselves, separately from any previous relationship with the production of goods and services . . . and where the operation of a market or market-like structure is seen as an ethic in itself, capable of acting as a guide for all human action, and substituting for all previously existing ethical beliefs.” (para.1)

This spirit of competition creates a corporate culture whereby everyone is encouraged to be attentive to the institution’s revenue generating activities. This process has been taken up in different ways across universities as various units attempt to reimagine their mission, at least in part, through the lenses of global competition and capitalism. While attention has been paid to how this corporate shift in higher education impacts tuition (Aronowitz, 2000), teaching staff (Gould, 2003), as well as grants and patents (Slaughter et. al, 2014), the ways in which specific campus units which seek to offer students opportunities to gain that competitive edge in the global workplace are largely under-researched.

Study abroad programs and international student and scholar recruitment, two traditional arms of campus internationalization policy, are popularly understood as being subject to university corporatization in much the same ways as any other unit. Given how full-fee paying international students contribute to the university’s bottom line, critiques of international student recruitment practices, such as Novak’s 2015 article *Milking the Foreign Student Cash Cow* appear in popular media from time to time. However, the ways in which study abroad programs – that is, those programs that send US students away from campus for anywhere from a few weeks to a year, align with broader corporatization trends are far lesser known.

Study abroad programs’ long history of pre-existing connections to the global community present a particularly salient case study for how internationalization and corporatization are in many ways, mutually constituted as well as mutually reinforcing. The shift in how study abroad programs and study abroad administrators see themselves, their role at the university, their responsibility to

students (and others) serves as a microcosm of the larger institution and therefore can offer important insights into the opportunities and perils presented by this historic corporate shift.

### The Evolving Form and Function of US Higher Education

Since Harvard University was established in 1636 the form and function of the US university has gone through a series of evolutions such that the US college student today would likely not recognize earlier iterations of US Higher Education as such. Geiger (2011) describes ten generations of US higher education starting from the reformation, moving through colonial college formations, with the first large infusion of money into the system coming from wealthy philanthropists (such as Wells, Purdue, Smith and Vassar). He argues that aspects of the modern US university, such as residence halls, athletics, and student activities began to develop in the 1890s and institutions began to become concerned with standardizing the college experience across a variety of institutions. The interwar period (1918 – 1939) brought in its wake the massification of higher education; many colleges and universities began accepting women and a cultural shift began to unfold whereby college was seen as something for more than just rich, white, men. ‘Differentiation’ of schools, colleges, and offerings also began to take off during this period. Professional schools for training in education, law, engineering, and applied science were established at many institutions to attend to the new students entering the higher education system with varied backgrounds, experiences, and goals (Guri-Rosenblit et. al, 2009).

The two most recent generations of US Higher Education, according to Geiger (2011) are the Academic Revolution (Generation 9) from 1945-1975 followed by the current generation of Privatization (Generation 10). The Academic Revolution is seen by some as the golden age of the US university, a time when students and faculty actively resisted political changes taking place both on campus as well as in the world (Thelin, 2003). However, the violence that erupted on campuses during the Vietnam war in the late 1960s and the subsequent involvement of the military and

national guard at places like Kent State University, fundamentally changed the nature of ‘campus security’, including increased law enforcement surveillance (Heineman, 1992).

Our current generation of privatization is marked by a transition of funding and ‘ownership’ of universities away from the public. As Berrett (2015) maps in his essay *The Day the Purpose of College Changed*, the evolution of Higher Education in the US continues to trend towards an increased emphasis on competition. Kerr (2001) argues that this competition exists at a number of levels, both inside and outside the university walls, and that this gives rise to what he called the multiversity, he writes: “The multiversity has to be so many things to so many people that it must always be at war with itself” (p. 7). He details how conflicts arise between and among students, faculty, administration, and the public domain – many of which are founded in competition for resources. For example, as the university becomes increasingly concerned with revenue generation, what constitutes a ‘good’ professor, student, or administrator can shift from the quality of their teaching, research, or program development, to the number of grants or scholarships they can yield, which can breed resentment between people and units. Kerr (2001) further suggests that: “Coexistence is more likely than unity. Peace is one priority, progress another” (p. 27).

#### The Generations of Study Abroad Programs

The peace and progress to which Kerr refers is, at least in theory, embodied in the international education movement within US universities. This movement was born largely out of World War I, and a desire to promote peace through an increased understanding of the world. At the time, most college students in the US were white men from upper-class backgrounds – and as such study abroad programs were de facto restricted to them. The first cohort of study abroad students (on record) was a group of eight men from the University of Delaware, who in 1923 traveled to France to study at the Sorbonne in Paris. There, they took part in seminars taught by French faculty members in the French language and established relationships with fellow students.

Upon their return, they developed a study group amongst themselves to continue to develop the ideas to which they were exposed during their year-long experience abroad (Hoffa, 2007). Their trip marked the birth of the junior year study abroad program model and for decades after most study abroad programs developed by universities across the US were designed around this initial program.

The 1940s through the 1990s saw participation in study abroad continually grow, from an anomalous trip undertaken by a few rich white men, to formalized exchanges which allowed a certain number of students from a US university to swap places with a student at a university abroad (McCabe, 2001). Initiated primarily by faculty relationships with colleagues at universities in Western Europe, and increasingly by foreign faculty members with connections to their countries of origin, these bi-lateral exchanges meant that a US student would enroll in courses at a foreign institution for typically a semester or year, living on campus, or in other accommodations with local students, becoming fully immersed in the host culture. Today we would call this an integrated university study program.

Given the bi-lateral nature of these exchanges, they were typically cost-neutral for the universities involved – students paid fees to their home institution that covered the cost of the exchange student who would take their place and vice-versa. Generally, this meant that US colleges and universities were collecting the same tuition and fees that they would have had their student stayed on campus that semester (Brustein, 2007). Yet, depending on their destination, US students could, in theory; save money on the cost of living if their host country's cost of living was lower than that of the US.

What was (and is) culturally unique about bi-lateral exchanges was that domestic and foreign visiting students shared a *common experience* – taking the same classes, taught in a shared language, living in the same accommodations and sharing meals together, much more akin to what we think of the international student experience on US campuses today. However, still, even into the early 1990s

(and indeed today as well) the majority of US students studying abroad were white, female, and middle to upper class (Hoffa, 2007). Further, the host students with whom US study abroad students engaged while abroad were still likely to be white and Western European (Twombly et. al, 2012).

#### The Current State of Study Abroad: Mission Critical

The current state of study abroad programs has also evolved along Geiger's (2011) typology such that over the last 20 years it has become increasingly privatized. Firstly, the ways in which study abroad programs are administered have changed. The earliest short-term study abroad program models were administered primarily by the lead faculty member, who made on-site arrangements and communicated directly to students regarding the program. Later, when bi-lateral exchanges began to develop, memorandums of understanding might be signed between academic departments at the US and foreign institutions and either a faculty member or a department administrator would assist in tracking incoming and outgoing exchange students (Hoffa, 2007). Today, study abroad administration is a professional field with over 10,000 people working at universities across the country, study abroad office staff sizes ranging from 1 at small community colleges to over 30 at larger institutions (NAFSA, 2014).

This change in the administration of study abroad programs can be explained by its increasing importance as a hallmark of internationalization policy – something that has become increasingly important to US colleges and universities that need to prove that they are preparing culturally competent, global citizens, ready to compete in a global workforce. Internationalization as a top priority of US institutions is best illustrated by the ubiquity of phrases like mutual understanding, cross-cultural exchange, inter-cultural competence, and global citizenship in university mission statements. However, Morphey and Hartley (2006) ask whether university mission statements are “strategic expressions of institutional distinctiveness” or “organizational

window dressings that are normative necessities” (p. 459). Either way, “recognition of international dimensions in institutional mission statements, planning, and policy documents” remains at the center of institutional internationalization strategy (Knight, 2004).

These mission statements often emphasize the speed with which one can become a global citizen which Zemach-Bersin (2008) and Bolen (2001) have suggested reflects broader trends in consumer culture which privileges the quick and easy. They argue that there is often no indication of a university’s approach to study abroad or how it defines mutuality or global citizenship. Yet study abroad programs and other international opportunities like internships and student teaching have become an increasingly important marketing and recruitment tool.

#### Diversification of Study Abroad Offerings

The centrality of study abroad to the mission of developing global citizens has inspired a dramatic growth in the variety of study abroad program models – and that diversity makes the development and implementation of programs increasingly complex. Following broader neoliberal trends in higher education, cost-neutral bi-lateral exchanges have largely become a thing of the past – making room for shorter programs that are more attractive to the student consumer (Zemach-Bersin, 2008). According to the 2017 Institute of International Education (IIE) Open Doors Report, only 2% of students who study abroad participate in a long term program defined as an academic or calendar year, while 32% of students choose a mid-length program (one semester) and the majority of students, 66%, study abroad on a summer or winter inter-session program lasting eight weeks or less. The structure of study abroad has gone from one of learning with Others, who were not really Others in the first place but rather racial and socio-economic peers in a different geographic location – to preparing oneself for a globalized economy through exposure to difference.

Yet, many of these newer models can be seen as limiting students’ exposure to difference, relative to classic integrated university study programs; study abroad centers provide US style

education to US students, in buildings typically owned or rented either by a US university or a US-based study abroad provider company in select global cities around the world (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Further, US university study abroad centers are typically open to US students from outside the home institution such that the home institution is generating revenue not just from their own students but from other US students as well.

However, anecdotally speaking, US university study abroad centers are still relatively rare, most US universities concentrate their efforts on the development and implementation of short-term faculty led programs. Faculty-led programs are marked by a professor leading a group of US students on a brief study tour (usually 2-4 weeks) during which the teacher and students typically move around quite a bit, interspersing lessons or lectures with tourist activities. Unlike previous iterations of faculty-led study abroad programs, where faculty members' connections are what catalyzed the program in the first place, today most institutions do not require that faculty program leaders have prior travel experience to their study abroad destination, nor fluency in the local language.

Further, most institutions restrict leading a study abroad program to full-time tenure track faculty, the percentage of which has rapidly declined from 78.3% in 1979 to 33.5% in 2009 (Kezar & Maxey, 2013). This drastically limits the faculty pool that study abroad offices have to choose from when developing new programs, and consequently students who are interested in studying abroad now outnumber the number of eligible faculty with in-country expertise and language proficiency. It may be this lack of capacity that often motivates study abroad offices to contract with a third party provider organization, typically a for-profit company that can arrange everything from flights, to curriculum, to home stays in a variety of destinations.

### Third Party Providers: Study Abroad Outsourcing

While the nature of the study abroad provider industry can be difficult to understand, even for those who work in study abroad offices, it is a large part of the study abroad industry more broadly. This part of the study abroad sector provides a number of different service packages to US colleges and universities interested in outsourcing the development and implementation of particular types of study abroad programs. Some providers act as intermediaries between universities and communities abroad where an organic link between a faculty member from the home institution and the destination does not exist. While others run an independent operation totally crafting the experience, hiring their own faculty (typically local), negotiating classroom space, if applicable, and managing all on-site operations. Many study abroad centers are owned and operated by third party provider study abroad organizations.

Tracing the evolution of study abroad along the broader trajectory of privatization and marketization in higher education exposes incongruity between the liberal humanist rhetoric of internationalization for the promotion of mutual understanding and mutual exchange and the realities of a complex, increasingly corporate structure of developing and implementing international programs. Within this context we can begin to see how US study abroad evaluative research may have evolved in such a way as to focus its energy on US students, their motivations and outcomes, while in the meantime, largely ignoring host community members.

### Theoretical Framework & Associated Literature

The corporatization of the university and its current neoliberal state serve as foundational theoretical underpinnings of this project. Further, theories of global citizenship, (inter)subjectivity, and postcolonialism undergird my thinking in regard to my research questions, literature review, data collection, analysis and interpretation. Below is a brief review of how these theories have been taken up within the international education literature and how they inform this project.



Table 1: Theoretical Framework

The Study Abroad Encounter			
Neoliberalism	Global Citizenship	(Inter)Subjectivity	Post-Colonialism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• corporatization of the university</li> <li>• student consumer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• power and knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• learner subjects</li> <li>• social capital</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• settler academy</li> <li>• imperialism</li> </ul>

### Global Citizenship

Within US higher education internationalization efforts are typically organized around the idea of promoting an ethic of ‘global citizenship’. Abdi and Shultz (2015) write that there is no agreed upon definition of global citizenship used by internationalization scholars. However, “in its most foundational or perhaps traditional constructions, citizenship is about the lives of citizens who act in a given national space on the basis of institutionally or otherwise agreed upon rights and responsibilities” (p. 2). Of course, when that ‘national’ space is expanded to be global or international scope the rights and responsibilities of citizens are not widely agreed upon and are up to interpretation. Abdi and Shultz (2015) further argue that inherent in any construction of global citizenship must be a commitment to social justice through recognizing how and why power operates in historical global systems and how “dominant knowledge categories constitute the most effective method to fix them for posterior applications that limit agentic capacities to liberate themselves from oppression and attached arbitrary categorizations” (p. 5). They suggest that global citizenship education must hold this concept at its center, which likely means engaging students (from dominant groups) in processes of both learning and unlearning. With this in mind, I am interested in if and how intentional hosts might contribute to these processes of learning and unlearning abroad.

Further, Johnson and Morris (2010) identify processes of ‘unlearning’ as central to critical forms of citizenship education which they argue begin with planned, in-classroom curriculum in K-

12 education which should then naturally extend into higher education. Yet, they suggest that not all 'critical' forms of citizenship education are created equal and that approaches "vary markedly and can range from a set of abstract and technical skills under the label 'critical thinking' to a desire to encourage engagement, action and political emancipation, often labelled 'critical pedagogy'" (Johnson & Morris, 2010, p. 77). Likewise, in her empirical research on college courses marked as fulfilling 'global citizenship' requirements at two Canadian universities, Roman (2003) found that the ways that 'criticality' and 'global citizenship' are constructed within individual classrooms can vary widely, even when faculty identify the university's stated internationalization mission as foundational to their pedagogical choices. Through in-classroom observations of 'global citizenship' discourses, Roman found several instances whereby "far from weakening the Canadian state and building instances of transnational democratic educational communities" (p. 269) themes such as western power, foreign aid, and other dominant discourses "may actually reinforce notions of Canadian gendered and racialized nation-building and nationalism" (p. 269). Yet, once courses were labeled as 'global citizenship' courses, the schools or faculty never systematically analyzed their content. Likewise, in the case of study abroad, its de-facto association with the development of global citizenship, and intercultural competence (more on this in Chapter 2) has created a situation in which, like these global citizenship courses, they often go critically unanalyzed.

On a larger scale, Chan-Tiberghien (2004) argues that institutions of higher education in the West are not well suited to perform the work of critical global citizenship education at all, in that universities are so heavily corporatized and caught up in neoliberal agendas that it becomes almost impossible for them to perform 'critical' functions. Flipping the switch, Chan-Tiberghien suggests that facilitating students' involvement in anti-globalization social movements, or at least making students aware of the history and catalysts for such movements would serve to make them more responsible, critical, global citizens. She suggests that institutional forms of critical pedagogy do not

go far enough and that “a fundamental critique of the cognitive injustice inherent within the hegemonic neoliberal ideology” (Chan-Tiberghien, 2004, p. 191) must take place within individual classrooms through conversations between faculty and students for them to be truly critical. Only through “re-asserting the diversity of value systems and restoring subjugated knowledges” (Chan-Tiberghien, 2004, p.191) can students begin to understand their ‘responsibilities’ in working towards social justice on a global scale. Because local faculty are at the helm in study abroad classrooms abroad, are their methods of educative engagement in line with this form of critical pedagogy?

Many international programs offices would likely argue that study abroad and the presence of international students on campus work towards the re-assertion of the diverse value systems to which Chan-Tiberghien refers. However, many critical scholars have begun to question the extent to which experiential learning abroad, particularly for Western students, exposes them to non-dominant epistemologies in meaningful ways. In their aptly titled edited volume, *Globetrotting or Global Citizenship?: Perils and Potential of International Experiential Learning*, Tiessen and Huish (2014) problematize the assumption that ‘the world’ wants to be an extension of college classrooms in New York or Toronto. They problematize the distance that a discourse of the world as ‘out there’ creates - and suggest that this, and other tropes, amount to ‘thin global citizenship’ which can do little more than confirm privileged students’ sense of superiority and at best engender in them pity and benevolence towards those they ‘discover’ abroad. On the contrary, they believe that ‘thick global citizenship’ defined as an ethic that emphasizes an awareness of the historical and political formation that are responsible for unequal global systems, is both desirable and possible.

Banks (2008) further questions the concept of global citizenship, or any form of universal citizenship, arguing that it is almost always defined and implemented by those in power and that as such “when the interests of marginalized groups are not expressed or incorporated into civic discussions, the interests of groups with power and influence will determine the definitions of

universal citizenship and the public interest” (p. 131). He argues that to prepare students for an increasingly globalized world, we must be careful not to passively accept the status quo in our own communities and nations, but rather come to a critical consciousness about the need for transformation. In so doing, Banks (2008) suggests that ‘transformative academic knowledge’ – knowledge that transforms the way students perceive the world around them, “enables students to acquire the information, skills, and values needed to challenge inequality” locally and globally, which in turn challenges them to “take actions to create just and democratic multicultural communities and societies” (p. 135).

### Subjectivity

Much of the critical global citizenship pedagogy literature relies on students’ willingness to engage in a process of learning and unlearning, as well as to (re)define their own subjectivity in more relative ways that acknowledge their complicity in global systems of inequality. Scholars such as Dolby (2004) suggest that study abroad programs do just this - invite students to ‘encounter themselves’ by encountering others. Her study involved 26 undergraduate students from a large research university in the Midwest, studying a variety of subjects, and who spent the Spring 2001 semester study abroad in Australia. Through interviews with students both before and after their experiences, as well as email communication during their time abroad, Dolby found that despite students’ expressed interest in learning about Australian history and culture during their time abroad, reflective debrief time was made up primarily of conversations about the history and culture of the US. While she does not explicitly cite particular theories of subjectivity, she makes passing reference to ‘coming to know oneself’ and ‘adopting a national identity’ all through processes that are ongoing and without conclusion, which align with Kristeva’s (1982) theory of subjectivity as a never-ending process that is always accompanied by doubt and instability.

Doerr (2015) engages theories of subjectivity a bit more directly in her investigation of study abroad participants as ‘learner subjects’ who are expected to adapt to the type of individual, learning-by-doing outside of the classroom, that study abroad promotes. Her study is based on five months of discourse analysis and ethnographic fieldwork, involving three students from a US college studying abroad on a short-term program in Europe. She suggests that the discourse of ‘immersion’ - living like and with local families, is something that by default centers the student learner’s individuality - they alone can experience ‘immersion’ and while they are living in community, those they are living with become objects of study rather than fellow subjects.

Doerr’s work uses Foucauldian theories of power and knowledge to better understand “how study abroad constructs difference, spaces, subjects and notions of learning in relations of power” (p. 373) and in so doing seeks to expose conflicts in popular higher education rhetoric around the benefits of study abroad. Her work suggests that by embracing critical pedagogy, students would be encouraged to “examine the subject positions from which they make sense of the world, clarify their values and learn about and question the structural and ideological forces that shape their daily lives” (Doerr, 2015, p. 379). I am applying Doerr’s theoretical work on students as ‘learner subjects’ to inform my inquiry into *intentional hosts* as learner subjects assuming that they likely act as both teachers and learners in their role as hosts.

Other scholars interested in the development of subjectivity during international experiences broaden their scope to include not only study abroad participants but travelers or volunteers as well. In a book based on her dissertation, Katherine Mathers (2010) uses Foucault’s technologies of power to explore how young travelers become American in Africa. She argues that the young people that she studied already had a firmly grounded sense of subjecthood before arriving in Africa, and resisted experiences that challenged their sense of self or made them question their intentions. Even though Mathers followed several young people on safaris and township tours, she suggested

that their “internal landscape was much more interesting than the one outside” (p. 37). She argues that power operates in discursive ways when travelers go in search of an ‘authentic’ experience abroad and encounter people and places that match their expectations - she suggests that this reinforces power differentials, and in line with Doerr’s (2015) position that the travelers’ sense of subjectivity creates a host object. Unlike Doerr however, Mathers does not conclude from her study that traveling allows for further liberal development of subjectivity and intersubjectivity but rather can actually thwart it or reinforce the sense of self that travelers arrive abroad with.

While the application of theories of subjectivity are still relatively few in study abroad research, with some notable exceptions above, Caton and Santos (2008) use the hermeneutic circle as a theoretical lens to analyze photographs taken by study abroad participants to determine whether they close the hermeneutic circle which is founded on “racial and cultural Others in Western tourism-related media” (p. 7). The theory of the Heideggerian hermeneutic circle suggests that to interpret a text, the interpreter must first project herself onto the text and apply assumptions and preconceived knowledge to contextualize what they are seeing in order to understand it. Their study uncovers five discursive binaries at work in the photos that were analyzed “traditional/modern, subject/object, master/servant, center/periphery, and devious-lazy/moral-industrious” (Caton & Santos, 2008, p. 7). Like the other scholars cited above, Caton and Santos (2008) use a Foucauldian understanding of power and knowledge to analyze how and why study abroad students project their own subjectivities onto unfamiliar people and places abroad. They found that study abroad participants construct images and understandings that align with popular media depictions of their host site thereby closing the hermeneutic circle. The authors further suggest that power is wielded by study abroad participants through the process of creating new images, through the documentation of their experiences, that either contribute to or close the circle. Of course, it is not *just* visiting students whose subjectivities come to bear on the study abroad encounter – local hosts

are also constantly making meaning of their experiences, and perhaps applying preconceived knowledge in similar ways.

#### Postcolonial Theory and the Settler Academy

Currently, US students who study abroad are overwhelmingly white, female, and middle/upper class. Given this, along with the increase in study abroad programs to ‘non-traditional destinations’ postcolonial theory is particularly important in analyzing the construction of the global classroom. In 2011, Andreotti and De Souza edited a volume on *Postcolonial Perspectives on Global Citizenship Education*, it is one of the first texts to pull together various research on Global Citizenship Education in its many forms that utilize postcolonial theories as their main theoretical framework.

The editors emphasize in their opening chapter that

some of these initiatives to produce global subjectivities tend to prescribe the adoption of strategies that very often foreclose the complex historical, cultural and political nature of the issues, identities and perspectives embedded in global/local processes and events and in the production of knowledge about the self, the other and the world.  
(Andreotti & De Souza, 2011, p. 1).

They suggest that the exclusion of critical engagement with global relations of power and knowledge both within higher education policy formations as well as in programmatic and pedagogical approaches to study abroad can reproduce “ethnocentric, ahistorical, depoliticized, paternalistic, salvationist and triumphalist approaches that tend to deficit theorize, pathologize or trivialize difference” (Andreotti & De Souza, 2011, p. 2). In framing the book, the editors put forward that they define postcolonial theories as “tools for thinking rather than theories of truth” (Andreotti & De Souza, 2011, p. 2) and that postcolonial studies are useful in the study of global citizenship education and study abroad specifically because they emphasize the complex histories and processes that produced the current unequal global distribution of power and wealth.

Further, Andreotti and De Souza (2011) question the role of modernity in framing theories of global citizenship education - quoting Colombian anthropologist Arturo Escobar (2004) who

asserted that “the seeming triumph of Eurocentered modernity can be seen as the imposition of a global design by a particular local history, in such a way that it has subalternised other local histories and designs” (p. 385). This interpretation of modernity, like Foucauldian theories of power and knowledge, as well as the hermeneutic circle described by Caton and Santos (2008) position the West as having agency to create normative narratives, while not claiming them as such. Andreotti and De Souza (2011) refers to this as the “epistemically neutral subject who speaks from Europe (or America/Canada) as a privileged epistemic site, adopting a universalistic perspective that does away with the significance of geopolitical location” (p. 386).

Postcolonial theories also inform study abroad participants and international volunteers’ perceptions of relationality to their host community abroad. While Mathers’ (2015) work focused on the development of subjectivity abroad, Conran’s (2011) study of volunteers in Northern Thailand uses postcolonialism to examine how intimacy is experienced and understood by Western volunteers. Based on nine-months of consecutive ethnographic research based in three NGOs that utilize international volunteers, Conran conducted over 70 interviews with international volunteers and community members and took part in extensive participant observation. Her analysis of this data suggested that volunteers understand intimacy as “an embodied experience that arouses a sense of closeness and a story about a shared experience” (p. 1459), and while ‘regular’ tourism affords the opportunity to ‘consume commodities’ the ‘intimate’ experience of volunteering gives the impression of authenticity to volunteers. Conran uses Said’s (1978) theory of orientalism to argue that the commodified ‘helping narrative’ in volunteer tourism “perpetuates a logic which suggests a binary opposition which creates an “us” (the West) vs. “them” (the Orient) dynamic” (Conran, 2011, p. 1464).

She finds that personal relationships that volunteers formed during her nine months of fieldwork often obfuscated the structural differences which their encounter relied upon and made it



difficult for volunteers to ‘see beyond’ the intimacy that they felt towards the community they were volunteering in. Further, Conran uses Bourdieu's (1984) theory of social capital to explain the contentious relationship that she observed between Thai host community members and volunteers, which was based on a belief that ‘farang’ (Thai slang for white people) are responsible for both the ills and the triumphs of modern Thai society, naming the racial element of her postcolonial analysis.

Also geographically situated in northern Thailand, Mostafanezhad's (2014) longitudinal work on volunteer tourists, uses ‘sentimentality’ as her organizing construct, akin to Conran's ‘intimacy’.

Yet, Mostafanezhad (2014) considers the ways that neoliberalism:

mediates the volunteer tourism experience including 1) how neoliberalism is resisted as well as how this resistance is co-opted through the privatization of social justice agendas; 2) how individuals take on neoliberal subjectivities and identity formations; and 3) the ways neoliberalism is appropriated as a coping strategy in local struggles for economic survival. (p. 3)

However, similarly to Conran (2011) she suggests that sentimentality, intimacy, and love all work to shape the ‘helping narrative’ which serves to “depoliticize the expansion of Western political, economic and cultural hegemony” (p. 27). Drawing from cultural studies she writes about the power of US celebrities such as Angelina Jolie and Madonna in shaping the ‘helping narrative’ and the discourse that follows. Further, Mostafanezhad (2014) argues that the Western media is complicit in developing images and narratives of ‘dark places’ in need of ‘white saviors’ making reference to commercials for NGOs and charities that show young, Black, African children often lying in the dirt surrounded by flies and while she notes that some of her volunteer participants were aware of how this is problematic from a postcolonial perspective, few were able (or willing) to position the problem within a broader frame of neoliberalism.

While Conran (2011) positions Western volunteers as largely unaware of the ways that their focus on intimacy with host community members distracts them from realizing their complicity in the systems that create the inequality that they are supposedly volunteering to address, Vrasti and

Montsion (2014) apply theories of transnational neoliberal capital to construct the ills of international voluntourism as intentional. Their respective fieldwork in Canada and Ghana, which they claim is ethnographic, but not ethnography per se in that does not seek to “capture and reconstruct the world of meaning of an entire people or community” but rather to “communicate the itinerant nature of our object of inquiry as it moves between places, cultures and subject positions” (Vrasti & Montsion, 2014, p. 343), involved participant observation, informal conversations, and interviews with volunteers and organizational administrators.

Their findings suggest that international volunteerism is anything but ‘intimate’ and ‘virtuous’ and rather “a carefully designed technology of government the purpose of which is to align individual conduct with neoliberal capital's double injunction of market rationality and social responsibility” (Vrasti & Montsion, 2014, p. 336). These conclusions were drawn across their respective sites and participants – a group of Western students volunteering in Ghana, a ‘typical’ North to South volunteer program experience, and a group of Chinese students who volunteered in Vancouver. They suggest that the cultural and geopolitical elements at play in these volunteer encounters are subsumed by neoliberal, capitalist, goals. For the Chinese students, Vrasti and Montsion (2014) argue, their volunteer experience in Canada was intended solely for the purposes of strengthening their Canadian citizenship application, which participants cited as necessary for ‘financial success’. Likewise, they suggest that the Western students who volunteered in Ghana gained cultural and ‘affective competencies’ that they would not have otherwise gained through domestic volunteering or employment, and that these skills increased their job marketability.

Zemach-Bersin, in her 2007 discourse analysis, similarly argues that the discourse of study abroad “surreptitiously reproduces the logic of colonialism, legitimizes US imperialist desires, and allows for the interests of US foreign policy to be articulated through the specious rhetoric of global universality” (p. 17), suggesting that by the time students study or volunteer abroad they are

encultured to be motivated not (just) by a desire for ‘cross-cultural’ understanding, as higher education policy rhetoric might suggest, but by a desire for increased marketability. She positions these market-based drivers as fitting in seamlessly with post-colonial theories, arguing that Western students are consuming experiences that are seen as commodities in the labor force, at best, and/or consuming people, places, and culture as commodity itself, at worst.

She further positions ‘global citizenship’ as a license “granted to study abroad students by institutions of higher education, not official international or national government establishments” (Zemach-Bersin, 2007, p. 21) and therefore suggests that “the ability to become a global citizen is dependent on the extent to which an individual is able to attain international knowledge through pre-approved and closely monitored educational channels that are based in the United States” (Zemach-Bersin, 2007, p. 21) all of which comes at a price, and can be bought and sold.

A final theory which, to my knowledge, has not been applied to the understanding of study abroad programs is that of settler colonialism. A concept within indigenous studies, settler colonialism typically refers to “the specific formation of colonialism in which people come to a land inhabited by (Indigenous) people and declare that land to be their new home” (Rowe & Tuck, 2017). Scholars have applied this idea of settler colonialism to critique the Western academy, which Morgenson (2012) refers to as “an apparatus of colonization” (p. 805). While *individual* US study abroad students do not typically declare their study abroad host city as their home, the *collective* presence of US students and institutions in popular study abroad destinations may have settler colonial manifestations.

The unequal relations of power inherent in any type of colonial relationship stands in direct opposition to the assumed outcomes of study abroad that currently dominate international education discourse. While mission and vision statements celebrate study abroad as a way to engender cross-cultural exchange and mutual understanding the lack of research on the experiences

of study abroad host communities makes it impossible to gauge the extent to which these theories apply to the study abroad encounter as a whole, or in particular contexts.

### Roadmap

The chapters to follow take the historical context and theoretical framework described above as a starting point. Chapter 2 provides a review of relevant study abroad literature, focusing firstly on the bulk of literature that focuses on understanding the US student study abroad experience as this makes up the majority of literature in the area of study abroad; namely studies which explore students' motivation to study abroad and the extent to which they gain intercultural competence through studying abroad. While this project focuses on the host-side of study abroad, US student focused literature provides further context for the state of study abroad research, and also serves to further highlight the gap in literature focused on hosts that this research aims to address. The chapter will also review studies of host community impact drawn from the different, but related, areas of international and global service learning research. While these studies provide important methodological insight, and offer important perspectives, they are often concerned with the material impact of community service abroad – which I will argue is limited and does not represent the full breadth of host community perspectives on the study abroad encounter.

Chapter 3 will provide a detailed overview of the study's constructivist grounded theory methodological framework and comparative case study methodology. More specifically, it will explain how qualitative interviews, lasting from one to two hours, were conducted with 57 hosts across my two research sites. It will also provide details on case selection, participant recruitment, participant demographics, data collection and analysis. In addition, there will be a statement of researcher positionality, which outlines how my own experiences as a study abroad student participant and later a study abroad administrator informed this project and how my race, gender, nationality, and other identities impacted how I operated in and was engaged with in the field. This

chapter will also introduce my conceptual framework which offers a logical structure of conceptual categories that informed my data analysis and reporting. Finally, the chapter will end with an explanation of study limitations.

Chapters 4 and 5 will introduce data from two host community case studies – the first in San Jose, Costa Rica in Chapter 4, followed by the case of Florence, Italy in Chapter 5. Utilizing the conceptual framework as a means of organization, these chapters offer host participant perspectives organized around a variety of important themes from this research. In an attempt to honor the voices of participants these chapters will provide space, first and foremost, for *their* perspectives and therefore I attempt to limit my interpretation of their words there. Rather, Chapter 6 will provide space for deeper analysis of the processes and phenomena that appear to be unique to each of the cases, as well as perspectives that were shared across the two contexts. And finally, chapter 7 will provide conclusions, implications, and directions for further research.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Understanding the US Student Study Abroad Experience

While extremely important to understanding how the global classroom is constructed, critical theoretical projects such as those cited in Chapter 1, make up a small percentage of study abroad literature. Rather, the vast majority of study abroad literature focuses on the student participant experience - from what motivates students to study abroad to what they gain from the study abroad experience. A brief review of this literatures serves to establish what is known about the 'student side' of the study abroad encounter, which is important in contextualizing the relationship between students and the communities that host them.

### Motivation to Study Abroad

Research that attempts to better understand what motivates students to study abroad typically uses the academic, personal, and professional benefits of study abroad as a given, and then probes motivating factors. It often highlights that the percentage of US college students who choose to study abroad remains low, at less than 2% each year. In order to develop more effective recruitment strategies and more attractive programs, researchers argue for the importance of broadening our understanding of students' motivation to study abroad. Their research in this area ranges from large sample surveys that seek to capture general motivation factors (British Council, 2015) to more nuanced qualitative investigations of how students develop perceptions of what study abroad is (or should be) and how those perceptions intersect with their motivations to study abroad (Nguyen & Coryell, 2015).

Found mostly in governmental and non-governmental organizational reports, large sample surveys of students report on what motivates them to study abroad; the most recent of which is a 2015 report published by the British Council which reports on both the motivations and barriers to

study abroad for 7,500 British and US students. The survey was conducted with the help of two market research companies in the UK and US respectively. While this was designed as a comparative study aimed at better understanding how UK and US approaches to promoting study abroad may yield different results, the UK and US data were first analyzed and presented independently from each other making it easy to delineate findings by nationality group. The study found that 58% of US students surveyed identified that their desire to “have fun traveling and exploring different cultures” was their primary motivation to study abroad; others identified a desire to “have a unique adventure (58%)” or “to travel overseas (56%)” as primary motivators (p. 31). In the comparative analysis, the authors found that “while UK students valued study abroad as a unique adventure more than a resume-builder, they were more likely than their US counterparts to recognize and be motivated by career-related factors” (British Council, 2015, p. 5) and further “for both UK and US students, the cultural experience of studying abroad was a significantly stronger driver than academic or employability-related factors” (British Council, 2015, p. 5).

Other significant motivators for students to study abroad were either fluency in a foreign language or interest in learning another language. Looking across both students who had studied abroad and those who had not, the study found that “78 percent of those who had already completed a study abroad experience spoke more than one language as compared to 31 per cent of those uninterested in study abroad who spoke more than one language” (p. 25). Another interesting motivator, which is not typically measured and points to class privilege, is the “relationship between one or more of the respondents’ parents studying abroad and student interest in overseas study” (p. 25). Thirty-nine per cent of those who had already studied abroad had a parent who had studied abroad previously; while of those who were disinterested or undecided only 5% had a parent who had studied abroad (p. 25).

While the British Council study took into account any full-time student at the universities

that were sampled, other research on motivation focuses specifically on a particular student population. Some scholars are interested in the stark gender disparity in study abroad – with women making up close to 70% of current US study abroad participants and attempt to explore what motivates women to study abroad at higher rates than men (Salisbury et al., 2010; Thirolf, 2014; Lucas, 2009). Lucas (2009) suggests that historically, affluent white women were sent overseas to gain cultural experiences that would help them “entertain their husbands' business partners” (p. 28) and that this tradition formed the basis of the hyper-feminization of study abroad. Other interpretations might include the disproportionate number of women in the humanities and social sciences, areas of study that tend to make it easier for students to study abroad by nature of counting courses taken at institutions abroad, as opposed to the hard sciences which tend to have more stringent course sequence and residency expectations. Yet the literature has yet to present an agreed upon explanation for the overrepresentation of female students in study abroad.

Studies of motivation to study abroad often seek to develop better recruitment strategies for various ‘groups’ of students. Chocko and Lin (2015) explored the motivations of pre-service teachers to study abroad by asking why they choose specifically to participate in international student teaching experiences and what challenges they faced while they were abroad. Their small sample (5) multiple-case study found that students’ relationships to individual faculty members, especially if that faculty member was to lead a student group abroad was a highly motivating factor (p. 30). However, while those faculty relationships were powerful, ultimately the study found that targeted participant recruitment, prior experiences, and a desire to “learn about different education systems” and have an “immersive cultural experience” were primary motivating factors, with ‘non-academic’ related motivators, such as wanting to have a fun adventure, being most prominent (Chacko & Lin, 2015, p. 40).



## Intercultural Competence

The greatest proportion of current study abroad research is studies of intercultural and/or cross-cultural competence. Couched within several different academic disciplines most of which use the terms interchangeably, intercultural/cross-cultural competence has no widely agreed upon definition but rather has been taken up in a number of ways. Its academic origins can be found in *The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)* (Bennett, 1986) which is a framework that seeks to explain how people experience and engage cultural difference. By extension, intercultural competence is generally understood to mean “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people of other cultures” (Spitzberg, 2000, p. 375). This ability is assumed to develop through participation in study abroad programs, but increasingly scholars are interested *how* and the extent to which this happens for different students on various types of study abroad programs. Studies of intercultural competence (IC) typically focus on one or more of the following: 1) testing the extent to which IC is developed on a study abroad program; 2) developing new instruments to measure IC; 3) testing attitudinal change for students with particular majors (ex. education); 4) exploring how IC interacts with language development; and 5) exploring the impact of IC on personal identity.

Straightforward tests of the extent to which IC is developed during study abroad typically employ one of many instruments to measure change in competence level. A popular instrument of the moment is the Global Perspectives Inventory (GPI), a “web-based assessment of individual experiences and development of a global perspective” (University of Iowa, GPI Website). This instrument is typically administered before students study abroad and then again after they have returned; it emphasizes cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal student development and is intended for “program assessment and institutional improvement initiatives” (University of Iowa, GPI Guide). There is a fee structure associated with the administration of the instrument based on

the sample size and frequency of use, so this may limit researchers with small budgets from using it. However, many institutions are investing in the use of this instrument for a variety of research goals.

One such goal is to investigate the extent to which studying a particular subject at home, on campus, is just as effective as studying that same subject abroad, in terms of the experience yielding a change in IC. A Tarrent et al. (2014) experimental-design study of students who self-selected into one of four educational scenarios to discover what exactly the added value was of each educational experience. The four scenarios were: students who 1) studied the subject of environmental sustainability (ES) at home; 2) studied the subject of ES abroad; 3) studied abroad but did not focus on the subject of ES; and 4) stayed home and did not study the subject of ES. Using the GPI, their findings suggested a significant highest order (three-way) interaction, for all three dependent variables:

Study abroad, in itself, is not the most powerful engine for nurturing a global citizenry. Rather, it is the combination of location (abroad) and academic focus (sustainability via experiential/field learning) that appears to yield the greatest increases in global citizenship scores (across multiple dimensions of global citizenship). (p. 153)

The authors note that the specific areas where development was most acute, across program types (at home and abroad) between the pre and post test were: Cognitive Knowing (understanding cultural relativism), Intrapersonal Identity (strong sense of personal values), Intrapersonal Affect (risk-taking), and Social Responsibility (commitment to social justice).

While the study cited above was institutionally situated, other studies are situated within study abroad provider organizations. These are unique in that they are often able to survey a wider range of students, from different universities across the US who study abroad in many different destinations. Anderson et al. (2015) administered the GPI to 355 students who studied abroad in 19 different study abroad sites run by study abroad provider AIFS. Interestingly, this study sought to explore the links between students' motivation to study abroad, the destination they chose, and any

development in IC that resulted from their study abroad participation. The study found that students who indicated wanting to have fun as their primary motivator for studying abroad, selected destinations that they felt would be less challenging for them – often meaning a place where English is spoken and there are many other US students and tourists. Whereas, students who primarily sought personal growth tended to choose more challenging destinations. Further, these motivations informed the type of housing that they chose; for example, apartment living (having fun) versus a home stay (personal growth), which in turn impacted their perception of change in intercultural competence. However, the authors note that no change in GPI was found in pre/post scores, indicating either a problem with the instrument, or some very disappointing results.

Some IC studies explore personal identity development and attitudinal change: these studies focus less on the programmatic elements and academic learning cited above, and more on how the process of developing IC changes how individual students think about and see themselves. Tian and Lowe (2014) studied a group of 8 US students who spent five months studying abroad in China. The authors used monthly interviews and the contents of their student diaries to trace the emergence of intercultural identity. They found that “all participants underwent some degree of cultural identity shift toward a more open-ended self–other orientation” (p. 281), meaning students exhibited an expanded sense of self that included their relationship to others. However, in a similar study of US students studying abroad in China, Du (2015) found that most of the 29 students that he studied retained a deep national pride while at the same time embracing their foreigner identity. Both studies suggest that personal identity evolution and the development of intercultural competence are inherently linked.

## Understanding the Study Abroad Host Community Experience

### Lessons from Study Abroad Research

As illustrated above, most of the evaluative efforts in the field of study abroad are focused on student learning outcomes; however, shifting the evaluative lens towards host community impact is taking place in small-scale ways. As early as 2004 we see critical scholars pointing to the need for what Hovey (2004) called “dialogue with the subaltern”, which he implied was essential to study abroad programs that are grounded in critical pedagogy and therefore seek to challenge global systems of inequality. More recently, we see scholars and practitioners in health-related fields questioning the impact that their students are having on the communities that host them on short-term study abroad experiences. Yet, methodologically, their investigations into this impact are still framed within the realm of their students’ experiences.

For example, Caldwell and Purtzer (2015) asked if a sample of 41 nursing students who participated in a 10-day long study abroad program to Honduras are “really truly helping the community” (p. 577). They administered written questionnaires to a group of former nursing student participants and probed their perception of community impact through changes in their world view. They concluded that:

using transformative constructs of questioning, critical reflection, and dialog about these worldviews is a first step in not only designing a transformative and long-term student learning experience but also a parallel process of transformation in faculty and others that is, hopefully, benevolent in nature toward the host community (p. 582).

The researchers’ methodological approach seemed to be largely disconnected from their research question and thus their results were unable to address their original question of community impact.

Other studies, like Elliot's (2015) investigation of doing good on a short-term study abroad program take an ethnographic approach to assessment and seem to yield results that are much more closely related to their original question. Admittedly, however, Elliot (2015) examines whether

occupational therapy students are “doing good” by examining their “verbal, written, and enacted narratives” (p. 121). So once again, the assessment of community impact centers the US student experience instead of the community members themselves. Yet, through ethnographic fieldwork the author was able to observe how students interacted with their host community, which highlighted some of the competing agendas that emerged when students wanted to ‘do good’ but lacked the contextual and cultural knowledge to do so. Analyzing these cultural exchanges led the author to conclude that there was a dearth of partnership culture on their program and that creating explicit pathways for ‘reciprocal and equitable’ exchange is essential for “diminishing the neocolonial legacy of Western expertise dissemination” (Elliot, 2015, p. 121).

There are a few examples of community impact research in study abroad that attempt to either ask more critical questions around community impact or actually center community voices. Schroeder et al. (2009) focused their research on several important and pointed questions about the ways that US students could be impacting the communities that host them abroad; they specifically considered Appalachian State University’s alternative Spring break sites. They drew on tourism literature to suggest that students inevitably have environmental, economic, cultural and social impacts on those they encounter abroad - and they paired each of these categories with a number of critical research questions. However, much like those studies cited above, they relied heavily on semi-structured interviews conducted with US faculty leaders that focus on their perceptions of impact. The authors reported that one faculty leader suggested that her student group could not have had a negative impact on the host community simply because there were so many US students who ‘pass through’ the community. While another faculty member credited her work with a local US Peace Corps volunteer for mitigating any negative impact that her students could have made.

The authors go on to explain how they attempted to interview local partners but had a very difficult time ‘getting them to admit’ any negative impact. Instead, they focused on the economic

benefit that their community received through the alternative Spring Break program. Apparently one on-site partner “complained about the late-night drinking habits of other student groups” (p. 142). In surveying student participants on the alternative Spring Break programs, alcohol use was a primary way that students understood the risk that they posed to their host community, citing that drinking can get out of hand and that could have a negative impact on their host community. Given the limited amount of primary data gathered from host community members themselves, the authors made some bold recommendations, including: simply not going to places where the potential for negative community impact is high, better preparing students for international travel by requiring them to actively engage with their potential negative impact before going, as well as creating an Institutional Review Board at universities specifically designed to vet community impact - none of which have become common practice within the field.

One of the only specifically study abroad focused studies of community impact (that I could find) is a doctoral dissertation, focused on the impact of US students on host families in two Spanish cities (Engle, 2008). The qualitative study began with focus groups of families who host US students. The author notes that the focus groups were useful for generating broad ideas about impact and creating categories of impact, which mirror those identified in the Schroeder et al. (2009) study, but were insufficient for understanding families lived experiences, so she invited those who attended the focus group to follow up with a one-on-one interview. Of the 16 total focus group participants, 12 people agreed to one-on-one interviews (across the two sites), and further 6 people invited Engle to conduct participant observation in their homes when they were hosting US students. This participant observation took the form of sharing 2-3 meals with a particular family while they were hosting a US student. The focus group, one-on-one interviews, and participant observation were triangulated to produce her main findings, which suggested that Spanish host families’ lifestyle, including dress and eating habits have become increasingly ‘americanized’. Host families also

suggested that because of their engagement with US students they have become more open to discussing global politics and religion and in so doing, many have come to question their religious and political leanings. Further, many host families identified that their world view had both expanded and deviated from “typical” Spanish ways of thinking and being as a result of their contact with US students.

### Lessons from International/Global Service Learning Research

Some of the earliest models of community impact assessment come from research on domestic service learning. Driscoll et al. (1996) developed a comprehensive case study method approach which was designed to capture the impact of service learning on faculty leaders, student participants, and host community members. Their model centered on the careful development of a set of variables, indicators, and measurements for each constituency. An example of a host community variable and its associated indicators and measurements is “economic benefits”, with indicators being “cost of services provided by faculty and students, and funding opportunities” measured by “interviews and surveys” (p. 69). This is one of 10 different host community variables that are measured by either interviews, surveys, focus groups or the syllabus; the model did not include details on the construction or administering of researcher instruments. However, this is one of the earliest community impact models in the broad field of education that specifically considers, at least in theory, the impact of students on communities with which they engage through service learning.

The student impact indicators in the model form the basis of later assessments of international service learning, such as Kiely’s (2004) article *Chameleon with a Complex*. While his study did not look specifically at community impact it is cited as one of the first critical, longitudinal, studies of international service learning and the methodology set forth in this project has served as the next iteration of methodological innovation in international educational activities since. Kiely’s

study, which took place over the span of 10 years attempted to measure the transformation of student participants on a study abroad program to Nicaragua, with a focus on their proclivity towards social justice work. Instruments included “on-site participant observation and semi-structured interviews” as well as document analysis which included an “in-depth review of pre- and post-trip questionnaires, photographs, student journals, final reflection papers and post-trip contracts or “covenants” for future action” (Kiely, 2004, p. 41). While the study confirmed the then growing literature on the positive outcomes of international service learning, it offered a new ‘chameleon complex’ theory which “represents the internal struggle between conforming to, and resisting, dominant norms, rituals, and practices in the United States” (Kiely, 2004, p.48).

It seems to have only been within the last 5 years that attempts to build host community perspectives into assessment research have begun to be realized. While based outside the US, Lloyd et al.’s (2015) study focused on ‘unintended outcomes’ of overseas university-community partnerships offers yet another methodological approach to grappling with the idea of host community impact. Their study is based on a larger project, the *Partners Perspective Project*, which seeks to address the lack of research on host community perspectives, through the network of international service learning site partners utilized by Macquarie University in Australia. Data collection took place by bringing program staff representatives from 9 different field placements sites around the world to Australia for a partners conference during which researchers conducted both interviews and focus groups.

The data produced was analyzed and findings were grouped into positive and negative in-flows or impacts on the host organization. Some unexpected in-flows included; “improved organizational management systems”, “validation of community, organizational and local knowledge” and “intercultural competence through contact with international students” (p. 168) among others. There were no negative in-flows reported amongst the unexpected outcomes of



Macquarie University student engagement with international partners, which I suspect may be due to the fact that the research was not only being conducted by their partners' employer, Macquarie University, but also at Macquarie University as opposed to in the host community.

Presently the most pointed resource available which provides models for critical research on engaging host communities is an edited collection by Larsen (2016) entitled *International Service Learning Engaging Host Communities*. The volume includes eight chapters dedicated to case studies of international service learning programs, all located in the so-called Global South. Drawn from this volume are two recent empirical studies focused specifically on the impact of North American students on local partners within the service-learning context that take a different methodological approach than the studies cited above by engaging *directly* with intentional hosts. Using different methodological approaches each resulted in concrete, actionable, suggestions for changes to program design.

O'Sullivan and Smaller (2016) share results from a 2013 pilot study that focused on the impact of international service learning programs on five rural communities on the western side of Nicaragua. A Nicaraguan sociologist was hired to conduct interviews with host mothers and others who had played a role in organizing service-learning opportunities. Participants were asked about their overall impressions of the programs. Positively, many study participants felt that the programs were mutually beneficial, with opportunities for visiting students to learn about Nicaraguan culture and vice versa. When asked to express problems or concerns, participants were hesitant to do so, but some eventually offered that the average \$10 per day per participant they received was not always enough to feed students "properly". Others suggested that they wanted more input on which projects to undertake, or involvement in the evaluation process.

The authors discuss intrinsic and extrinsic advantages for communities and local residents. Many participants found great intrinsic value in the service-learning program, reporting that they shared special moments with students and believed that the global nature of the exchange raised the status of their community. To this point, a coordinator shared that residents are sometimes asked whether it would be better if the money students spend to come to Nicaragua were instead given directly to the community. They responded “no”; residents prefer that students come to Nicaragua because it means that someone has heard about their “situation”. Extrinsically, participants noted the material benefits that are brought to the community by way of service-learning programs. However, while all supported the continuation of the programs, some felt that the service or work component should be eliminated or severely reduced to make room for “deeper learning activities” such as spending time in conversation with peers, that could create relations of solidarity instead of charity.

This idea of privileging “being with” others over “doing for” others, is at the heart of the organization *Intercordia Canada*, which provides the context of MacDonald and Vorstermans’ (2016) study of the experiences of host families in rural Ghana. This impact study was based on in-depth surveys administered by a program mentor, who herself had been a student participant in the same community four years prior. Like the O’Sullivan and Smaller study, research participants in Ghana valued the mutual exchange of culture and ideas between themselves and the students they hosted. Immediate financial gain was not an outcome of hosting students; indeed, many said that what they are paid barely covers students’ cost. However, some participants conveyed that hosting white students increased their cultural capital. Specially, others suggested that having a student living in their house provided motivation for their own children to take their studies more seriously.

The authors argue that knowledge of hosts’ expectations is critical for student preparation and program planning, and thus the mentor asked about these. A primary theme of study

participants' expectations was "living difference". That is, Ghanaian hosts expect that students arrive prepared to live in a different cultural context driven by specific values. MacDonald and Vorsterman suggest that this is uniquely different from the discourse of respecting differences, or living in peace with difference, which students may experience in the US or Canada. They argue that "students are being asked to enter into a very profound relationship across (often devalued) differences without the impulse to change or make better, but to be with, understand, and live differences in a radical way, even ones they might be opposed to" (p. 138).

The methodologies used in these examples of impact studies in service-learning in the Global South differ. One uses interviews with local partners at multiple sites; surveys are the primary instrument for the other. However, the results are similar: both offer concrete and actionable suggestions for changes to program design and evaluation that are informed by local partner voices. This practice is (slowly) growing within international service learning and must be explored in other forms of education abroad if reciprocity and cross-cultural exchange are to become a reality.

As this literature illustrates, there is a variety of empirical and theoretical work that relates to questions of how host community members experience the study abroad encounter. Yet, still the vast majority of the literature focused most specifically on study abroad continues to focus on understanding the study abroad experience from US student and faculty perspectives. Much of this work focuses on students' motivation to study abroad and the extent to which they gain intercultural competence, both of which are connected to a neoliberal US university agenda as opposed to mutuality. Those studies that are concerned specifically with host community members focus, seemingly exclusively, on those who engage with international service-learning students or volunteers, in the so-called Global South. Further, theories of global citizenship, subjectivity, and postcolonialism, discussed in Chapter 1, when applied to explorations of study abroad focuses on the ways that Western students and institutions wield power within the study abroad encounter

while perhaps not always accounting for local host resistance or agency. It is these gaps in the literature that invite an in-depth analysis of the study abroad encounter for host community perspectives.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODS

### Statement of Positionality

Ratner (2002) suggests that in qualitative research projects “subjectivity guides everything from the choice of topic that one studies, to formulating hypotheses, to selecting methodologies, and interpreting data” (p. 16) and my project is no different in that regard. My interest in the production of the global classrooms stems from my position as both a student consumer *of* the global classroom, and as a product of the internationalization of US higher education. More specifically, the question of *how are US study abroad participants impacting the lives of those who host them* stems from my own study abroad experience in Tanzania in 2007.

While many aspects of the four-week, faculty led program dramatically impacted the complexity with which I understand the world, the day spent in Maasailand – a traditional, nomadic community on the Tanzania/Kenya border, left a lasting sense of confusion that I have in many ways been trying to unpack ever since. During this portion of the trip, we were hosted by a community that lived many hours driving from the closest town, without electricity, running water, or modern infrastructure, and who spoke Maa. In order to communicate verbally we used a Maa to Swahili translator (one person) and then a Swahili to English translator (another person), so this meant that over the course of our short stay we spoke very little – our reciprocal gaze *was* our communication. As I struggled to make meaning of what was, to me, such a foreign way of life, I wondered what questions lay behind the gaze of the Maasai host community members. Is this yearly visit from a group of US students welcomed? Dreaded? Barely noticed? Did this encounter leave young people in the Maasai community with the same questions and confusions about the world as it did me?

I studied abroad twice more as an undergraduate student, spending one semester at Oxford

University in England and one semester at Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic. This made me somewhat of a poster-child for study abroad at the University at Buffalo, where I finished my degree having taken 38 credits overseas – in the ‘global classroom’. My semesters at Oxford and Charles universities were very different types of study abroad experiences, both from each other as well as from my Tanzania program. In Oxford and Prague, I took courses taught by local faculty members and had more prolonged engagement in my host communities. Yet, like most US study abroad students, the closest friendships I made across the three programs, were with fellow US students. I later went on to work in the study abroad offices of the University at Buffalo, Harvard College, the University of South Florida, and SUNY Cortland.

I recognize that my multiple study abroad experiences as well as the freedom to conduct this research project are both linked to my own class privilege. While the SUNY study abroad consortium, which allows SUNY students to study abroad at the SUNY in-state tuition rate along with scholarships helped me to afford these experiences – I had an incredible amount of financial and emotional support from my parents, who recognized the potential benefits of study abroad and made sacrifices to support my study abroad ambitions. Further, a generous fellowship and additional research funding allowed me to be a full-time student for the majority of my PhD program. This enabled me to engage with coursework and fieldwork that I may not otherwise been able had I needed to work a full-time job, as so many students do.

This chronology is important to this project in that, the questions that I am asking are personal and based largely on hanging curiosities from my own study abroad experiences. I considered the idea of taking an even more personal and possibly autoethnographic approach to this project, by returning to my three host communities in Tanzania, Oxford, and Prague, but ultimately decided against doing so. On the one hand, these are communities where I have personal connections that could have aided in access, but on the other hand I was hesitant to complicate my

relationships there by trying to balance research and friendships. Further, I thought it was important to concentrate on sites where the ratio of US students to local community members was high – which would have excluded all three sites (as Oxford and Prague are relatively well populated cities, and Magi Ya Chai, Tanzania does not host very many US students).

In terms of my personal commitments then, it is important for me to express, especially in light of the critical nature of this project, that I am a *proponent* of study abroad. I support efforts to broaden access to study abroad, particularly for students of color, student with disabilities, students from low-SES backgrounds, as well as non-traditional students. I also support research on the outcomes of study abroad for US students, as this seems very important to the continuation of expanded study abroad access and programming. However, I think it is equally important to understand study abroad as an *apparatus* that is both political and power-laden, and as such should be constantly interrogated. The ‘common sense’ conflation between international education and ‘mutual exchange’, institutionally legitimized through policy rhetoric, runs the risk of blinding well-intentioned international educators and institutions to the potential for harm in the programs that they design.

*A white, English-speaking, US woman, with a Harvard degree*

Since conceptualizing this project, I have continually asked myself – are *you* the right person to do this work? Would this project not be more effective, and perhaps more legitimate, if it were host-community-initiated? Will it be possible for me, particularly as a former consumer of the global classroom, to truly hear the perspectives of host community members and represent their stories well? The answer to these questions at all stages of this process has been, and still is, I don’t know. In an attempt to try and amplify the voices of host community members who are currently left out of study abroad research, I have made a conscious effort to try to be as comprehensive as possible in the reporting of my participants perspectives and also allow space for their words to speak for

themselves without the constant intrusion of my outsider interpretation. Therefore, as outlined in my roadmap at the end of Chapter 1, Chapters 4 and 5 are largely reserved for the reporting of data while Chapters 6 and 7 focus more completely on my analysis and interpretation.

Returning to my positionality, at various stages of this project my race, native language, education, class, and gender played a role in how I perceived and was perceived became increasingly evident. As will be detailed below, Costa Rica was my first study site and from the very beginning of the collaborator recruitment process, I was surprised by how well my emails were received by complete strangers. Once I got to the field and began to hear participant after participant say how they have been ‘trained’ to, in their words “serve” US tourists, one potential reason for how warmly I was welcomed seemed to be tied to my nationality. I also felt embarrassed and squirmed inside every time the issue of language and respect came up in conversation. While all participants had the option to conduct our interview in Spanish, with the assistance of a translator, all but 5 of them chose to speak to me in English. I assumed this was because they were confident that they would be able to express themselves accurately in English. Something that I appreciated, but again, felt embarrassed by and again, constantly had me questioning why I was doing fieldwork in a country where I was not fluent in the native language. However, I think that focusing this research on two non-English speaking sites added an important element of complexity that may not have been present had I selected sites within English-speaking countries.

The Costa Rican economy relies increasingly on US and Canadian tourism and as such there is a popular association between whiteness, money, and power. Because of this my white identity may have afforded me access to people and places that I might not otherwise have had access to, and/or this may have engendered distrust of me amongst community members. However, having active collaborators at two institutions helped to alleviate this a bit. I also think that to say that the warmth with which I was welcomed by collaborators and participants in Costa Rican was directly



related to desire to “serve” US tourists may be inaccurate, unfair, or incomplete, as I found that my collaborators were all cosmopolitan, international education professions who seemed genuinely interested in my research.

Prior to beginning my Italy case collaborator recruitment, I thought that my Italian-American heritage and Italian speaking ability may afford me access to people and places that I might not otherwise, and unfortunately, I did not find this to be the case. I had a very difficult time getting responses to my call for collaborators (described below) and found that when I led my ‘cold’ email, rather shamelessly, with “I am a Harvard graduate” responses began to come in a bit more rapidly, albeit, still not nearly as quickly or definitively as in Costa Rica. Once actually in the field in Italy, relations were a bit warmer – and my Italian last name, Ficarra, was brought up, with a smile, in most interviews. By this time, access was not really an issue, but it did help to establish rapport with participants in many instances.

I did not anticipate my status as a former study abroad student, and now current study abroad administrator to play such a large role both in access and rapport building. Yet, I felt that despite our differences, the shared experience of implementing student programming, in the case of the university participants, and of being a host-student, in the case of the host mothers, provided a point of connection to start from. Yet, this did not stop my questioning of whether or not I was the best person to undertake this project. However, my hope was, and still is, to better understand the perspectives of the host community participants in San Jose and Florence, and to bring their voices into study abroad program development and evaluation conversations. This process of amplification – of taking host community voices and finding ways to make them heard and understood by international education policy audiences is where I see the advantage of my positionality in the context of this project.

## Methodological Framework

### *Grounded Theory*

While theories of neoliberalism, the corporatization of the university, colonialism and global citizenship inform my research questions I am not attempting to prove or disprove a particular theory or hypothesis, but rather engage these theories and perhaps develop new theory through the description and comparison of the lived experiences of intentional hosts in two US study abroad destinations. Given the nature of this project, grounded theory, defined as “systematic yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories from the data themselves” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 1) is particularly useful as it offers researchers “general principles, guidelines, strategies and heuristic devices rather than formulaic prescriptions” (p. 3). Taking a grounded theory approach to this project leaves room for an ‘inductive’ process whereby the data will inform theory and vice versa. Further, grounded theory recognizes that “researchers, in their “humanness,” are part of the research endeavor rather than objective observers” and stresses that “their values must be acknowledged by themselves and by their readers as an inevitable part of the outcome” (Mills et al., 2006, p. 26).

Further, *constructivist* grounded theory, pushes beyond the foundational tenets of grounded theory to include a recognition of “the interaction between researcher and participants in the research process and in doing so brings to the fore the notion of the researcher as author” (Mills et al., 2006, p. 31). Due to my interest in centering host community voices, this distinction of the researcher as author becomes very important in both the presentation and the analysis of data. My intention in Chapters 4 and 5 is primarily to allow host participants to speak for themselves without the constant intrusion of my analysis. Yet I acknowledge that through the reading of interview transcripts and the identification of codes and themes my authorship is inevitably present in those findings chapters. Further, in Chapters 6 and 7 I analyze the data presented in Chapters 4 and 5 and

want to be clear that my interpretation is just that, my own, and does not claim to necessarily represent the attitudes of my participants or how they might interpret various phenomena. This contemplation of researcher subjectivity particularly in relation to participants is largely missing in current assessment and evaluation models - perhaps in order to suggest researcher 'neutrality', an idea that constructivist grounded theory rejects.

Social constructivism serves as the foundation of this approach, which is particularly important for pushing beyond current models of US student learning *as* study abroad program evaluation. It emphasizes the ways in which reality is socially constructed through *shared* meaning which would inherently call for inclusion of host community members and how they understand the study abroad encounter. Often it is the meaning that is shared by US students in relation to *each other* that serves as the basis for analysis, instead of in relation to their hosts. Constructivist grounded theory would suggest that only by understanding the perspectives of both US students – which is already well documented in the literature, *and* host community members – which are largely ignored, could conclusions be drawn about what is happening in a host community context. So, for these reasons I used a constructivist grounded theory approach as a strategy for conducting this qualitative research project.

#### *Critical Ethnographic Approach*

While this project does not claim to be an ethnography, its approach is critical in nature, meaning that it attempts to question established hierarchies of power. It does so firstly from its foundational position that rejects 'common sense' assumptions of mutual understanding as an outcome of study abroad programs. It also takes a critical approach by centering the perspectives of those who are currently largely left out of study abroad research and policy creation. The combination of grounded theory and a critical ethnographic approach "gives priority to the studied phenomenon or process rather than to a description of a setting" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 22). This

marks a diversion from more traditional ethnographic methods that privilege thick description, however it alone does not do enough to address the many concerns presented by Larsen (2016) and Larkin et al. (2016) in their exploration of methodological challenges of working with host communities, particularly around global systems of power and privilege. In this regard, taking what they also refer to as a “critical ethnographic approach” which seeks to “penetrate the borders and break through the confines in defense of the voices and experiences of subjects whose stories are otherwise restrained and out of reach” (Madison, 2011, p. 5).

Madison (2011) suggests that voice is ‘given’ or I would prefer to say *amplified*, primarily through interviewing in critical ethnography, and while interviews are a part of current methodologies in study abroad and international service learning research, critical ethnographic interviewing techniques center the agency of the interviewee in order for them to guide the meaning making process (p. 25). This dialogic process allows for an iterative analytic process that can take place alongside data collection, as constructive grounded theory advocates. Through critical ethnographic interviewing, researchers become aware of the inherent relations of power that emerge within the interview space - which Madison (2011) suggests can be challenging and can make interviewers (rightfully) question their ethical positions (p.64). However, Gubrium (2003) suggests that “discursive mediation should not be viewed as a source of contamination but rather as a crucial source of insights into both interviewing processes and the social worlds they seek to document” (p. 496). In other words, this self-questioning process and the tension that may result does not make an interview bad or unsuccessful, but rather may provide even deeper insights into what is being researched. Mullings (1999) further suggests that “recognizing and naming these uncertainties is an important step towards not only establishing rigor in the research process, but also to displacing the indomitable authority of the author” (p. 337).

## Research Methodology

### Comparative Case Study

Yin (1994) suggests that “case studies are the preferred strategy when “how” or “why” questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (p. 13). Given my interest in understanding both the “why” and the “how” of the intentional host experience, the lack of control I, as a researcher, have over events, and the focus of the research on the contemporary phenomenon of the study abroad encounter, I determined that a case study methodology was appropriate. I initially considered that the project would focus on descriptive case studies which “present a complete description of a phenomenon within its context” (Yin, 2003, p.5). However, as I developed the cases, they ended up reflecting Yin’s “exploratory case study” which “aims at defining the questions and hypotheses of a subsequent study” as certainly the results of this study present a number of new questions and hypotheses for further study. The breadth of the research questions, and subsequent extensive reporting of data was inspired by this attempt to provide as complete a description as possible of “a phenomenon and its context”.

Stake’s (2005) guidance on the major conceptual responsibilities of the qualitative case study researcher helped to steer the methodological design of this study. Stake suggests that a case be “bound” and that the object of study be tightly conceptualized – in both cases, the intentional host experience within the study abroad encounter is the “object of study” and intentional hosts were defined using specific criteria, described in detail below. He further suggests “seeking patterns of data to develop the issues” – this guidance anchored my data analysis process, which is also further described below.

While I drew from traditional qualitative case study methodologists Stake (2005) and Yin (1994), in the design and implementation of two case studies, I also drew from the more recent work

of International and Comparative Education scholars Bartlett and Vavrus' (2017) Comparative Case Study (CCS) method. Their approach suggests that “the case is formed by *tracing across sites and scales* to understand how the phenomenon came into being, how it has been appropriated by different actors, and how it has been transformed in practice” (p. 10, emphasis added). So, in essence *the case* is the comparison of two or more unique but interconnected cases. They suggest that it is through the tracing across sites and scales that we can come to best understand the real-life issues that affect the actors within each case.

### Case Selection

In case studies “the researcher examines various interests in the phenomenon, selecting a case of some typicality but leaning towards those cases that seem to offer *opportunity to learn*” (Stake, 2005, p. 451). In terms of study abroad host communities there were several host cities that potentially offered opportunities to learn about the study abroad encounter from hosts' perspectives. I began with a list of the top 10 study abroad destinations for US students, see table below (Institute of International Education, Open Doors, 2015) and then bolded the countries that I had spent at least a few weeks in and had some familiarity with the language and/or cultural context. This process yielded a list of four countries, three of which were in Europe – the UK, Italy, and Ireland; and one of which was in Latin America, Costa Rica.

*Table 2: 2015/2016 US Study Abroad Leading Destinations*

Rank	Destination	Number of US Students
<b>1</b>	<b>United Kingdom</b>	<b>39,140</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Italy</b>	<b>34,894</b>
3	Spain	29,975
<b>4</b>	France	17,214
5	Germany	11,900
6	China	11,688
<b>7</b>	<b>Ireland</b>	<b>11,070</b>
8	Australia	9,536
<b>9</b>	<b>Costa Rica</b>	<b>9,233</b>
10	Japan	7,145

Next, I decided that in order to best explore how host community members produce the global classroom and how the impact of the study abroad encounter on their communities is understood, I wanted to try and capture sites that were in different ‘moments’ in US student ‘saturation’. That is, I decided to select one study abroad host site that is highly saturated with US students and another site that is only semi-saturated. I attempted to gather city-level data on study abroad participation from the Institute of International Education, as their Open Doors Report only publishes country-level data, however my request was denied. Therefore, the concepts of saturation and semi-saturation for the purposes of this study are not scientific measures but rather based on my professional knowledge of study abroad programs in each destination.

Immediately Florence, Italy and San Jose, Costa Rica came to mind as sites that fit this ‘saturation’ model because of the large number of study abroad programs located in these cities, with Florence representing a saturated site (over 200 study abroad programs in Florence) and San Jose representing a semi-saturated site (approximately 50 study abroad programs in greater San Jose<sup>1</sup>). The approximation of the number of study abroad programs in each site was garnered using various study abroad program search engines and a list was created. The two sites share things in common – they host a large number of US students, there are plenty of intentional hosts, they are both non-English speaking, and rely economically on tourism. Yet, these sites differ in important ways.

Florence, Italy is a city of about 380,000 with about 60,000 people living in the two-square mile historic city center (United Nations, 2018). It is home to a large number of study abroad centers, which are primarily located in the small historic center. San Jose, Costa Rica is a sprawling city similar and the universities that host US students are not as concentrated within the city (nor is

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<sup>1</sup> There is no central data base that lists all US study abroad programs in a given city – however I used a number of popular study abroad search engines to compile a list of programs in San Jose and Florence. Further, the Association of U.S. Colleges and Universities in Italy (AACUI) has some statistics on the number of US programs that operate in the country. I was able to use this information to distill approximate city level data in terms of number of programs.

the city as pedestrian as Florence). The districts that host a college or university that hosts US students have between 10,000 and 20,000 people residing there and are smaller than Florence's historic city center – spanning about one square mile (United Nations, 2018). San Jose is also not a hot spot for international tourists in the same way as Florence. Local hosts suggested that tourists in Costa Rica often tend to spend a night or two in San Jose, while in transit to the beaches.

Italy and Costa Rica also have very different histories and political economies, as well as cultural and economic relationships with the United States (Sasson, 1997). Tracing across these two diverse sites, one would expect that host community experiences and perceptions of the study abroad encounter to vary widely. However, the similarities (if any) in how these host communities produce the global classroom and understand the impact of the study abroad encounter has the potential to contribute to a fuller theoretical understanding of what 'mutuality' means in the context of study abroad across geographic, socio-cultural, linguistic, and economic contexts as well as across different study abroad program models.

#### Collaborator Recruitment

After San Jose and Florence were identified as the two research sites, I used the list of study abroad programs I had compiled in the case selection process and found the email addresses of the directors of each of these programs online. Starting with the Costa Rica list in November 2016, I sent an email to each of the 10 site directors I had previously identified requesting their collaboration in the research project (see email in Appendix), the nature of which was open for discussion. Two of these directors very quickly responded expressing interest in collaborating on the project and offered to host me at their respective institutions for one week. While three others also eventually responded, the planning process had proceeded with the first two that responded, so they were not included, the remaining five did not respond. These two institutions offered to assist in the recruitment of study abroad administrators, university staff, faculty, and host families to be



interviewed during my time in Costa Rica. They did so with the agreement that their institutions would be kept anonymous. After sharing my sample recruitment email and flyers (see Appendix) they took over all recruitment and arranged all interviews for me, such that I did not know who I would be interviewing until I arrived in Costa Rica. They further offered to arrange a home stay for the duration of my time with them, meaning that I stayed with one host family during the first portion on my field work with institution A and the other half with a different host family during my work with institution B.

Throughout April 2017, upon returning from my Costa Rica fieldwork, I went through the same process of reaching out to site directors of study abroad programs in Florence identified in my initial case selection research, again the nature of the collaboration was intentionally left flexible so that host institutions could sign on to the project (or not) on their own terms. After reaching out to representatives from 22 different organizations, 8 agreed to collaborate in some way, 8 said they did not want to collaborate, and I never heard back from 6. Surprisingly, the highest positive response rate was from study abroad provider organizations that host study abroad centers in Florence, while a number of prominent US, research, universities declined. This was telling, especially in light of the context of my study. The for-profit study abroad provider organizations, which undoubtedly see themselves as businesses were more willing to expose themselves to a researcher for the purposes of improvement than many of the research universities that have a presence in Florence. Again, the flexibility embedded in my initial 'ask' made it so that collaborations in Florence took on quite a different shape than they had in Costa Rica. In Costa Rica I was hosted by two local institutions that host visiting US students, and therefore all host participants were drawn from these two organizational affiliations making for a greater depth of collaboration. In Italy 8 organizations agreed to collaborate, but in a more limited fashion than my Costa Rican partners.

Collaborators in Italy primarily volunteered themselves and offered to invite members of their administrative and teaching staff to participate. Likewise, I shared my recruitment email and flyer with them (see appendix) and they in-turn shared them with their affiliates, who then reached out to me directly to schedule an interview during my time in Italy. This led to a fieldwork scenario whereby, in contrast to Costa Rica where I spent an extended period of time at just two institutions, I conducted 3-4 interviews per day at various study abroad centers across the city of Florence.

Because my goal was *not* to maintain what Yin (1994) called “replication logic” or the creation of two ‘mirror’ cases for comparison, but rather, to create two cases that are “descriptive in nature and designed to shed light on a particular situation, set of circumstances, and the social relations and processes that are embedded in them” (Crossman, 2018) the differences between the nature of collaboration on the ground in Costa Rica and Italy did not negatively impact the study, on the contrary, it provided a greater opportunity to learn from these differences.

### Participants

As described above, the nature of recruitment was slightly different in each case. However, the inclusion criteria were the same. In order to qualify as a participant of the study one had to be: at least 18 years of age or older, “local” which was defined as having lived in San Jose or Florence for at least 10 years and engage with US students in the capacity of a study abroad administrator, university staff member, professor/instructor, or host family. In Costa Rica, all participants were born and raised in Costa Rica, with two exceptions, one study abroad administrator who was born outside of Costa Rican but who had lived there for at least 10 years, and a professor who likewise was born outside of Costa Rica but had been there the 10-year minimum. In Italy, this was not the case. While all participants met the criteria, six participants were born and raised in the US, and three participants were born elsewhere in Europe.

### *Costa Rica*

Below is a chart indicating the pseudonym for each host participant, what I perceived to be their gender presentation, and approximate age. Their host type is also indicated; professor, university staff, study abroad administrator, business owner, and host mother. The original research proposal included unintentional hosts, previously defined as people who live in a location that hosts US students but who do not directly choose to engage with them. Therefore, in Costa Rica, two business owners were included as participants. However, the difficulty of recruiting unintentional hosts once arriving in-country, given the time constraints, led to unintentional hosts being excluded from the study. Within the Costa Rican case study there were 26 participants in total, 8 of whom were men and 18 of whom were women. They ranged in approximate age from 25 – 70, and included 8 professors, 2 university staff members, 6 study abroad administrators, 2 business owners, and 7 host mothers.

*Table 3. Costa Rica Case Study Participant Information*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Approx. Age</b>	<b>Professor</b>	<b>Uni Staff</b>	<b>Study Abroad Administrator</b>	<b>Business Owner</b>	<b>Host Mother</b>
Karla		1	58	1				
Diego	1		38	1				
David	1		45	1				
Christina		1	38	1				
Francesca		1	35	1				
Herman	1		38	1				
Saul	1		65	1				
Stefano	1		42	1				
Maria		1	40		1			
Lorena		1	34		1			
Pablo	1		30		1			
Karen		1	25				1	
Natalie		1	31				1	
Gabriel	1		28				1	
Caterina		1	35				1	
Olga		1	38				1	
Rosario		1	30				1	
Mauricio	1		60					1

Andrea		1	42				1		
Cata		1	50					1	
Vanessa		1	50					1	
Ana		1	50					1	
Roxanna		1	50					1	
Rafaella		1	22					1	
Jessica		1	55					1	
Jane		1	70					1	
				<b>TOTALS</b>					
				8	3	6	2	7	

### *Italy*

Within the Italy case study there were 31 participants in total, 7 of whom were men and 26 of whom were women. They ranged in approximate age from 25 – 70, and included 8 professors, 1 university staff member, 17 study abroad administrators, 0 business owners, and 5 host mothers.

*Table 4. Italy Case Study Participant Information*

Pseudonym	Men	Women	Approx. Age	Professor	Uni Staff	Study Abroad Administrator	Business Owner	Host Mother
Alberta		1	65	1				
Livio	1		40	1				
Giuliana		1	45	1				
Carmella		1	65	1				
Nora		1	35	1				
Carol		1	70	1				
George	1		50	1				
Valentina		1	35	1				
Lucia		1	40		1			
Domenico	1		55			1		
Justina		1	30			1		
Jackie		1	50			1		
Leda		1	35			1		
Martha		1	35			1		
Francesco	1		25			1		

John	1		48			1			
Chiara		1	40			1			
Sarah		1	42			1			
Eraldo	1		50			1			
Irene		1	30			1			
Benedetta		1	45			1			
Lorenza		1	45			1			
Paul	1		65			1			
Franzi		1	35			1			
Mia		1	35			1			
Gia		1	65			1			
Ada		1	60					1	
Aurora		1	50					1	
Emma		1	50					1	
Andrea		1	50					1	
Sofia		1	50					1	
				<b>TOTALS</b>					
				8	1	17	0	5	

## Data Collection & Analysis

### *Costa Rica*

Beginning with the Costa Rican case, pre-fieldwork preparation including the recruitment of on-site collaborators and the preparation and issuance of IRB approval spanned four months, from November 2016 – February 2017. In-country data collection spanned two weeks from March 15, 2017 – March 29, 2017. The first week of data collection took place at a Costa Rican university which hosts within it a study abroad center, whereby US students take courses, typically with other US students, taught by local faculty.

Upon arriving at this first site, I was given a schedule of prearranged interviews. Most of these interviews took place at the university, in a small conference room, or in the offices of the person being interviewed. All interviews, with the exception of the host mother interviews, were conducted in English. At this first site, all host mothers who agreed to participate came to the

university to be interviewed. I posed questions in Spanish to the host mother participants, they responded in Spanish and then a study abroad staff member translated their response.

The second host institution was a Costa Rican university that hosts US and other international students, who are then integrated into English-medium classrooms that include both local and international students. Like the first site, all interviews were pre-arranged by study abroad staff at this institution and I received a schedule upon arrival. Interviews took place in the offices or classrooms of administrators and professors. All interviews with the exception of the host mother interviews were conducted in English. At this site, a cultural and linguistic translator who was a former employee of the study abroad office was suggested to me, and I hired her to accompany me to host mother interviews, in their homes, to translate. Likewise, during those interviews, I posed questions in Spanish and then Spanish to English translation was provided in the moment and recorded.

At the beginning of all interviews, an informed consent document was provided to the participant, in either English or Spanish based on their preference and they were given an opportunity to ask questions. Across both Costa Rican sites all interviews lasted between 30 – 45 minutes, with two interviews lasting about 1.5 hours and one interview lasting two hours. At the conclusion of the interview, each participant was added to a “Participant Roster” spreadsheet, that captured the participant’s name, approximate age, gender, institutional affiliation, contact information, and host type. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym and random participant number at that time. All interviews were recorded, and to the extent possible transcribed within a few days of the interview. All transcriptions were completed within one month of each interview.

Upon returning to the US I started the data organization process by creating a Costa Rica Code Book excel spreadsheet with space to list codes vertically down Column A and then entered each participant number in the cells horizontally along Row A. In line with my grounded theory

approach I engaged in open coding, which Strauss and Corbin (1990) describe as “the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data” (p. 61). As I read and re-read interview transcripts I engaged in first cycle coding (Saldana, 2013) using the descriptive coding method, whereby I assigned topics to aspects of the data. I did so by using the add comment function within the word document transcript, and then added the code to the list in Column A in the Costa Rica Code Book spreadsheet. I then put a “1” in the cell that corresponded to the intersection of the code and the participant – adding another number for every time that data was coded with that particular topic within the participant’s transcript. So, for example, if four different passages within participant #1’s interview were coded as “critical of the student consumer”, the cell that intersected with that listed code and the participant would have a “4” in it.

After completing first cycle coding for all Costa Rica transcripts, I analyzed code frequencies by determining the number of times a specific code was assigned *across* all transcripts. There were 145 distinct codes in all, and the most frequent code (which was “prior international experience”) was assigned 20 times across all transcripts. I then sorted the codes into themes by reference (Saldana, 2013), meaning when a group of codes referred to a particular concept, they were then assigned a broader theme. This was indicated in a new column in my Costa Rica Code Book, so that I could then sort the codes by theme. I then analyzed the themes by sequence (Saldana, 2013), looking at whether a group of codes came before or after another within the conceptual framework discussed in the section below.

### *Italy*

In-country data collection in Italy lasted three weeks, from May 22 – June 14, 2017. Given the dispersed nature of host participants across 8 institutions, as opposed to 2 institutions like in Costa Rica, the logistics for this data set collection were more complicated and required an extra week in the field. By the time I arrived, 85% of interviews were confirmed, with the remaining 15%

set in motion but waiting to confirm dates and times. All interviews took place in the offices of the study abroad administrator or professor, or in a private space on the campus grounds. All interviews were conducted in English, with the exception of 4 host mother interviews that were conducted in Italian.

In accordance with the IRB protocol, all interview participants were provided an informed consent form, in English or Italian based on their preference, and were given an opportunity to ask questions. All interviews, across sites, lasted between 30 – 45 minutes, with 2 lasting over an hour and one lasting closer to 2 hours. At the conclusion of the interview, each participant was added to the “Participant Roster” spreadsheet, that captured the participant’s name, approximate age, gender, institutional affiliation, contact information, and host type. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym and random participant number at that time. All interviews were recorded and transcribed within one month of each interview.

Upon returning to the US I undertook the same data organization process that I had for my Costa Rica data, including the creation of a Italy Code Book excel spreadsheet with space to list codes vertically down Column A and then entered each participant number in the cells horizontally along Row A. Exactly as with the Costa Rica data, I engaged in open coding, beginning with first cycle coding (Saldana, 2013) using the descriptive coding method, and used the add comment function within the word document transcript to record the codes. I then added the code to the list in Column A in the Italy Code Book spreadsheet. I then put a “1” in the cell that corresponded to the intersection of the code and the participant – adding another number for every time that data was coded with that particular topic within the participant’s transcript.

Again, as with the Costa Rica data, after completing first cycle coding for all Italy transcripts, I analyzed code frequencies by determining the number of times a specific code was assigned *across* all transcripts. There were 131 distinct codes in all, and the most frequent code (which was “unable



to live in city center”) was assigned 11 times across all transcripts. I then sorted the codes into themes by reference (Saldana, 2013), meaning when a group of codes referred to a particular concept, they were then assigned a broader theme. This was indicated in a new column in my Italy Book, so that I could then sort the codes by theme. I then analyzed the themes by sequence (Saldana, 2013), looking at whether a group of codes came before or after another within the conceptual framework, below.

### Trustworthiness

I took several measures to ensure trustworthiness of the data and findings. Firstly, in terms of credibility, I used qualitative interviews as my primary research instrument – a well-established method for qualitative inquiry. I also have prolonged engagement in the field of study abroad and familiarity with (and former travel to) both research sites. Purposive sampling was utilized which fostered the inclusion of multiple voices, exhibiting characteristics of similarity and dissimilarity, redundancy and variety – which also helps to establish potential transferability. Further, I member checked verbally throughout the conduct of the fieldwork by constantly confirming my understanding of the phenomenon described by participants. I achieved this through paraphrasing and summarizing for clarification. In addition, triangulation among a wide range of informants with affiliations to several different organizations helped to increase trustworthiness, as did negative case analysis, both within cases and across cases.

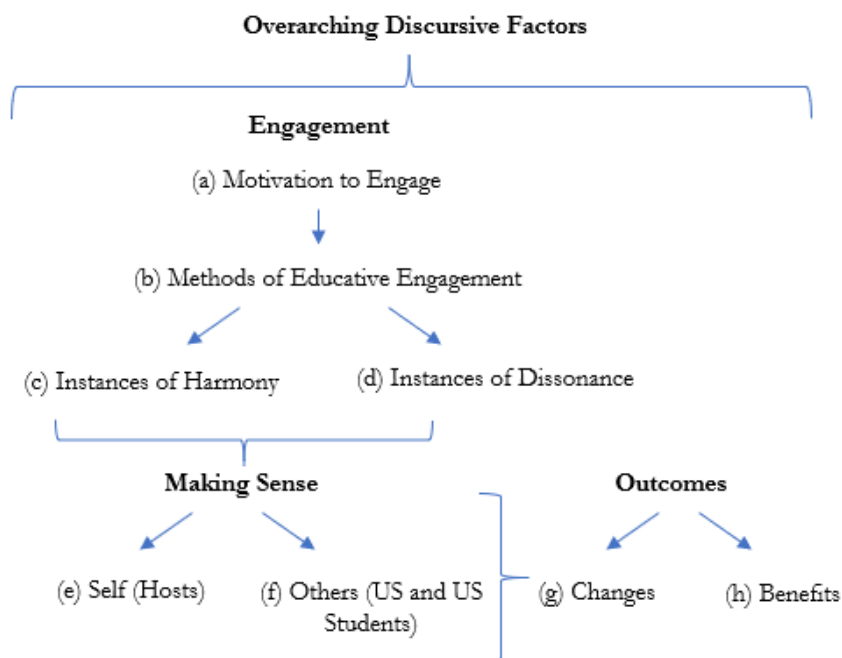
Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that credibility and dependability are interconnected and that in practice, demonstration of one helps to ensure the other. However, this chapter includes a detailed description of the research design and its implementation noting what was planned and executed, such that a future researcher could go to same sites or different sites to replicate the study. This audit trail helps to establish confirmability, as does my reporting of large amounts of data (so that it can speak for

itself), as well as the admitting my own predispositions (as both an advocate and critic of study abroad) in the positionality section above.

### Conceptual Framework for Reporting Data

I developed a conceptual framework, based on my five research questions, to organize my thinking and the reporting out of the data for each of the individual cases. Hosts had so much to share about their experiences, and I wanted to honor their voices to the greatest extent possible, but also desired to “bound” the case studies in a way that kept them readable. So, I created this conceptual framework based on the shape and content of my research questions. As illustrated below, the framework operates as a way to define the conceptual boundaries of this research and organize the reporting of the data.

*Figure 1. Organizational Framework for Reporting Data*



Both of the individual case study reports (Chapters 4 and 5) are organized in the same way. They begin by reporting on hosts’ motivation to engage with US students and then proceed to

methods of educative engagement, or the many ways in which various hosts engage with US students and contribute to their learning abroad. Within the context of these methods of engagement, hosts experience instances of harmony, defined as what hosts perceive to be positive personal connection, as well as instances of dissonance, defined as negativity or disharmony. Both types of encounters are subsequently reported on. In reflecting on these instances, hosts make sense of themselves and their own culture as well as US students and US culture. This conceptual cycle of engagement and meaning making contribute to producing what hosts see as changes (or not) in themselves and their city or country. These changes can be perceived to be predominantly negative, positive, or value-neutral (not positive or negative). Perhaps not coincidentally, benefits are often the same things that motivate hosts in the first place. The final aspect of hosts perspectives that are reported on are overarching discursive factors, or discourses that color the entire experience for hosts.

Each case study report is designed to stand on its own in order to produce a descriptive and exploratory case. Given the absence of research in the literature focused on intentional hosts in study abroad settings, presenting several important themes at each stage of the conceptual framework seemed important for the development of “questions and hypothesis for future study” (Yin, 2003). This is why there are more themes reported out in these chapters than may be typical of other forms of qualitative research, especially research focused on a phenomenon for which there is already a significant presence in the literature. Following the two cases, I traced *across* cases, to complete the comparative case study methodology, organizing comparative findings within the context of each of my research questions – this is found in Chapter 6. Finally, findings were analyzed in reference to my theoretical framework and the literature. This is explicated in Chapter 7, along with new theoretical insights, implications for theory, practice, and research.

## Limitations

Some limitations of this project are pointed to within the broader literature on community impact research, such as the possibility of host community members being unwilling to discuss their attitudes and experiences with someone outside of their community. This is especially salient for intentional hosts, most of whom are monetarily compensated for their engagement with US students and therefore may be nervous about putting their arrangement at risk by divulging anything that could be perceived as negative. I attempted to mitigate this through collaborating with people and organizations who were community-based and well known by the participants. I hope that the trust that participants had with these collaborators helped to make up for any distrust that there might have been in me, as an outsider.

The purposive sampling that was community-collaborator driven, while essential to the project design, may present some potential limitations. In Costa Rica, on-site partners reached out to their staff, faculty, and host families inviting them to participate in the study. By nature of their willingness to volunteer, these hosts may share attitudes or perceptions that are not broadly shared by those who chose not to participate in the study. This goes too, in Italy, where on-site directors who elected to participate in the study may have perspectives that are different than those who chose not to participate in the study. However, given the guarantee of anonymity and relatively low risk to participation, I assume those who chose not to participate did so because of time constraints. Nonetheless, the nature of my collaboration with on-site partners affected the sampling of participants, which could be a limitation.

Further, the need for a translator during Spanish interviews may be seen as a limitation. And while every participant was given the option of conducting the interview in English, Spanish, or Italian, and everyone who could speak English chose to do so, not conducting interviews in

participants' first language may be a limitation. However, I do not think that this limitation should be overstated, in that it assumes that participants were not able to express themselves well or fully in a second, or third language. I do not think that was the case. In order to mitigate linguistic challenges, my interview protocol was prepared in English, Italian, and Spanish to help ensure that even when an interview was conducted in Spanish with the help of a translator, the translator was better able to understand the nature of my questions.

A further limitation of this study was my inability to spend more time in the field. At just under two months in-country across the two sites, I was unable to conduct in-depth ethnographic research. I of course observed my surroundings while in the field but did build any formal participant observation into my protocol, primarily because it was not possible to be a "participant" in the hosting process, which is the unit of analysis. My intention is to center the voices and experiences of host community members as opposed to my own interpretation of their lived reality, so in this way I feel that the time I was able to spend in the field was a positive start in this direction.

Lastly, as described above, my original intention was to include both intentional hosts and unintentional hosts, or people who live in San Jose and Florence and do not actively choose to engage with US students. This facet of the host community is really important, and continually left out of community impact research. My time constraint in the field precluded me from recruiting enough unintentional hosts to include them in the study. However, my hope is that follow-on research would focus specifically on this population.

## CHAPTER 4: SAN JOSE, COSTA RICA

*“In the United States we’re thankful for the many Costa Ricans who contribute to our prosperity and our liberty. In my best Tica, Pura vida.”*

*-US President Barack Obama, San Jose Speech, 2014*

Costa Rican English-language online newspaper, the Tico Times, identified the quote above as one of the publication’s “*Favorite Quotes About Costa Rica*” from the year 2014. The article provides the following context:

*The most powerful leader in the world stumped in Costa Rica in May to firm up economic ties between the US and Central America and the Dominican Republic. While in San José, Obama tried out the country’s catchphrase in his best “Tica,” whatever that means. (para. 1)*

Misusing the word “Tica” which colloquially refers to a Costa Rican woman, this quote from President Obama and the Tico Times’ reaction to it helps to paint a picture of two countries that are intimately engaged economically, but perhaps not mutually well-understood culturally. “Pura Vida” translated literally means “pure life”, but as Van Velzer (2014, para.1) suggests “transient in meaning, in relevance, in purpose, to define pura vida is to misunderstand the term”. However, when in Costa Rica you hear the phrase constantly and Van Velzer (2014) explains it as a phrase which is “shouted from the rooftops at parades and festivals, it’s a response to *como estas?* (how are you?) and you’re welcome. It’s both a greeting and a goodbye. It’s a statement about life, how it is and how it should be.”

GoAbroad.com, a popular study abroad program search engine, lists “*Living la Pura Vida*” as the #1 reason “why you should study abroad in Costa Rica”. They claim that:

*The ticos pride themselves on living la pura vida, and maintaining an incredibly peaceful and relaxed lifestyle. Costa Rica is, in fact, one of the few countries in the world with no standing army, which was abolished in 1949. Average life expectancy is close to 80, and many citizens are active past the age of 100, partly due to climate and diet, and of course their attitude. Demographically, there is a rich mix of old, young, and all types of ethnicities, making for an*

*eclectic collage of cultures for students to experience. Studying abroad in Costa Rica truly allows students to experience a high quality of life that is both peaceful and unique to the region.*

The desire to experience la pura vida, combined with the relatively low cost of living and travel to and within Costa Rica has likely contributed to the large increase in US students studying abroad there over the last 20 years; with 3,421 US students studying abroad there in 1999/2000 and 9,233 US students studying there during the 2015/2016 academic year.

With the increase in US study abroad participation in Costa Rica has emerged a small set of literature across a number of disciplines focused on the design and outcomes of primarily faculty-led study abroad programs to the country (Geary, 2015; Connor & Roberts, 2017; Brannstrom & Houser, 2015; Delafield, 2018; Regalla, 2016). However, in line with study abroad research trends more broadly, the perspectives and experiences of Costa Ricans who *host* US students while they are studying abroad are absent.

The case study to follow centers host voices and perspectives on their engagement with US students. Beginning with what motivates intentional hosts to engage with US students, the chapter will move through the conceptual framework describing what participants shared in regard to each “stage” of the framework: (a) Motivation to Engage; (b) Methods of Educative Engagement; (c) Instances of Harmony and (d) Dissonance; (e) Making Sense of Self; (f) Others; (g & h) Host-Perceived Outcomes of US Student Engagement/Presence; as well as overarching discursive factors that emerged across stages which seemed to influence the entire intentional host/US student encounter. Below is a chart that lists the major themes that will be discussed within each stage of the conceptual framework in the pages to follow.

Table 5. Major Themes at each Stage of the Conceptual Framework: San Jose, Costa Rica Case

<p><b>a. Motivations to Engage</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive prior international experiences</li> <li>• Opportunity to learn or improve English for self or family</li> <li>• Economic benefits</li> <li>• It's like having kids again</li> </ul>
<p><b>b. Methods of Education Engagement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educating On-Campus</li> <li>• Contextualizing textbook learning</li> <li>• Teaching US students how to live as part of a family</li> </ul>
<p><b>c. Instances of Harmony</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintaining close relationships with former students</li> <li>• Academic connections</li> </ul>
<p><b>d. Instances of Dissonance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of connection with local peers</li> <li>• Language barrier</li> <li>• Lack of respect</li> <li>• Drunkenness</li> </ul>
<p><b>e. Making Sense of Self</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contrasting cultures</li> <li>• Different approach to family</li> <li>• Communication style</li> <li>• Punctuality</li> <li>• Risk aversion</li> <li>• Lack of "US-style" patriotism</li> </ul>
<p><b>f. Making Sense of US Students</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparation of US students for study abroad</li> <li>• Girls and boys</li> <li>• US students and wealth</li> <li>• US students and partying</li> </ul>
<p><b>g. &amp; h. Host Perceived Impacts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural change</li> <li>• Economic change</li> <li>• Home life change</li> <li>• Cosmopolitization of locals</li> <li>• Increased neighborhood security</li> <li>• Democratization of 'the global'</li> </ul>
<p><b>Overarching Discursive Factors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Politics of language</li> <li>• US economic and cultural imperialism</li> <li>• Getting students to recognize and question their power</li> </ul>



## a) Motivation to Engage with US Students

Intentional hosts are in some way agreeing to engage with US students through the nature of their work. Professors are either choosing to teach US students specifically or choose to work at an institution that hosts US students. In this case, all local professors interviewed specifically elected to teach in either US-student-only classrooms or in mixed classrooms with US, international (i.e. not Costa Rican), and Costa Rican students. Study abroad staff and university staff form two distinct categories in this case, so for study abroad staff, they are, by nature of their work, very intentionally engaging with US students. Meanwhile, university staff have elected to work at an institution that hosts US students but have less of a choice when it comes to engaging with them. Finally, host families are intentionally electing to welcome US and in some cases other international students into their homes. This section unpacks how these host community members described their motivation to engage with US students.

### *i. Positive Prior International Experiences*

The overwhelming theme of responses to questions of motivation to engage with US students was participants having had positive prior international experiences. Six of the eight professors interviewed indicated that they had studied or traveled abroad themselves and were inspired by the experience. Two professors, Francesca and Diego, completed their Masters degrees, in Political Science and Marine Biology respectively, in Australia. While two other professors, Saul and Herman, went to high school in the US – Saul graduated from a military academy and Herman from a public high school in Miami. Another professor, Karla, a woman with short graying hair in her late 50's, who has been teaching US students in Costa Rica for over 25 years, studied abroad in France and explained how learning French there inspired her to teach Spanish in Costa Rica:

*well, I think it was coincidence, it was in 1991 when I was in France, I loved that experience so much and when I came back here, I said this is what I'm going to do... I want to start my own language school, I never thought about it at the university. I was thinking about a language institute and then I met the owner of this*

*university and we started talking and he said... I want to have the best language school in Costa Rica, no actually he said... in Latin America, and I want you to start it*

David, professor of Intercultural Communication, who has been teaching US students for more than 30 years described how the transformative experience he had studying abroad in the US inspired him to be involved in similarly transformative experiences for US students in his home country:

*I studied abroad when I was, I turned 21 in the States, and that allowed me to see a level of poverty and a level of illiteracy in rural areas that I did not perceive in movies and I think that and just trying to help people, trying to reach kids in elementary schools, that here in Costa Rica we didn't live in the trees, and we did have cars, or whatever, it was just interesting to start perceiving that part of America that is usually not portrayed in the media.*

Likewise, all study abroad administrators and one university staff member cited their own prior international experiences as motivation for engaging with US students in their professional lives.

Two study abroad administrators, Karen and Caterina, volunteered abroad – Karen in Brazil with a group of students and Caterina in Sweden independently. Caterina shared that although she did not come from a particularly international family, her father would see opportunity for international travel advertised in different places and always encouraged her to go. She shared further that although there were exchange opportunities through her university she decided to wait until after she graduated to go abroad, she said: *“I have to go abroad myself, and I thought I’m at the university I’ll wait, I’ll finish and then I’ll go because you never know if you have the opportunity to stay.”*

One study abroad administrator and one university staff member did entire degrees abroad. Gabriel, a study abroad administrator, attended a US military academy for his bachelor’s degree which he credits with opening his eyes to cultural differences between the US and Costa Rica – namely in terms of individualism, patriotism, and patterns of socializing. Lorena, who works in university admissions, did her master’s degree in Business at a university in China. The other two study abroad administrators did short term exchanges in the US. Natalie, a study abroad administrator, participated in a month-long exchange at a high school in California and lived with a

US family, which she said further immersed her in the US culture and English language that she was already exposed to growing up in Costa Rica. Olga, a young, friendly, dark-haired study abroad administrator at a different institution, shared how her experience as an exchange student at the University of Kansas inspired her interest in international education:

*when you go to another country you have an great opportunity to share with the rest of the world, your culture, your assets, as part of that culture, so I first, I was in love with my country, a lot more, with my country, I realized all of the blessings that we have, and I would say, geographically speaking, cultural speaking, well in many aspects, socially speaking, all the aspects I could kind of become aware, right, of each of them more deeply, normally you're here and you take it for granted, and you don't pay attention to why are you like that? Why are we always happy and so warm? You don't really think about it... but when you're abroad, and you take the chance to do it, you appreciate, you become more grateful for what you have in your country. Why wouldn't I want to help other students have such an experience?*

Similarly, three of the seven host mothers interviewed indicated having positive prior international experiences that motivated them to host US students – the remaining four did not mention having had prior international experiences. Ana lived in San Francisco for 2 years which she said helped to introduce her to predominant ways of being in the US as it relates to time, language, and patterns of social interaction so now she feels very comfortable with US students in her home. Roxanna had a brother who studied abroad for six months in North Carolina, he had a positive experience there which inspired her to host US students in her home. Likewise, Cata's sister studied abroad in Colorado for one year where a US family hosted her. So, Cata reasoned, *"if someone hosted my sister while she was there, why not do the same for someone else's children here"*.

While it may not be surprising that study abroad administrators reported being motivated to host US students because of their own international experiences, it is interesting to note that not all of them studied in the US, even those who studied, volunteered, or traveled to other countries cited those experiences as motivation. Likewise, half of the professors who cited their international experiences as being a motivating factor did not study in the US. This suggests that it is not specifically prior exposure to the US that serves as a motivating factor for engaging with US

students, but international travel more broadly. In the case of host mothers, the international experiences of others, in this case their siblings, were a motivating factor.

The length of time people spent abroad did not seem to make much of a difference in terms of their motivation, as evidenced by study abroad administrators who were abroad for years, while others just a few months, both indicating that those experiences motivated them to engage with US students. Most interestingly perhaps, is the extent to which hosts cite reciprocity as a motivator – we see in the case of Karla’s experience learning French in France and then wanting to teach Spanish to US students in Costa Rica, Olga’s experience coming to appreciate her home culture in Kansas and wanting to help US students do the same in Costa Rica, as well as Cata’s desire to host US students in her home as her brother was hosted in a US home, that these motivations are grounded in a desire for reciprocity.

*ii. Opportunity to Learn or Improve English for Self or Family*

At least one participant from each intentional host category identified the opportunity to learn or improve their (or their family’s) English language abilities as a motivation for engaging with US students. Stefano, a professor of marketing in his early 40’s, jumped at the chance to teach a marketing course in English and identified this opportunity as a primary motivating factor for engaging with US and other international students. He explained:

*You could have fluency [in English] but not have the skills to teach a class [in English], you don’t always have both. They had a very important professional who is fully bilingual but can’t teach – being a professional doesn’t mean you can transfer knowledge. So, at first, I wasn’t sure if I could teach a full quarter class in English, so at first it was the challenge, but a challenge that I felt was important for me to take.*

Likewise, Lorena, a professional admissions officer at one of the research sites explained that she was particularly motivated to work with US students because most of the time she engages with Spanish speaking students. She said that: *“it’s really difficult to be practicing the language, and in my case, I have studied English for almost all my life, and I have to improve a lot of things, stuff that being with international students, it forced me to do it, because otherwise I won’t do it.”* Rosario, a study abroad administrator shared

this sentiment, citing the opportunity to practice English as a primary motivating factor for choosing to engage with US students. She shared that opportunities to practice with native speakers is rare and that growing up she went to a small school where *“English classes were available, and we had English until the last year, in high school we got English classes, but they were not a good quality”*.

Others, like Natalie, a study abroad administrator, shared that her knowledge of English served both as a factor that motivated her to work with US students but also as a motivating factor for why she was hired to work in International Education in the first place. She shared that *“at the university where I got my licentiate which you always need to get in Costa Rica, they were looking for people to work in the center for international programs, and they needed to have English”*. Gabriel, Caterina, and Olga, all study abroad administrators, similarly shared that their knowledge of English was an important qualification for working in international education and the opportunity to keep practicing English served as a motivation for engaging with US students in their professional lives.

Finally, only one host mother, Jane, in her 70's who has been hosting US students and international students for over 30 years, identified providing her children with an opportunity to learn English as a primary motivation for hosting US students. When specifically asked what motivated her to host US students she responded: *“I wanted to experience something new, and to have the environment for my kids to learn a new language. I have three sons and they are now all fluent in English”*. Given how important the use of English was as a motivating factor for study abroad administrators I was surprised that more host mothers did not identify the desire for their children to learn or improve their English as a primary motivating factor for choosing to host US students. Yet, it's important to note that in both of my home stays during my fieldwork the family children spoke with me and other US students in English and to their parents in Spanish.

The popular desire to learn English was a strong motivating theme but follow up questions on *why* those with whom I spoke felt it desirable or necessary to learn English led to discussions that

are more fully described in the section on ‘the politics of language’. Briefly, many of those I spoke to under the age of 30 felt that English is *the* global language, and as such there are many professional and economic benefits to being bilingual. Others, mostly over the age of 40, were more cautious or ambivalent about the constant presence of English in San Jose and in Costa Rica. So, while this is a motivating factor that is in some ways separate from the economic motivation explained in the next section, they are connected in some ways as well.

### *iii. Economic Benefit*

The strongest theme around economic benefit as a motivating factor for engaging with US students was connected to host families. However, a *minority* of host families themselves cited economic benefit as a motivating factor for hosting US students – in fact, only 2 of the 7 host mothers interviewed identified this as a motivation for them. One host mother admitted that “*at first I was motivated by the extra money, but once I started receiving students, I realized that it was a very enriching experience*”, while the other host mother who discussed money did so in this way, she said:

*apart from the economic [benefit] because obviously [institution] pays us money for our work and for having students stay in our house with us, the sharing that we have [is a benefit] because they come in, especially those who are more communicative, because they ask a lot of things, and they can talk about different things of the country, especially right now, that the students I have right now talk a lot and ask me all the time and everything like that so, I'm used to having them at home, it's part of my routine.*

Yet another host mother shared that the money that she gets from the university for hosting US students she spends on things for her home that she would not otherwise buy, such as: fast internet, more furniture, extra sheets and blankets, and foods that she and her family do not typically eat. She also buys a greater amount of cleaning supplies and reported that other host mothers she knows use the money to employ a house-keeper to come and clean the student rooms once per week. Further, she went on to say that of course, US students are using more electricity and water, which increases her bills, so she does not see hosting US students as being particularly lucrative.

However, two study abroad administrators and two professors talked about how they thought that money is a primary motivating factor for host families. They described this motivation in different ways. The study abroad administrators, both of whom have worked with host families for over 5 years in recruiting, vetting, and then supporting them as they host US students, said they thought that money was the primary motivating factor; one person said, *“I mean money is the obvious motivator, once they start hosting students they begin to get other things too, like not money, but more cultural enrichment, but at first of course its money”*. By cultural enrichment, I believe that this person was referring to the ability to have conversations and learn about one another’s culture – things like, politics, sports, religion, and family. The other study abroad administrator said more plainly *“they want money”*. Yet, a faculty member in his description of money as a motivating factor for host families went further to say;

*If you think about how many, let’s see it from a machismo perspective, how may housewives that didn’t have any income are now empowered because they are homestay families, and they do get some money, and now they are more self-assured in saying that they disagree with something in the house because they bring part of the income too.*

There are a few different possible explanations for the discrepancy between the strength of money as a motivating factor as self-reported by host families versus those who work with host families on the ground (local study abroad administrators and local professors). Firstly, discussing money, especially one’s own financial situation or desires is a personal matter – it is possible that host families, with whom I had limited interactions, did not feel comfortable bringing this up. It is also possible that money does not play a primary motivating role for Costa Rican host families, and the extent to which it is a motivator is overstated or inflated by study abroad administrators due to their proximity to the actual process of paying host families. However, my sense is that as the “apart from the economic benefit” qualifier one host mother led with suggests, the economic benefit of hosting US students is thought of as implied, and therefore not worth bringing up.

*iv. It’s Like Having Kids Again! (Host Mothers)*

Similarly to the theme of money as a motivation for engaging with US students, two study abroad administrators shared their thoughts on why they think the local families with whom they work choose to host US students. Natalie and Gabriel, both study abroad administrators at the same institution, said that families share with them their desire to fill their home with children again, once their own have left. Natalie shared: *“from what I see, a lot of them [host families], have grown kids, or are out of the house, so they are just a mama and papa, and it’s like having kids again, a lot I hear that a lot”*.

Gabriel points to the inter-generational nature of hosting US students in the neighborhood where his institution hires hosts families and also points to the mix of motivation of income and experience:

*A lot of the homestays that we work with have been working with us for 15 to 20 years, and so a lot of the things that happen, the mom started the project and now the daughter or the son got married and lives close by and so now they open up the door to someone else, and also it’s a good income for the people around here. It’s a lot of word of mouth, a lot of family, kids growing up and buying close by and they need income or they like the experience.*

Likewise, host mothers themselves identified the desire to have young people in their home again after their children have left as a primary motivator for hosting US students, yet they described this desire in different ways. Vanessa, a “Mama Tica” or Costa Rican mom, in her early 60’s, who has been hosting US students for nearly 23 years, when asked what motivated her to host US students said: *“my nest is empty, and I don’t want to be alone”*. Meanwhile, Cata, who has been hosting US students for 29 years, explained that because she has 4 children she is used to there always being many people in her home, *“there was always people around my house - friends, family and everything so now that they’re gone, most of them, in a way, the students come in and replace them”*. She went on to explain that because of this she does not feel like her home is negatively impacted by the constant presence of US students, she sees them as a replacement for all the people who used to fill her home.

Mama Tica, Jane, spoke emotionally about her motivation to host US students and what they bring to her family and her household:



*They are part of my family, they give the life in this house, it's like the sun, the movement in this house. My family have said "stop, stop, stop, you are getting too old" but I don't want to stop hosting students. The French students who were here 2 weeks ago, they are gone now and I am so sad.*

The extent to which having visiting students “bring life” to the home was a surprising motivating factor and speaks to how integrated many students become in family household life.

## b) Methods of Educative Engagement

Almost all participants, when asked specifically if they see themselves as teachers, or as part of the educational experience for visiting US students, responded that indeed they do consider themselves as an important part of the education process for visiting US students. However, as one might expect, the ways that different types of hosts understand their roles and explain their methods of engaging with US students vary widely. Below is an explanation of some of the ways different intentional hosts engage with US students during their time in Costa Rica, and in some cases, challenges that hosts face in the process.

### *i. Educating On-Campus*

Of the four intentional-host ‘types’ (study abroad administrator, university staff, professors, and host families) study abroad administrations made the fewest references to themselves as ‘teachers’. Rather, many of them saw their teaching role as having more to do with educating colleagues at the university and members of the community on the benefits of internationalization. Study abroad administrator, Olga, explained how she and her colleagues attempt to educate the university community about international education:

*We started with deans and directors, we wanted to raise awareness with them first so they can pass it on. We were sharing with them the importance of international education, the different benefits, the first training was more informative, the benefits, the programs we have, and the different opportunities.*

In a follow-up question, I asked if she was met with resistance, to which she replied:

*The resistance that we are facing, has to do with lack of knowledge, it's not that they [faculty] know*

*about it and they don't want to help, it's that they don't know about it. So, for those who have contact with international students... they want to help the students, they are happy having students from other countries... You don't see faculty promoting international education because they don't understand the level of development that they have here – I see more resistance on the director and dean side, I think it's because they are overloaded, sometimes they have their priorities and we are the last number in the list, so if I have to hire profs, design syllabi, do accreditation, meet with the provost, the list continues, we're probably at the end. There might be a few people who may be a little resistant because of lack of language proficiency, usually who can perform in the language, and have had experiences are more eager to help there are others who can't speak English that are more resistance...*

The process of educating US students is typically at the center of discussions of study abroad, and in US study abroad offices we often think about the role of US study abroad staff in educating our local university community about the benefits of international education. What is particularly important about what Olga shared is that she, and her colleagues, have very similar responsibilities, and challenges as those of us who work in study abroad in the US. Often, we think about the direct services and interaction that local study abroad administrators have with visiting international students, but perhaps do not as often think about the educative work that they are doing *within* their own institution through meeting with administrators and faculty to try and make a case for various methods of internationalization – such as, hosting international students, sending local students abroad, and internationalization curriculum.

Another form of educative work that often goes overlooked is that of university staff. In one case, Maria, who works in the cafeteria at one of the research sites, shared how she considers herself part of the educative process for visiting students. She explained how when students first arrive, they are very shy and know very little, if any, Spanish and because she does not speak English she speaks exclusively in Spanish to them, which helps them learn the language. She said: *“the first thing is currency, I help them understand what collones are, how much each bill might be, and I use the receipt to help them understand the currency. I also help them with very simple words like colors, or for example words for food”*.

Maria is helping to reinforce language learning that students start inside the classroom.

## *ii. Contextualizing Textbook Learning*

On the flipside, some professors reported using the classroom as a space to help US students contextualize and process things that they experience outside of the classroom. Karla, the professor who helped to found the language program at one of the research sites over 20 years ago, gave an example of something that happened during a trip to the national museum with her US students and how she helped her students contextualize class based ideology as well as Costa Rican history. She recounted:

*... we were looking at some old pictures and I said, "look at what Costa Rica was like at the beginning of the 20th century, we were very poor, people didn't have shoes, they were so poor, that they couldn't afford a pair of shoes, and it wasn't until the end of the '60s that there was one president that said everyone is going to wear shoes and so they started giving shoes to everybody". But then they didn't have the variety of shoes that they have now, it was the pair of shoes, oh you're a 7, this is your pair of shoes. It didn't matter if you had a wide foot or a narrow foot, and so I said "okay, look at these pictures" and it was a picture of a fat women with very wide feet, you could see them popping out, and so they [US students] were taking pictures of that, and they [US students] said "now I understand why we wear shoes in the house" because their host mother says no do not take off your shoes, put on your shoes, and they said what? And probably your mom, your local mom, doesn't know, that's why she's asking them to put on their shoes because it's this idea that not wearing shoes, is being poor, so these little things.*

Likewise, professors who teach both US students and local students in the same classroom shared examples of how they use the classroom as a laboratory for helping US students and local students understand how their own backgrounds and cultural contexts influence the way they see different issues. In her intercultural communication class, Francesca uses controversial issues to draw out a diversity of positions in the room:

*There was a discussion about abortion, here in Costa Rica there was a discussion about a 13-year old girl, she was raped, she got pregnant and in Costa Rica abortion is illegal, so there was this open discussion about whether she should be allowed to have an abortion. And that week we were talking about gender and freedom, and in class, there was a US student, she was very open, 'it's about choice being free, having the option', then you had the local students who were like 'yes but no, I don't know, God, religion, I don't know, it's another life'. And you could see the difference between the different genders, the guys were just like, silent, they were not going to say anything, not get into trouble. Of course, it can be a difficult topic, but it allowed for a discussion of freedom and how cultures evolve around religion or not, it was quite interesting.*

Other professors emphasized how important they feel it is for them to give US students opportunities in the classroom that they do not get at home. Diego, the professor of Marine Biology who did his graduate work in Australia, lamented that many of the US students he teaches in Costa Rica complain about how large their lecture halls are in the US, and how even by the time they are juniors or seniors they have not made meaningful personal or academic connections with faculty. He explained: “*my lab is not like that, we are equals, we are learning together, that is what science is all about*”. He went on to describe how he takes students to the ocean each semester to tag sea turtles and how he has co-authored published journal articles with US undergraduate students who spent one semester in Costa Rica. At the time of our interview, he was supporting a current US student on a National Geographic research grant that would allow her to return to Costa Rica to continue their shared research.

Explanations of approaches to engaging US and international students in classrooms while abroad, told from the perspective, not of the US students but from the local professors are rare. But through them we can come to gain a better understanding of local faculty’s pedagogical approaches to bringing the world into the classroom and the classroom into the world. Further, it might be assumed that because of the limited time US students are spending with local faculty (in most cases one semester or less) that they do not have the opportunity to make meaningful connections. However, in the case of Diego at least, it seems as if US students are afforded access and opportunities that they might not otherwise have at their home institution. *This* type of opportunity is particularly meaningful and important in that it can have a lasting impact on students’ academic trajectory, *and* in that it points to academic labor and mentorship that is expended by local faculty that they (the faculty) and US students identify as not happening as regular on their home campuses.

*iii. Teaching US Students How to Live as Part of a Family*

Research on study abroad home stays suggests that US students are learning a great deal from their host families. Indeed, in my time in two home stays during my fieldwork in Costa Rica I witnessed US students learning and practicing language with their host mothers, watching movies and playing games with the host siblings, and sharing meals together. One might assume that much of this learning happens simply by people from different cultural backgrounds sharing space and time together – however, I was interested in knowing about what, if any, intentional measures host families take to educate the US students whom they host. And indeed, host mothers shared several different ways that they see themselves as teachers and make intentional pedagogical choices in how they engage with US students in their homes.

The primary method of educative engagement shared by host mothers was through providing cultural guidance. In Mama Tica Ana's case, this takes the form of helping US students with their homework after dinner and making suggestions for other books to read, places to visit, and different foods to try. Host mothers Vanessa and Roxanna both encourage their US students to keep a notebook with them at the table so that they can write down words that come up in conversation during dinner that they do not know, and at the end of the meal they go over them and share the meaning. They both also shared that when US students make mistakes in their spoken Spanish, they will correct them. Mama Tica, Cata, suggested: "*Sometimes I feel like I could be a tourist guide already because of all the information I give out to the students. But I also help them with their language, I do this thing where I give them a new word of the day, but I try to make it a hard word for them to learn*". These host mothers do not know each other and in fact two different universities employ them, yet they use similar pedagogical tactics.

More than half of the host mothers interviewed made specific reference to using the same methods of engagement with US students as they do their own children or treating US students the same as they would their own children. They see themselves as teachers to US students in much the

same way they see themselves as teachers to their own children. Mama Tica, Vanessa, explained how she approaches telling US students that she is unable to do something she normally would do, like cook dinner. She said: *“It’s part of the experience, you have to organize yourself as a family nucleus and when you converse, and you talk to your kids, and you tell them I can’t do this, they understand because it’s something outside of the norm.”*

Host mother Jane similarly described how she approaches disciplining US students just as she would her own children. She said: *“I am a mom. I scold them if they smoke a lot, or if they come home drunk, or if they are late. They have to learn that that is not acceptable”*. Likewise, Roxanna, explained that she loves to look after US students, and to help female students navigate the world of dating in Costa Rica. She expects the female students she hosts to ask someone they are dating to her house and introduce themselves just as she would her own children. She shared an example from last year whereby: *“a girl I hosted last year said she was dating an engineer from Coca Cola, but when I got to meet him, I knew he definitely was not an engineer because he was dirty and stuff, I told her he probably drives a truck or something, she needs to be careful.”* These examples suggest that a primary mode of educative engagement employed by some host mothers in Costa Rica is care.

Another way that host mothers are intentionally structuring their engagement with the students they host is by controlling physical spaces. Surprisingly, three host mothers, who do not know each other, described a very similar ritual they have for preparing for the arrival of a new student. Vanessa explained: *“I have this custom where every time I get a new student I do something new to the room - whether it be change the carpet, or change the curtains, or paint the walls, I always change something to give it a fresh feel”*. Likewise, Ana and Jane described painting the host student’s bedroom a new color before each new student. Ana specified: *“They [US students] are all different so when one leaves and a new one comes I have to open my mind – new room, new mind”*. This practice is reminiscent of what a teacher might do to prepare a classroom for new students each year.

### c) Instances of Harmony or Personal Connection

There are myriad ways of organizing the many stories that participants shared. However, the broadest categories within which most of the stories seem to fall are instances of harmony and instances of dissonance between themselves and US students. These instances of harmony or dissonance in many cases served as the foundation for how hosts then made sense of the study abroad encounter. Perhaps unsurprisingly, among the four categories of hosts, host families by far reported the greatest instances of harmony and personal connection, followed by study abroad administrators and professors who reported about the same amount, with university staff not sharing any particular instances of harmony.

Every single host family shared multiple stories that illustrated instances of harmony, defined as perceived positive personal connection between themselves and the students they have hosted. As suggested in the last section, many host families treat the US students that they host much like their own children and as a result many of them maintain close relationships over time. Jessica, a host mom of over 20 years shared:

*It's been very fulfilling for me because I get to share a lot with the students. For one former student, I am like a parent, she still writes to me on facebook and everything and she is sharing pictures of her daughter with me. I still feel like her Mama Tica in a way. I am still communicating with many of them and I feel like we share so much that when they leave I cry and cry! I find the job very fulfilling personally.*

Likewise, Vanessa hosted a student many years ago from the US who used a wheel chair. Vanessa has one of the only accessible homes in the area, so she has always been willing to host students with mobility differences. This one particular student has returned to visit 7 times. Vanessa expressed that they share a special bond because Vanessa's brother also uses a wheel chair and so they are able to empathize with each other about that experience. Host mother, Jessica, also formed a particularly special connection with a male student named Steve, they have kept in touch for many years and she speaks regularly on the phone with Steve's grandmother – a native of Latin

America and fluent Spanish speaker.

In some cases, the close connections formed during the home stay experience create international networks for the children of host mothers. For example, Cata shared that she has maintained contact with some of the students she has hosted for over 20 years. Her daughter now lives in Paris and some of her closest friends in France are US students who once lived in her home. Likewise, Jane has a son who lives in Boston, and even though it is on the other side of the country, she explains that a girl she hosted, Sara, who lives in Seattle is his closest friend in the US.

One particularly touching story, shared by Roxanna, helps to illustrate the depth of connection that can be formed between host families and US students in a short period of time:

*Last year I broke my shoulder and I had a student who was Jewish staying with me, she helped out a lot. She paid to stay a week after the program ended to help me recover. I was worried because I knew that she was paying money to stay here to help me, even though classes at the university had ended.*

In instances like these, Roxanna suggests, that help to break down the stereotype of US students that you find in the media:

*Normally when you see the news or whatever the perspective that you have of a culture its very different when you actually meet the people, so I have had the experience of meeting lots of individuals, and then I can make up my own mind about what is the culture. The same way, it sort of comes around, in a sense that knowing individual people gives a different perspective on what people normally communicate about that culture, in ways we have perceptions of our next-door neighbors, it just changes because I actually know the people.*

Study abroad administrators and professors emphasized the connections they see being made between US students and host families as well. But they also added their own instances of personal connection too. Gabriel, a study abroad administrator, shared an encounter he had with a US student whereby they shared with him how they are making local connections:

*I was just talking to one of the students, there was a jungle jam, they call it, this weekend, and she was there, and she said there were a lot more Costa Ricans students than she thought, and I said yea it's a festival and there are going to be Americans and Costa Ricans and it's a good way to mingle, and yea, bars also, that's another big one they told us, they have met more people in bars than they've met here at [the institution]."*

Karla, a Spanish professor, shared how students keep in touch with her through facebook:



*They don't say, oh I love the experience of learning the language, they never mention that, even though, over time they send messages on facebook and say oh, I'm so happy I learned Spanish in Costa Rica, a lot of students that came to Costa Rica they say I'm going to be a lawyer and in the end they study to, they become Spanish professors, and I think OH MY GOD, you were in my business Spanish class!*

Likewise, as described above, Diego, the professor of Marine Biology, has made close personal and academic connection with several students, co-authoring journal articles with some of them, and David a professor of cross-cultural communication shared that he has kept in touch with many students, one of whose Masters thesis he advised.

Notably absent from this set of coded themes and examples were university administrators and staff. This could be because in some ways they are the 'least intentional' of the intentional hosts that I include in this study. For instance, Maria, who works in the cafeteria, shared meaningful examples of how she engages with US students, however during my time at the institution where she works I spent about 2 hours per day in the cafeteria, and like in most cafeterias, students are in and out and those working there are quite busy. It may be difficult for lasting personal relationships to form there. Likewise, while I am sure that many study abroad administrators have formed meaningful connections to students, as Olga described, there are many other duties to which study abroad administrators must attend to during the work day. It seems as if the atmosphere intentionally created within the home-stay environment lends itself best to the creation of instances of harmony and personal connection than might the classroom, study abroad office, or other university settings.

#### d) Instances of Dissonance

Across all intentional host types, the separation or general lack of connection between US students and their Costa Rican peers was also a reoccurring theme. While this may not be surprising in and of itself, what is troubling is that study participants are embedded in study abroad programs at Costa Rican institutions, where it could be assumed that the opportunities for organic connections

between US students and Costa Rican peers is perhaps the highest. It was confirmed with multiple study abroad administrators that the majority of US students who come to Costa Rica do not study at a Costa Rican institution, but rather take part in a program led by a US faculty member from their home institution, or a third-party provider, or volunteer organization. Meaning, while one might expect there to be little interaction between US students and Costa Rican peers in a faculty-led or third-party provider program, you might assume that at institutions where US and Costa Rican students are both in attendance, and in some cases in classes together, that instances of connection might be frequent. More research is needed to confirm whether the instances of personal connection are higher in institution hosted programs than in other program types.

Perhaps given their proximity to both US and Costa Rican students, all six study abroad administrators interviewed identified separation of US students and Costa Rican peers as an issue. Natalie, a study abroad administrator who works specifically on “integration programming” aimed at bringing US students and Costa Rican students together, explained the resistance on behalf of some local students to welcome US and international students:

*I can think in terms of the local students, mostly, um historically they never felt very comfortable of being with so many international students here on campus, like “you’re taking up my space”, so for me, for example, as a cultural integration coordinator, it’s very hard to integrate both groups, it’s the biggest challenge ever, so there’s this, big part of the students that feel like, “please go away”, right, and I know how much that affects them [Costa Rican students], when they have this experience.*

Karen, a study abroad administrator, at the same institution felt otherwise, and suggested that Costa Rican students love to hang out with US students, but they find it difficult to approach them, and likewise US students do not go out of their way to befriend Costa Rican students. She suggested that: *“they [US students] are only with each other, they don’t like to talk with Tico students, probably because of their Spanish or something, but most of the students here speak in English, so I don’t know”.*

Olga, a study abroad administrator at a different institution discussed at length the robust programming that they have in place to try and help form connections between local students and visiting students. She explained that every international student who comes to her institution is assigned a Costa Rican buddy, and together they go on outings as well as practice their Spanish and English together. These buddies help to organize welcome activities such as tours, and trips to the beach – and Olga said that the fact that they are then in classes together helps quite a bit. However, she lamented that after those welcome activities, *“you cannot control what’s happening, you always see the internationals together, like hanging around... it’s always a trend”*.

However, both Olga and Gabriel, study abroad administrators who studied in the US, said that this is a natural human tendency – Olga shared based on her experience that, *“when you are international you always look for similar things, even though you are from a different country, you are new to this country, that is what you have in common”*. Likewise, Gabriel explained that when he did his undergrad in the US, he immediately gravitated towards other Spanish speakers. He shared that upon arriving at university in the US: *“when I first got there it was me and the 15 other internationals, because we felt safe... there was a Peruvian guy, a guy from Ecuador, so it was usually us, together, because we spoke Spanish, you just feel more comfortable that way”*.

The discomfort that these study abroad administrators perceive is also perceived by host mothers, all of whom made reference to the language barrier between them and some students that they host as being a source of distance. Jessica, a host mother of 20 years, explained that students who do not speak any Spanish tend to come home from class and just stay in their rooms and skype home or watch Netflix on their computer. She had hoped when she started hosting students that she would be able to make closer connections to them and learn about where they come from, but she said that there have only been a few students who were confident enough with their Spanish to interact with her, and those have been the students with whom she has made lasting connections.

She has been disappointed that some students do not even try to speak in Spanish: *“they do not need to know a lot of Spanish to show an effort, to show interest in our lives”*, she suggested. Students’ lack of willingness to make themselves vulnerable and be deferential to the hosts language is seen as disrespectful and disappointing.

Other host mothers perceive the physical distance between them and some of the students that they host in a different way. Ana and Jane both talked at length about how they think that US students are simply not used to living as part of a family. Ana thought that because before coming to Costa Rica students are living in dorms by themselves, they become very independent and lose the desire to be surrounded by family. Whereas Jane shared that she thinks that because families in the US are so small, students never really learn how to be part of a big family and interact in that way. She said: *“being with us is like education for life, because they are coming from a big country, and here we are a small country where people are more connected to each other”*.

Host mothers and study abroad administrators both shared more dramatic instances of dissonance, defined as conflict or disconnection, many of which involved US students getting drunk. A study abroad administrator shared a story of a host mother who had to deal with a student coming home and urinating in different rooms of the house. Jane told a story about a female student who came home drunk one night and climbed up on the roof – she said that her husband went outside and threatened to get out his pistol if she did not come down. One of the most dramatic stories of an instance of dissonance due to drunkenness was shared by Mama Tica, Vanessa:

*A boy from Alaska came home drunk, in a taxi, we live close to the university, so he got off at the university, didn't pay the cab and ran home, and got in the house, but the thing is a lot of taxi drivers here are like a mafia kind of a thing, so the taxi guy called other taxis in the area, and they parked in front my house and started shooting at the door and they brought the door down and it was like in the middle of the night, and we were all asleep. We were really scared but nothing happened. But I always try to solve problems at home before we have to escalate it to the university, but of course this we had to tell the university because we exposed our life, so the university told me, we can kick the guy out, or are you comfortable still having the guy here. We*

*talked to him and he really regretted what happened and he ended up paying for the door and everything, and that last month, he really changed, so we gave him a second chance.*

These examples suggest that while the host family environment lends itself well to the creation of personal connections, that closeness also comes with the potential for serious instances of dissonance or disconnection. The trope of the “ugly American”, or of US students behaving badly abroad is nothing new, but what is well highlighted by these examples is the extent to which a language barrier, or a lack of effort to communicate in the host language on the part of US students hinders the opportunity for personal connection with both Costa Rican peers and host families. The stories shared by Jane and Vanessa bring to light some of the challenges of hosting US students but also how the familial environment that they seek to create fosters positive connections, as illustrated in the section above, comes into play during times of dissonance as well.

#### e) Making Sense of Self

Both instances of harmony and dissonance between Costa Rican hosts and US students create an opportunity for hosts to make sense not only of US students, as outlined in the next section, but of themselves as well. Karla, a local professor of Spanish, put it in this way:

*To me it's very interesting to see my own culture, my own country, through their [US students'] eyes, the average Costa Rican is “pura vida”, everything is “pura vida”, and here in class, they tell me their experiences, good and bad, so it opens my eyes to a different perspective of my own reality.*

One of the most interesting processes that came to light through this research was the ways in which engaging with US students can prompt hosts to see their own culture in new or different ways.

Participants identified their collectivist nature and orientation towards family, indirect style of verbal communication, impunctuality, risk aversion, and lack of patriotism or national pride, as elements of Costa Rican culture that they have come to reflect more deeply on as an effect of engaging with US students, many of whom hosts perceive to exhibit opposite cultural characteristics. The section to

follow includes examples of participants reflecting on their own culture by contrasting it to US culture. It is important to state here that while not included in the quotations below, many participants qualified their statements by acknowledging the diversity of US and Costa Rican culture, and their general discomfort with generalizing, but none the less shared these important insights.

Over and over, all host types emphasized that Costa Ricans generally hold the preservation of strong connections to their family in very high regard. When I asked Natalie about why she chooses to stay in San Jose, despite some of the negative views she shared with me about noise, traffic, and crowding in the city, she responded, *“Well my family lives here... I studied in San Jose, my university is in San Jose, my family is in San Jose, work has always been in San Jose, and um, I don’t know, I’ve never felt like I needed to leave.”* She then juxtaposed this to what she perceives to be a different orientation towards living with or near family, held by the US students with whom she engages:

*We are a bit more family oriented... I think Americans are family oriented, but in a different way. We are more of staying near family, and if you’re not married, generally, you live with your parents, Americans maybe they need to go to study somewhere else, and maybe they rather live alone, we have that here too of course, but that is one of the major differences I see, through the American students I work with.*

Likewise, David, a professor of intercultural communication, questioned what happens when the collectivist nature and family orientation of Costa Ricans collides with the cultural orientation of US students:

*People normally don’t leave their homes until they get married, in Costa Rica its normal that you have siblings your age when you come to study abroad because they haven’t left home, so all these [Costa Rican] young adults, all of a sudden have [US] young adults their own age with different perspectives living with them, how does that change their [Costa Rican] perspective of going abroad, the possibility of going somewhere to study or so many other things?*

Several participants noted the general differences in communication style between Costa Ricans and US students. Christina, who teaches Spanish to US students, explained that: *“we are not a direct people, there are certain ways to say things in Costa Rica – you either say nothing, or say it using lots of nice words, a lot of*

*explanations. People in the US are used to efficiency and that's something that we're not.*" University staff member, Lorena, gave another example that supports Christina's claim, she said:

*In Costa Rica, people rather not be straight forward, but give a really nice speech, with nice words, and we don't want to give you a bad impression, so we say, try this instead of that, you'll have these possibilities, but with US students you have to be direct, I am more of a direct person, so it's easier for me to communicate with them.*

Karen, a study abroad administrator, and Lorena, a university staff member at two different institutions described how working with US students makes them think differently about Costa Rican perceptions of time. Karen shared that US students like to be punctual, and that in Costa Rica

*"we have this problem, we call it Tico Time, I'm really embarrassed by it because some professors are not here at 8am when their class starts, and they [the US students] are already here at 7:30, and so I'm so embarrassed about that."* Similarly, Lorena said: *"I am Costa Rican and I know my culture, so most of the time people will be doing things late – US students will be doing things in advance so they want everything to be secure...so of course the customer service that I have to deliver is a really high level".*

Another cultural difference that study abroad administrators and professors noted was the US student expectation of punctuality and their perception of Costa Ricans as tardy. Francesca, a professor of intercultural communication, shared how frustrated she is by *"how everyone expects everyone to be 30 minutes late even in work environments"*. She went on to say how she sees this orientation towards time as an issue in government especially – that when people demand things of their government they are not surprised when results take a long time. For her, it comes down to respect. When someone is late, it is like saying *"my time is more valuable than yours"*. Again, she gave an example from government, saying: *"we see it in our law makers, sometimes they just don't arrive to the session, this is an important job, it should be a priority – it shows that people don't appreciate the seriousness of the situation and respect for others"*.

It seems as if the direction of these hosts' reflections on their own culture are impacted by their engagement with the different cultural orientations and preferences of the US students with

whom they engage. Another orientation which one host mother identified as “typically Costa Rican” is general aversion to risk. Mama Tica, Jane, shared that when students who stay with her engage in what she perceives to be risky behavior, she worries about their safety, *“if something was to ever happen to them, like a robbery or something, I feel like they are a part of me, I would hurt because they are hurt”*, she shared. Likewise, when asked if she sees any disadvantages to hosting US students, host mother Ana said that the biggest disadvantage in her opinion is that she worries about the safety of the students that she hosts. She always tells them:

*Be careful, to not walk alone at night, so they don't lose their stuff, because it has happened. I want them to be as safe as possible. I give them some tips on how to be safe, it's also important that they have a good experience here and they go back without any issues because it reflects on our country.*

Costa Rican hosts' perceptions both of their orientation towards time and risk may come about as an effect of their engagement with *a particular type* of US student. Generally, there are minimum eligibility requirements for US students to study abroad, which includes things like submitting an application on time and maintaining a certain GPA. So, the students that hosts are encountering may be more punctual than average. Likewise, Costa Rica is known amongst US study abroad students as a place for adventures like ziplining and scuba diving, in addition to the more general interest in travel and partying while abroad, and so it is also possible that the students that hosts are encountering are more interested in ‘risky’ behavior than average. This could be giving them a false sense of cultural difference as they make sense of themselves. Likewise, the theme is risk aversion, and fear for student’s safety could be gendered, as it was discussed almost exclusively by host mothers.

The last aspect of self-reflection that presented as a theme in participant interviews was Costa Rican lack of US-style patriotism or national pride. Christina, a professor of Spanish, noticed that *“US students are so proud of their culture, their flag, their military”*. Likewise, Rosario, a study abroad



administrator, recounted a frustrating conversation that she once had with a US student regarding the US military:

*I think they are really proud of the Army, they have the Marines and the Airforce, lots of divisions and I don't see why they should be proud of that, because we don't have an army. I remember talking to a student from the US about going to war, and the American guy was like we need to go and fight for freedom for ourselves and others, and I was like no, you are just killing people. That is something that is really different from here – I don't like it but it's their country and their thing. That's something that represents the culture.*

She went on to say that US students' "obsession" with freedom made her think about how or if the US is actually "more free" than Costa Rica. Philosophy professor, Herman, shared that teaching US students, especially during the run-up to the US Presidential election in 2016 made him realize how "inward facing" the US currently is and how that draws attention to how "outward facing" Costa Rica is. He commented that "*Costa Rican culture is exocentric by nature, we are always looking towards the outside, I actually think that a bit of patriotism wouldn't hurt us*". Similarly, study abroad administrator, Caterina suggested that "*it's like people think that if there's something from the outside its better than what we have here, it's a Latin American thing.*"

Spanish professor, Christina offered a historical explanation for this xenocentric orientation:

*Historically Costa Rica never had its own culture, we've always belonged to other countries, and now we're independent but there is so much immigration, we never had to fight for land, and therefore there really is no such thing as Costa Rican identity, everything about our culture is imported – even Pura Vida comes from a movie from the 1950's, we've given it meaning but it's not really ours. If you ask for food – most of 'our' food comes from Nicaragua, Honduras or Panama. Even our traditional music, the marimba is Guatemalan, the masquerades comes from Spain.*

These examples are not intended to suggest a causal relationship between reflecting on one's own culture and being an intentional host of US students. This research design does not lend itself, nor is it interested in, determining if those who engage with US or international students reflect on their own culture more often, or in different ways than those who do not engage regularly with US students. These examples simply suggest that intentional hosts do internalize the juxtaposition of

their culture and US culture, perhaps in part due to the extended exposure they have to US students. Certainly, it is possible that the exposure of hosts to US culture more generally, through products, business, media, and tourism would allow for a similar process of cultural self-reflection.

#### f) Making Sense of US Students

The study abroad literature tends to concentrate on how *US students'* experiences abroad impact the way they think about their own culture, and what they learn or how they make sense of the people and places that they visit. The section above explored the ways in which *host participants* reflect on their own culture in the context of encountering US students at home. This section elaborates on the ways in which host participants make sense of US student visitors - their culture, orientations, and behaviors while in Costa Rica. Participants offered a number of different things that they learned about US history, geography, food, and culture from the US students that they host. However, presented below are six themes around which there were either competing or troubling perspectives, or varying ways of making sense of US students, among host participants.

##### *i. Preparation of US Students for Study Abroad*

Because of their proximity to US students, host participants have the opportunity to get to know the young adults that they host, as students. During the part of the interview where hosts were asked to talk about their impressions of US students, as students, both professors and study abroad administrators pointed to what they perceive to be a lack of preparation on the part of US students for study abroad. David, a professor who also presents to students during the on-site orientation at one of the host institutions, said that students do not come to Costa Rica with an understanding of how to take advantage of all of the learning opportunities afforded to them. He said that both in orientation and as the semester goes on, he has students whom express disappointment that their reality and their expectations for the experience are not the same. When

students share this, he thinks: *“you’re actually missing out, and you should have been told back home, before you came here that part of learning is that flexibility.”*

David shared that he thinks there needs to be better oversight of US student preparation before they leave the US. He suggested:

*Sometimes in the States, you apply to study abroad they send you to this webpage and they expect students to be responsible to read everything and no one really checks if they did. And then it’s like, oh well, you were supposed to read that and you didn’t and it’s like, maybe it’s an individualistic culture, as a way of solving things other than making them responsible for not getting what they were supposed to get, it influences the fact that sometimes when they arrive here they have no idea what the experience was supposed to be.*

Likewise, study abroad administrator, Natalie, shared that she thinks that in the US study abroad in Costa Rica is romanticized in such a way that it acts as a strong motivator for students to study abroad in Costa Rica and then they are disappointed when they arrive and realize that Costa Rica, like any other place, has its problems. They also are not prepared for the different situations that they may encounter, and Natalie attributes some of this to study abroad messaging in the US. She said: *“I don’t know how the communication is in the States when it comes to study abroad, always happy? Always fun? Always great opportunities? And maybe not talking about the academics, the work, the potential for issues to arise? The need to be flexible?”*

Olga, a study abroad administrator at a different institution, lamented that she thinks this is an issue both for international students coming to study in Costa Rica and for the Costa Rican students that she helps to prepare to study abroad. A big difference however is that Costa Rican students are fluent in English before they study abroad in an English-speaking country, whereas, the US students that she hosts are not required to have had any Spanish language preparation. She asks, *“if you know you want to study abroad in Brazil, for example, why would you not start taking Portuguese, six months or a year before?”* Olga said that preparing yourself by getting to know a language is not only about helping yourself be more comfortable in the county, but rather *“it shows respect for the other*

*culture, that you made that effort”.*

She suggested that host universities, such as the one where she works, become more involved in what universities in the US are doing to prepare students – saying, “*that is something that US students need to do more of, a pre-study abroad course, they need to work more on the culture and language and making previous connections. Let’s have a video conference with someone who is there right now, you can ask questions, get to know the people better*”. Mentioning that this is something that they already do with some partner institutions, she suggested that although the office is already stretched very thin, helping to better prepare US students before arrival is something that they would be interested in contributing to.

ii. “*Girls & Boys*”

While host mothers did not comment extensively on students’ pre-departure preparation for study abroad, a common theme amongst them was trying to make sense of the attitudes and behaviors of US women students. Given that almost 70% of US students who study abroad are women, this may account for some of the attention host participants paid towards women students specifically. However, often when describing a US student characteristic or behavior, host mothers would qualify it by specifying that they were talking about women students. Roxanna, a host mother who hosts only women students in her home, explained that many young Costa Rican men seek out the bars where US women students hang out. When asked why, she replied “*because the girls are very beautiful, and they have a reputation of being easy*” or that they are sexually promiscuous.

While Roxanna positioned Costa Rican men as the ones who go looking for US women, Natalie, a study abroad administrator, sees it in a different way. She explained that because of her proximity to students through the programming that she organizes, they share stories with her that lead her to believe that some US women come to Costa Rica specifically looking to have sexual encounters with Costa Rican men. She explained:

*You hear that the girl has slept with 20 guys, um, all they do, some of them, all they do when they come is look for someone to sleep with, because they want to sleep with a local because it's exotic and its things like that I'm like WHAT? REALLY? Because that would never cross my mind, but then some people have this way of living.*

Karen, a study abroad administrator, identified the behavior of US women students as one of the negative impacts of study abroad on the city of San Jose. She said that for her *“the negative part is with the girls, we have tried our best to tell the girls to be careful, but the girls are here to find a Tico guy, and have just fun with them or something”*. In explaining further what she meant by this, Karen explained that US women students put themselves in risky situations, and when “something bad” happens it reflects poorly on the city, and that is bad for San Jose. She always said how sad it is when US women students go through a trying ordeal. However, she said that she thinks that this happens in part because of the way that US women dress. She explained that in San Jose, *“we use jeans and the [US] girls use shorts, and for all the Tico guys, they are like WOW, and there's a lot of sexual harassment in central San Jose, and the [US] girls are not used to this.”*

Similar to discourse in the US around women, dress, and sexual harassment and assault Karen and Natalie's attitudes towards this dynamic oscillated between seeing women as victims of sexual harassment and as irresponsible or promiscuous. Both women seemed genuinely concerned about the welfare of US women students but confused by students' dress and behaviors. In asking Natalie why she thought US women students abroad acted in the way she described, she said that she thinks that they take risks while studying abroad that they would not at home, *“it's their chance to be whoever they want to be, to be free”*. By this she implied that she thinks that US students do not feel free to be whatever they want to be and act freely at home in the US.

### *iii. US Students & Wealth*

Another element of the US student reputation in San Jose, as reported by the host participants, is that they are wealthy and have a lot of money to spend. However, various hosts reported that those preconceptions have been challenged over the years by hosting many different

students. They said that while some students do have a lot of money, and travel around the country every weekend, they are seeing an increasing number of students who do not have the money to travel. This is changing the way that they think make sense of US study abroad students and money.

For example, in speaking about her perceptions of US students has changed, Maria, a staff member in the cafeteria at one of the host institutions shared that at first, she thought that US students had a lot of money but after interacting with many US students she thinks that may not necessarily be the case. She reported noticing students being careful with how much money they spend in the cafeteria – putting things back if the total amount of money owed is too great. Likewise, in describing the local perception of US students, study abroad administrator, Olga, suggested, *“in the past they could have perceived US students as being rich, they know now that they are not, that their families are making great efforts to send them abroad.”* This may be due to the increase in access to study abroad that has taken place in the US in recent years, whereby study abroad scholarships have made it easier for low and middle-income students to study abroad.

Professors, David and Karla, both noted that they have perceived a change in the “typical” US study abroad student over the years. David affirmed that there is a perception of the “wealthy American” and some students are in fact wealthy, especially by Costa Rican standards. However, he said that increasingly students who come to Costa Rica are not wealthy and they tell him that their families have made great sacrifices to afford to send them there. Similarly, Karla shared that:

*I have definitely seen the changes. I could see that these students are more, concerned about the future, and then I could actually see that it's that they have to work a lot to come to Costa Rica. I can actually see that they are working in a bar or a restaurant or whatever they were doing to get the money to come here, because like 10 years ago, you could see that very well-off students were coming here and money was not a problem.*

#### *iv. US Students & Partying*

The section on ‘Instances of Dissonance’ described specific instances of US student drinking and how it created dissonance with their hosts. Below are examples of how host participants made

sense of those instances, or what conclusions they drew about US students or US culture as a result. One particularly interesting interpretation of why US students drink and party so heavily in Costa Rica, was offered by Pablo, a university staff member. He said, *“their [US student] drinking makes me sad, there must be something wrong, something so terrible happening in their life, that they are self-medicating with alcohol. I think it is connected to the lack of family support, of people who are around you to care, they must feel very alone”*.

Gabriel, a study abroad admin, who did his undergraduate degree in the States, also attributed US student drinking in part to students’ disconnection from their parents. He explained that when he was in the US, he and his international friends would go to the bar, have a drink and converse, but that a US friend of his had a different approach:

*We would usually go out to drink and like have fun, but usually sit down and talk and you just don’t go as crazy I guess, but then a friend of mine, he’s American, the first thing he would order is a whiskey shot, and I’m like what? That doesn’t make any sense, and he’s like yea, I just want to throw up tonight, and I’m like that doesn’t makes sense either, why would you do that?*

He then explained that perhaps this is because in Costa Rica young people often live with their parents while they are attending college. Whereas, in the US *“you get to leave your parents’ house at 18, with no one supervising you, so no wonder everyone goes nuts.”* Others, like Professor David, think that the US student problem with drinking is a bit overstated. He suggested that:

*“people should relax, I mean they’re teenagers, well they’re not teenagers, well sometimes they act like they are and its fine, I mean there are teenagers in every culture and sometimes they get a bit crazy, and especially when you are not in your home, you do crazier things, because you think that’s when you can.”*

So, we see that interpretations of US student drinking are mixed but that there is a general trend towards connecting US student behavior to the freedom that they experience being separated from their families and perhaps the lack of responsibility they feel given weaker family connection, both at home and in Costa Rica. Likewise, Pablo, describes drinking as “self-medicating” for deeper issues that students are experiencing – an explanation that is probably quite different from how

students themselves might characterize their behavior. Nonetheless, this is a prime example of how hosts are not only noticing student behaviors but making meaning of them as well.

#### g) Cultural Change

Costa Rican host participants were asked what (if any) cultural changes they have experienced as an effect of their interactions with US students. In most instances, this led to a discussion of the impossibility of separating the impact of engaging with US students as hosts and being inundated with US culture in everyday life. Many hosts said that they have a difficult time distinguishing between what is uniquely Costa Rican and what is brought in from the US. Indeed, in the section above on 'Making Sense of Self' several hosts identified the precarious nature of defining a Costa Rican identity, given its openness to outside people and ideas. Nonetheless, some participant hosts did offer reflections on how they think Costa Rican culture is evolving as an effect of the increase in US presence and whether they see this as positive, negative, or somewhere in between.

##### *i. Essential Cultural Changes*

The ubiquity of US company call centers in Costa Rica was a constant theme in conversations with hosts from professors, to study administrators, and host families. According to Bill Anderson's 2012 article in the Costa Rica Star, "call centers in Costa Rica employ 16,000" and are largely responsible for developing a middle class in the country. Anderson explains that "Costa Rica is the home of a number of corporate call centers, including Bank of America, HP, IBM, Proctor & Gamble, and Western Union" and that average monthly earnings for a junior bilingual agent (in 2011) was \$1281 USD. Several host participants attributed the centrality of call centers to the Costa Rican economy as being responsible for a major shift in "the culture of working". Professor and administrator, Francesca, explained how economic engagement with the US, both



through things like call centers, but also through international education has changed the way Costa Ricans do business. She perceives this as a disadvantage of engaging with the US in these ways:

*I think that the only disadvantage is the way that we perceive work, and the life/work balance. In the US, the culture is more competitive and more individualistic, while Costa Ricans we're more easy going, more community thinkers, and that has changed a lot in the last few years and I think it has a lot to do with the perception of work, the priority that we give to work, and I think that has come from the US. There are a lot of US companies here and their schedules, their demands, impact the culture here, the life/work balance.*

On a more personal level, two host mothers discussed how engaging with US students in their home has shifted what they see as typical Costa Rican cultural qualities – indirect communication and risk aversion. Vanessa explained that “*typically Costa Ricans, we usually say yes to everything, or we might say something but in the end, we don't really mean it*” but the US students that she has hosted are much more direct about their preferences and needs. She sees the benefits of this style of communication, so she said that it is something that she is trying to implement in her own life, even when not interacting with US students.

Similarly, host mother Cata admitted that hosting US students has made her think differently about places that she used to think of as dangerous or risky. She explained that there are some places that she probably would not go to, like a specific beach or park, but when students go there and they have a good time and nothing happens, she thinks to herself “*okay probably this place that I was afraid of going or thought that wasn't that safe is actually fine, there is no issue at all*”. When students take, what Cata perceives as, risks to go to different places and then come home and report that everything was fine, she feels more at ease and questions why she was concerned in the first place.

While these last two examples describe how host mothers perceive these changes to be positive other host participants lamented that the increase in US students, and US presence more generally is resulting in a loss of Costa Rican culture. Again, making a connection to call centers, Pablo explained that “*call centers are a very important place of work, especially for young people, these places they*

*have to speak only in English*". So, he went on to say that even when young people leave call centers, they are going to Starbucks and ordering their coffee in English. He thinks that "*this is a risk for our [Costa Rican] culture*".

Natalie, a study abroad administrator at a different university than Pablo, also mentioned Starbucks as an example of cultural loss. She said, "*now Starbucks is here and people are like why? Why is there Starbucks when we have such great coffee? And such great cafeterias, and coffee shops that are incredible and beautiful and now we're giving our money to Starbucks!?*" However, she said that some others, especially younger people, embrace these changes because "*it's glamorous, that inside our small country, inside our dirty city, we have these kind of things, ya know. It kind of takes you away for a moment, from that perception that you're just a people in their world.*" In saying this, Natalie points to a belief amongst young people that the world 'belongs' to young people from the United States and by embracing cultural practices like drinking Starbucks coffee they are becoming part of a global cultural elite.

Likewise, study abroad administrator Olga, explained more pointedly how she perceives interactions between US and local students as changing the cultural practices or orientations of local students. Firstly, she thinks that although they still participate in moderation, that Costa Rican students may be drinking alcohol more often due to the influence of US students. Further, she suggests that:

*Because of the bombarding of other habits, students might be less participative in activities or events that are culturally oriented because that's not fashionable or popular in the States right now. They see all of these new trends so they forget what our culture is, where they come from.*

She went on to say that Costa Ricans may begin to practice different traditions and forget traditional customs. For example, she offered the embracing of Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Black Friday as illustrations of this change. Perhaps most importantly, she described how and why she attributes some of these changes to the presence of US students specifically. She said:

*I think students have an impact on that because they stay longer, so families and local students, have the opportunity to see those practices from a direct source. But, something like*

*Halloween, it's not part of our culture, it's not part of what we believe in...it's great to understand other traditions, but you should not substitute those for your ones, or give more importance to the foreign ones than to your own ones.*

Further, other host participants felt that direct exposure to US students increases dissatisfaction with Costa Rica or Costa Rican culture. Christina, a professor, suggested that US students make “great efforts” in terms of their academic and professional pursuits and that “*locals feel ashamed of their outcomes by comparison, so there is an impulse to improve*”. She suggested that some US students look down on Latin America and act superior, “*they underappreciate the culture, people, and institutions*” which can cause locals to do the same. Likewise, Rosario, a study abroad administrator who has studied abroad in Korea, suggested that “*being around US students makes you think about how things could be different in Costa Rica compared to the States. It's such a big and important country and Costa Rica is small and not many people know about it*”. Here Rosario seems to express feelings of inferiority that she experienced when comparing Costa Rica and the United States that was exacerbated by some people not knowing where Costa Rica is.

Perhaps most telling was the insight shared by Rafaela. She was currently a student at one of the host institutions, but her family hosted US students for years while she was growing up. She explained how she enjoyed growing up with a constant rotation of US women students in her home. However, she also shared that:

*It kind of made me feel unsatisfied with my own culture because like, I used to, for example, I talked to the American girls about how great life was there and how everything was so organized and how the streets were clean and little things like not having to wear a uniform to school, or driving a car when you're 16, it's all so different, and I was like, I really like these things, but I can't have them in Costa Rica, so that kind of sucks, so I feel like it did make me like, I used to compare it a lot, my culture to their culture.*

She went on to say that the more she has traveled, the better she has begun to feel about her home country, stating “*some things are better someplace else and there are things that are better here, and that's fine, it's ok, just different, some things I'd love to change but I can't and that's okay*”. Rafaela went on to say that she has come to really appreciate Costa Rica for its natural beauty and pace of life but wants to

experience what life is like in different places. Travel has made her curious about how things work in different parts of the world.

Finally, two hosts, a university staff member and a professor stated that they think that cultures must adapt and evolve to stay relevant in the world. Pablo shared a specific example of his university adopting a mascot. He said that having a mascot is not something that is typically a part of educational culture in Costa Rica, but his university hired a group of US consultants to advise them on how to build community on campus and they suggested instituting a mascot. So, he explained, the university now has a mascot, which is an animal not native to Costa Rica, which he indicated can be confusing. However, he thinks that the university administration thinks that they need to evolve in this way to be successful – this seems like a symptom of the corporate university and the neoliberalization of higher education.

More generally, professor Francesca, shared that she thinks that *“culture is something that is always evolving and should adapt to exist”*. She cited a number of traditional cultures that she said have *“just disappeared, because nobody cared about them”* indicating at least her personal opinion, if not a broader view, of the status of Indigenous people in Costa Rica. She felt strongly that internationalization and the inclusion of US students into Costa Rican universities is not a threat, only an opportunity for local people and local culture. She suggested that *“the utopian idea is to bring the best, and to enhance your culture, your society, and your context, with the best from other countries, while keeping the best of your country and your culture.”* Going on to say that the challenge then becomes distinguishing what is ‘the best’, she ended by saying that *“there is no conflict, you just keep adding to your base knowledge”*.

#### *ii. Economic Changes*

Many host participants cited the positive impact that they perceive US students to have on the local community. I frequented a number of local businesses during my time in San Jose and had conversations with business owners who echo these sentiments. In particular, local cafeterias,

coffee shops, restaurants, bars and taxi services have experienced an increase in business as a result of US student presence in parts of the city. While this is positive for business owners and employees, study abroad administrator Karen, and professor David, both explained how this decreases local access to goods and services.

David suggested that because of the persistent stereotype of the “wealthy American” local business artificially inflate their prices because they can get more from US visitors, like tourists and students. Especially around the university, David said: *“they can think they can charge more, now that they have a different market niche or orientation, for their ice coffee or whatever and that could be a negative element for the rest of the community”*. Likewise, Karen was surprised on a recent trip to the beach that a restaurant that she typically frequents now charges double what they used to charge for her favorite dish. She attributed that to the increase in US students and tourists who visit that place on the weekends.

Yet, study abroad administrator, Gabriel, thinks that many businesses still maintain “tico prices” and “gringo prices”. He said that while gringo prices are typically reserved for tourists, many people cannot tell the difference between US tourists and US students and so *“they might want to take advantage of them in the sense of charging them a little bit more in a taxi or something like that, they might see it as a business opportunity, it’s a way to make money I guess.”* And while study abroad admin Karen denied that she thinks this type of thing happens in San Jose, she contends that students share with her their frustration of having *“one price for nationals and another price for internationals”* at places like the beach. She said that local businesses and organizations say, *“ah you’re a gringo, and then the prices are really different”*.

### *iii. Home Life Changes (Host Families)*

Each host mother participant was asked to identify ways that their daily life, or routine, has changed as a result of hosting US students. Two responded that their routine had not changed at all, that it is just like having another child – so there is a bit more laundry to do, or more food to cook.

Only one host mother openly identified a change that she perceived to be negative, and that was the loss of privacy when hosting students. However, she quickly added that this is easily manageable when you are open and up front with students about your expectations and family rules.

A professor, Karla, who said that she has been working with host families for over 20 years said that she has noticed changes in families' diet and washing habits. She elaborated that the typical Costa Rican diet includes a lot of carbohydrates, but US students are used to having just one carbohydrate or starch per meal. So, she said that she had noticed that friends who host US students are now eating fewer carbs themselves. She also indicated that friends who host US students have bought dryers in the last few years because the increase in laundry created by hosting students makes it more of a challenge to hang clothes out to dry.

One of the more obvious changes that many host mothers identified was the language used in their home. As described in the section on hosts' motivations, many host mothers are hoping that having US students in their home will help expose their children to the English language, and in turn, they then identified this as a change to their daily routine. One host mother described how the family spends more time around the dinner table than they might typically because of the time they are taking to help US students learn new words in Spanish. Also, the same host mother described how in some instances the family has changed their diet to accommodate a vegetarian, vegan, or gluten intolerant student.

Lastly, three host mothers explained that while not part of their daily routine, they have traveled abroad more than they think they would have had they not hosted US students. All three of these host mothers have gone to visit US students who lived with them while they are studying abroad, one plans to return to the US this year to attend the wedding of a former student. Similarly, two of these host mothers and two other host mothers reported that they have former students visiting their homes regularly. Host mother, Vanessa, reported that one student has returned to visit

her 7 times since she originally stayed with her and the week that I was interviewing her, she had a former student stop by with her husband and baby. She said that these encounters would not be a regular occurrence if she did not host US students.

#### h) Host Perceived Impacts

While the section above describes host perceived changes to life in Costa Rica as an effect of US student (and in some cases tourist) presence, this section refers specifically to what hosts perceive as the benefits of hosting US students, for themselves and their families or for their city. Not surprisingly given the limitations of this study and my positionality hosts were often not explicit about what they perceive to be disadvantages of hosting US students. The disadvantages of working with US students are detailed in the ‘Instances of Dissonance’ and in some cases ‘Perceptions of the Evolution of Costa Rican Culture’ sections above. The section to follow highlights aspects of the encounter which host participants identify as positive or *beneficial*.

##### *i. Opening the Minds of Locals*

While the question was open ended, most host participants started by identifying how US students positively impact the economy of the country and of the city. They cited the number of sectors and industries that are directly tied to hosting US students including, the education sector, tourist companies, hotels, restaurants, bars, gyms, taxi services and other services that students need while they are in Costa Rica. Rather quickly though host participants turned to how having US students in their city contributed to “opening the minds” of local people.

Some host participants, such as study abroad admin, Olga, cited what they see as benefits specifically to those who host students. Olga made the following observation of families who host US students:

*Families know more now, they talk about things that I don't even know about, they'll say, did you know that in such a culture they do this and this. Or, for example, one family was hosting a student who was Muslim, and he always prayed at 3pm, and he had very specific habits, he needed a very specific room, and a rug for the floor, and I didn't know any of this but I learned from the family, so they are acquiring more and more knowledge on the different cultures.*

Likewise, Pablo, who works as a staff member for one of the host universities, explained that he thinks that US and international students are changing the culture of the university in a beneficial way. He suggested that “*it enriches tolerance, awareness, how things are in other countries*”. Similarly, Gabriel, who works at a different institution than Pablo, pointed out that: “*as the world continues to globalize, I think it's important to have that exposure to other nationalities... it's easy to live in this Costa Rican bubble, having US students here gives students another network*”.

More specifically, professor David, shared how he thinks that exposure to US students has helped him come to appreciate the diversity of the US and is helping to breakdown media generated stereotypes of what it means to be from the US. He said:

*Understanding how diverse America is, we tend to say in Intercultural Communication that America is individualistic but um you're talking to someone from Nebraska, and maybe they're not so individualistic, or maybe you're talking to someone from Mississippi and they're collective maybe then you are like okay interesting, it depends on a lot of variables.*

## *ii. Costa Rican Student Desire to Study Abroad*

Many study abroad administrators, all of whom engage at least in small part with local students as an effect of working at a university that hosts both local and international students, noted that US student presence increases the desire among local students to study abroad. Natalie explained that many local students want to meet international students, “*they really enjoy it and then eventually they're like, I want to go, I want to go abroad and study*”. Lorena, who works at a different host institution, agreed. She works more closely with local students than she does international students and has noticed that the exchange that they have on campus “*lets them [local students] know how*



*experiences are outside Costa Rica, so somehow this is also a key in the future for them if they want to travel or study somewhere else”*

A marketing professor reflected on how a desire to study abroad has grown amongst local students over time:

*The local students get the bug and they want to have the same experience they see them [US students] having here, they want to go abroad and be exposed to different realities. Many years ago, it was much less common for students to think about going abroad, now I'd say 80% are interested in going abroad, that doesn't mean that they do, but many have that interest in getting a Masters, or PhD or do research abroad.*

Rafaela, who grew up with US students in her home, affirmed that her exposure to US students studying abroad catalyzed a curiosity in her and a desire to study abroad herself. She shared that, *“when I got older and got to be more curious about what study abroad was, and when I went to work abroad, I did realize, oh, the people you live with have an impact on what your experience is like.”* More generally, however, study abroad admin Rosario, thinks that the presence of US students on campus and in the city promotes *“tolerance, or adaptation or accepting other cultures, open mind and maybe higher goals, like learning the language, or, studying more which can lead to studying or working abroad”*.

### *iii. Increased Security in Neighborhood*

A surprising host perceived benefit, that was mentioned by almost one third of host participants, the majority of which were host mothers or study abroad administrators, was the increase in security in their neighborhood as a result of hosting US students. Olga, framed this as a no-brainer, saying: *“having more students in the city means that we automatically have to improve our safety and security system”*. She further explained that in order to keep US and international students coming to Costa Rica, that they need to ensure that they are safe, and that there are minimal issues that would cause students to think twice about studying in Costa Rica.

Andrea, a local business owner, identified the increase in security as the primary benefit of US students' presence in the neighborhood. She expressed that:

*It keeps the university on their toes as well, because they have security guards going around, and they are paying attention to where their students are, what they are doing. To me, the positive thing is that you get more security, police are around, they know there is an international community, so even though there are more pickpockets around you still get more security.*

She further explained that pickpockets come to know where US students hang out and they know that they often carry money or expensive electronic equipment, like laptops or cameras with them. Knowing then, that the risk is increased, she noticed much larger police presence in her neighborhood as the US student population increases.

Professor, Karla, agreed that added security in the area is a large benefit to local community members. She explained that in recent years they have hired more guards on motorcycles so that when the US girls go running at night, they can have a motorcycle follow them. While the university is doing this for the protection of the US students, she said, the neighbors and local businesses also benefit from the added security. She said that she hopes that it may even increase the value of their property in the future.

*iv. Democratization of Exposure to English Language Learning and “the Global”*

Another unexpected theme to come of our discussion of the benefits of US student presence in San Jose, was the increase in access to English language learning opportunities and exposure to the global community. Study abroad administrator, Olga, explained how:

*In the past people saw speaking English as a privilege of a few, people who have money, or travel, but now with more people here in the capital, people want to manage that second language to learn English so that they can communicate, so it's been helping our society in that sense.*

Likewise, host mother Jane, said that “*not many people here can send their family abroad, but I can be a part of this experience here*”. She feels that hosting US students gives her an opportunity to feel connected to the world outside of San Jose, without having to have the money or flexibility to travel herself. Now, two of Jane’s sons live in the US and “*have made good lives for themselves*” and she attributes that in some

ways to the exposure that they had to English, and to another culture growing up with US students, that she may not have been able to provide for them otherwise.

So, we see that host perceived impacts are varied and straddle both the personal and the systemic. On an individual level the opening of local peoples' minds, or an increased sense of security, or inspiring an interest in travel, or English language learning impact individual people's lives. However, the compounding of these experiences across a number of individuals has the potential to have a larger societal, inter-generational impact. However, the interactions between US students and Costa Rican hosts and their eventual impacts are influenced by a variety of factors, some of which are described and analyzed in the section to follow.

#### i) Overarching Discursive Factors

Some of the most powerful data to come out of this research was the identification of factors that color the entire study abroad encounter, as perceived by host community participants. These themes permeated the social landscape and influenced everything from methods and products of engagement, to how hosts make sense of themselves and the students that they host, to what they see as benefits and disadvantages of the host experience. Below, data is offered to suggest two primary influencing factors of the US study abroad student/host encounter, recognizing that there are many other factors embedded even within this single case study.

##### *i. Politics of Language*

During the very first skype calls with an onsite partner we discussed the politics of the use of the word 'American' in Costa Rica, something that she identified most US students are oblivious to when they first arrive in the country. During an interview with professor Christina, in-country, she described the tension in this way: *"there is an unconscious, psychological effect when you talk about your nationality. You call yourselves Americans, I see it with my US students, a sensation of not feeling comfortable with*

*others considering themselves Americans too.*” She went on to offer the following analogy describing how she believes US students are socialized to think of themselves as superior to Latin Americans:

*If you give the dog the name Butch, it will believe it is tough. If you give it a name that means something diminishing, smaller, people who have that name might have insecurities rather than those who have strong names. It is an empowerment, this psychological connection you have to ‘American’ – you should call yourselves United Statesians. It’s about supremacy, and domination, especially over other Americans, especially with Trump diminishing many Latin Americans – he’s from Honduras or El Salvador, it doesn’t matter... he’s Mexican. And it’s not your fault, these ideas have been present for a long time, this is information that has been taught to you for a long time.*

This perspective is compounded by what many hosts see as a resistance on the part of US students to learn Spanish and their expectation of English as a global language. Further, the combination of these attitudes leads some to see US students as arrogant. Rosario expressed that:

*I think they are a little bit, it might be a stereotype, but sometimes they think they are the only ones in the planet, really arrogant. I know that it’s not everyone, but I know that there are many people who think that English has to be spoken everywhere, that they come to Costa Rica and people need to speak English for them, that we should know this or that about their country, and that we should show them more respect.*

She later told a story about when she was studying abroad in Korea, she and her Latin American friends would speak Spanish to each other and that *“the Americans got really angry because they couldn’t understand the Spanish, and I felt like, sorry, study like me, you can LEARN Spanish, but don’t expect that everyone is going to speak English because it’s the main language of communication”*. Rosario perceives that expectation as an attack on her identity – she said, *“I will only speak in Spanish to native Spanish speakers; it’s about identity and feeling comfortable expressing myself. So, it’s okay to learn English as long as you don’t lose the Spanish”*.

Other hosts expressed similar sentiments regarding the expectation amongst many US students that English is, and should be, a global language, and how that creates a tension among locals about learning or using English. Professor Francesca suggested that:

*The experience of learning other languages opens your world and a lot of times I think English speakers think that they already have those doors open because it’s English, everyone*

*speaks English. And that's the difference, we are always thinking, how could we open more doors to our lives, while English speakers could be thinking English is enough to have everything that I need.*

Francesca's sentiments regarding language learning as opening the world and English-speakers' attitude toward the world already being open to them is particularly salient in terms of the study abroad encounter. US universities often pose study abroad as a way of broadening students' horizons – however more often than not speaking (even some) of the local language is not a requirement for participation. Therefore, US higher education study abroad policy likely contributes to the attitude around the world already being open to English speakers that Francesca describes.

Study abroad administrator, Olga, suggested that there are other implications to the language barrier and students' apparent resistance to learning or using the Spanish language. She said: *“so the locals get to improve English that's great, but the disadvantage is we are not transmitting the importance of Spanish, as a way to show respect for our culture”*. She went on to explain that especially when you are living in a space for a short period of time, and you will not likely become fluent in the language, *“the minimum effort is I'm going to try to speak your language as a sign of respect to you, your country, and your culture.”* Later, she suggested that locals do not encourage US students or other English speakers to try to speak Spanish or embrace Costa Rican culture – for example, *“the person doesn't want to try our food, so I'm going to go to McDonald's with him, instead of encouraging them to adapt”*. She described this as *“local students just give more and more power to US students, they might not think that, they might think well it's just easier this way, but they really are giving them more power”*.

Olga specifically names the giving and taking of *power* as something that is at play in the study abroad encounter, which she described clearly as being connected to language. A tension exists whereby Costa Ricans recognize that learning English ‘opens up the world’, as Francesca suggested but at the same time in learning and using English they are complicit in the unequal relations of power that makes English a global language in the first place. Olga suggests that something as simple

as accompanying a student to McDonald's as opposed to encouraging them to eat somewhere local is 'giving them power' and as a result putting Costa Rican hosts in a position of deference.

*ii. US Economic and Cultural Imperialism*

Despite the language barrier, and the politics of language described above, several hosts described a desire to engage with US students and US culture. Some described this as a necessity for surviving in a US centric, global economy, while others explained that they see US culture as glamorous and desirable. Gabriel explained that:

*Right now a lot of people, a lot of the middle to low class people from Costa Rica are dependent on US companies, maybe not US, but a foreign company, there's a lot of these...what are they called... call centers, there's a lot of call centers...I feel like, people need, or have grown to understand the need of, and the benefits of international companies coming into the country, they give them jobs, and a lot better paying jobs than what they would normally get here.*

Pablo, pointed out that because the language of business is English in the call centers, people who work there speak English more and more. So much so that when they leave work or are out on the weekend, *"it's natural for them to go to Starbucks and order their coffee in English"*. He further explained that he sees this as a threat to Costa Rican culture. Much like Olga, he thinks that it is fine for people to learn English, but not at the expense of using Spanish with other native Spanish speakers.

Pablo, who coordinates interactions between US (and other international students) and the community went on to share how the prominence of US tourists and US culture in Costa Rica impacts some locals' perspectives.

*We have been educated that we have to serve tourists, because our economy relies on it. I think language is a wall to communicate and integrate, but at the same time, it's like that thing, that image that they [people from the US] transmit to local people, that they are different, that they are rich, or they are smart people and everything, it makes for an interesting relationship.*

He later provided an example from what he referred to as a slum neighborhood, where US and Costa Rican students go together to volunteer. He explained that in these areas, *"when a child sees a US student, they are more likely or willing to socialize with them, than a Costa Rican student because...the US is seen as the first power in the world, it has everything"*. He attributed this in large part to US media culture,

saying that whenever you turn on a movie in Costa Rica it is probably set in New York City. So, children are not attracted to individual people, but rather “*the system of the culture*”, which Pablo explained is “*a legacy from generations before us*”.

The interesting relationship to which Pablo refers is, again, one that is based on unequal relations of power. From the outset, he describes having been educated, or socialized, to “serve tourists” because of the country’s economic reliance on tourism. Inherent in the act of ‘serving’ is a mutual understanding that one party requires services and another party provides those services and are in that way unequal. The further example that Pablo provides with the child who would rather interact with a US student than a Costa Rican student may be a manifestation of this ‘service’, especially given the historical and systemic nature of this relationship that Pablo describes.

While some hosts accept this relationship, others, like study abroad administrator Caterina, described how many Costa Ricans are adopting aspects of US culture. This may be an attempt to resist the unequal relations of power described above, by engaging in some of the cultural activities of US Americans, and therefore aligning *with* them as opposed to *servicing* them. She provided several examples, such as; Black Friday sales, Halloween, and snowmen decorations around Christmas time, she said:

*At Walmart they have Black Friday, it’s like that’s the US, and we don’t know why, but it’s becoming a trend here, ... it’s very like, how do you say, soft, the Costa Ricans don’t notice, but then it’s becoming very strong – then the Halloween thing, yes, it’s something that is not Costa Rican culture, or we are not used to celebrating it...and for Christmas its interesting, because our Christmas is in the middle of the summer and we still have the snowman decorations, we have all these US things, and it’s like, strange”*

Local restaurant owner, Mauricio, a tall man in his late 50’s, perhaps had the most pointed explanation of the relationship between the US economy and culture, and Costa Rica. He said:

*The US historically has been the sun to the world. The sun beats affect the whole world, in economics they say, when the US sneezes, the rest of the world gets the flu and that’s because of the great influence, the great influence that historically, the US has had all over the world. We do not have much of an impact to the United States as the US into us, or South America, or*

*the rest of the world.*

Mauricio's analogy points to his socialization, and perhaps the socialization of those in his generation, regarding the relative geopolitical and historical positions of the US and Costa Rica. He signals a sense of inferiority saying that while the US is the 'sun to the world' that Costa Rica does not have much of an impact on the US. This led me to ask him if he sees this dynamic as a threat to Costa Rican culture or way of life to which he responded with a resounding *no*, and argued that "*it's part of us, we're Americans, we live in the same continent, and the big country in this part of the world is the United States*". His response felt like he sees the Americas as a team with the United States being its strongest player and that while Costa Rica may not make as many contributions to the team's success, a US 'win' is also a 'win' for Costa Rica.

### *iii. Getting US Students to Recognize and Question Their Power*

The sections above detail different ways hosts understand how language, and economic and cultural imperialism color their relationship with US students. From those themes it seems that what may be mutually understood between US students and hosts is that many US students have been socialized to feel superior and expect Costa Rican hosts to defer to their language and cultural orientations and that due to the need for economic security, many Costa Rican hosts have been socialized to serve tourists, of which US students are an extension. It is easy to imagine how these unequal relations of power are solidified through the study abroad encounter, however two local hosts provided a counter perspective, arguing that they see study abroad as a way for US students to recognize and question the global power described in the section above. Gabriel, positioned this as a benefit of study abroad for US students saying that "*given everything going on in the States politically, I think it's a good eye-opener for the students to come here and be the minority, whereas like, so when they go back home, nothing might happen, but at least they have a new perspective.*"



Professor David, who works with US students during their orientation expressed how important he feels that it is for them to be “*crossing everything with power*” or understanding their experiences through a lens of global systems of power and their positions within them. He explained:

*Coming from the most powerful country on earth ethnocentrism is really easy, when you have that reference and all of a sudden you're in another country and something didn't work the way you wanted it, I mean just naturally you go to ethnocentrism, like how customer service should be oriented, or how does this work back home, it's not working here the way I would expect it to work – and thinking like I'm coming from this country it's so powerful, because things have worked and that's why we're so developed, it's so easy to just go there.*

He further suggested that US students are “*looked up to because you come from that culture that they see on TV*”, and that he tries to challenge his students to not give in to that, to not allow that to influence their view of themselves, and to bring a sense of cultural humility to their interactions in Costa Rica. David is a great example of a local host who is pushing against the historical and systemic unequal relations of power which suggest that, like tourists, US students should be ‘served’. Instead, he pushes them to step out of that position of power and allow themselves to set aside their assumptions about *why* the US holds so much global power and allow themselves to be vulnerable and allow their Costa Rican hosts to set the pace.

All of these overarching discursive factors play a large role in how hosts and US students engage with each other in Costa Rica and should be taken in to strong consideration by US-based international educators in the ways that they design and evaluate study abroad programs. The themes of politics of language, economic and cultural imperialism, and power that pervade the entire engagement process illustrates just how political and power-laden the practice of international education is and how programmatic and partnership choices can and should be informed by these dynamics.

The Costa Rican case illuminated a number of ways that US students are having an impact of those who host them while they are abroad. The examples included in the beginning of this chapter suggest that intentional hosts share a variety of motivating factors, the most predominant of which is their prior international experiences. Hosts described a variety of ways that they seek to educatively engage US students – for faculty this takes place in the classroom, but also in labs, as well around the city and country where they are helping students apply their learning to real life situations. While they have more limited interactions with US students, study abroad administrators and university staff are working to help acclimate students to their host institution and have a meta-view of trends in US student’s participation and attitudes. Host mothers are doing an incredible amount of labor, often across multiple generations, caring for US students, helping them learn Spanish, and responding to challenging issues that arise. Across host types, there is a concern that many US students exhibit US exceptionalism and show a lack of respect for Costa Ricans and Costa Rican culture by refusing to use (or learn) Spanish. There is a tension that exists between Costa Rican hosts’ interest in using/learning English out of economic necessity and adopting other US cultural practices, and the preservation and elevation of Costa Rican language and culture. The chapter to follow presents a second case study, based in Florence, Italy which will further explicate the relationship between US students and local hosts in that city.

## CHAPTER 5: FLORENCE, ITALY

*"What is the fatal charm of Italy? What do we find there that can be found nowhere else? I believe it is a certain permission to be human, which other places, other countries, lost long ago."*  
 – Erica Jong, *A City of Love and Death: Venice* (1986)

*"I think we [the city of Florence] are saturated. I think it's too much... I think here we're a saturated market. I think that we [Americans] are tolerated in a sense. I think there's been so much globalization and Americanization that it's made it not even all that fascinating or exotic anymore..."*

- Annette, American-born study abroad administrator, 20+ year resident of Florence

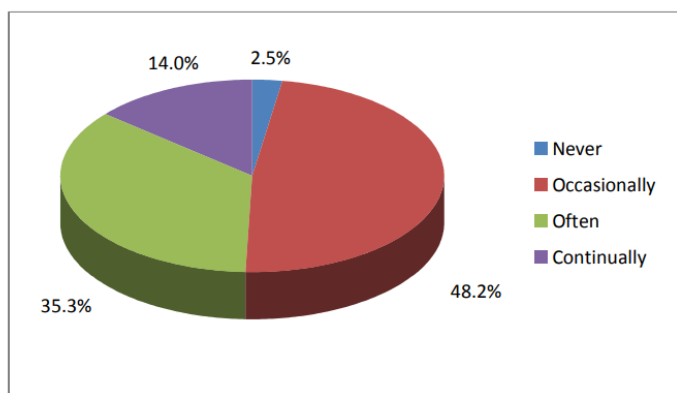
While I think that novelist Erica Jong intends us to understand the would-be visitor as the one who falls victim to Italy's "fatal charm", research participant, Annette, sees the city of Florence as the victim of "saturation" of Americans – which she blames for the degradation of her adopted city. Attracting over 52 million tourists per year, Italy has long been a top tourist destination and for the last 20 years has consistently ranked in the top 5 study abroad destinations for US students (Institute of International Education). Its popularity as a study abroad destination has led to the emergence of dozens of study abroad centers operating in the city. According to the Association of American College and University Programs in Italy's (ACCUPI) 2012 study *Education in Paradise: The Value of North American Study Abroad Programs in Italy* approximately 6,000 North American students studied abroad in Florence during the 2012/2013 academic year. A participant in my study, estimated that currently, at any given time there are nearly 10,000 American students in Florence.

Perhaps due to the fact that most students who study abroad in Italy do so for a semester (ACCUPI, 2013) we find few instances of US faculty writing about their study abroad program in the literature. The most comprehensive study of the presence of US students in Italy is likely the *Education in Paradise* report, put out by ACCUPI in 2013. However, it focuses primarily on quantifying study abroad programs in the country and better understanding the students that take part – how long they stay, where they come from, what motivates them to study abroad in Italy, how

they spend their money and free time. Yet, one section of their survey asked students about their interactions with Italians. We see in the figure below (ACCUPI, 2013, p. 136) that a majority of students reported interacting with Italians either occasionally or never. Of the interactions that do occur, 64.6% of students reported that those interactions take place in a bar or pub.

Figure 2: *Educating in Paradise, ACCUPI 2013 Study, Students' Interactions with Italians (p. 136)*

STUDY ABROAD IN ITALY, YEAR 2012-2013 - INTERACTIONS WITH ITALIANS\*



Source: IRPET Processing of Data from the Direct Survey Conducted on the Students.  
Number of Responses: 1,263.

\*On average, how often do you interact with Italians?

Figure 3: *Educating in Paradise, ACCUPI Study, Students' Interactions with Italians (p. 137)*

STUDY ABROAD IN ITALY, YEAR 2012-2013 - INTERACTIONS WITH ITALIANS\*

Methods of Interaction**	Absolute Frequency	Bearing by % on the Whole Sample
In pubs, discos and other places of entertainment	826	64.6
Through the program	646	50.5
In other public places	596	46.6
Through my study companions in the program	292	22.8
Through friends, relatives, or Italian families	254	19.9
By performing activities with volunteer associations	142	11.1
At home/during private parties	131	10.2
By means of social networks	111	8.7
By doing sports	97	7.6
In church	84	6.6

Source: IRPET Processing of Data from the Direct Survey Conducted on the Students.  
Number of Responses: 1,279.

\*By what means do you interact with Italians?

\*\*Students were given the possibility of choosing more than one method.

Again, in line with broader study abroad research, this comprehensive study, while conducted by local scholars, focused exclusively on the demographics and experiences of *visiting* students as well as economic and occupational outcomes, and did not seek to understand the experiences or perceived qualitative outcomes of *hosts*. This chapter will present a case study focused on the experiences of intentional hosts in Florence, Italy. Like in the San Jose, Costa Rica case presented in Chapter 4, this host-side engagement conceptual framework for centering host voices and perspectives on their engagement with US students.

Like in Chapter 4, the case will begin by describing what motivates intentional hosts to engage with US students. It will then move through the conceptual framework by describing what participants shared in regard to each “stage” of the framework: (a) Motivation to Engage; (b) Methods of Educative Engagement; (c) Instances of Harmony and (d) Dissonance; (e) Making Sense of Self and (f) Others; (g & h) Host-Perceived Outcomes of US Student Engagement/Presence. Each section will also include my interpretation of the major themes that emerged at each stage, summarized in the chart below (table 6). Finally, the chapter will end with an analysis of overarching discursive factors, or discourses that emerged across stages that seem to color the entire intentional host/US student encounter.

*Table 6: Major Themes at each stage of the Conceptual Framework: Florence, Italy Case*

<p><b>a. Motivations to Engage</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive prior international experiences</li> <li>• Economic benefits</li> <li>• Difficulty of getting a job at an Italian university</li> <li>• “I was once new to the city too”</li> </ul>
<p><b>b. Methods of Education Engagement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Italian language help at home</li> <li>• US students not well prepared for academic classes</li> <li>• Cell phone usage and attendance issues</li> <li>• Instructors as “guests” in US education abroad</li> </ul>
<p><b>c. Instances of Harmony</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Care</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Host mothers treating US students as their own</li> <li>• Shared time spent at home with family</li> <li>• Formalized community engagement/volunteering</li> </ul>
<p><b>d. Instances of Dissonance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• US bubble</li> <li>• Accommodation issues</li> <li>• Intersection of nightlife and drinking</li> <li>• Gender, class, and/or age-based conflict</li> </ul>
<p><b>e. Making Sense of Self</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Italians as more reserved in public</li> <li>• La bella figura</li> <li>• Differences in drinking culture</li> <li>• Florence “underutilizing” US students</li> </ul>
<p><b>f. Making Sense of US Students</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hosts perceptions of what motivates US students to study abroad in Florence</li> <li>• Understanding the behaviors of US female students</li> <li>• US diversity and the student consumer</li> <li>• US student drinking habits</li> </ul>
<p><b>g. &amp; h. Host Perceived Impacts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural change</li> <li>• Economic change</li> <li>• Mutual learning</li> <li>• Impacts on city</li> </ul>
<p><b>i. Overarching Discursive Factors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Politics of language</li> <li>• Student choice of accommodation</li> <li>• Program design choices</li> </ul>

a) Motivation to Engage with US Students

Host community members were asked about their motivation to engage with US students. Having had positive prior international experiences and wanting to help students along a similar path, as well as the economic benefit of working with US students, were predominant themes. Two particularly interesting themes were the motivation to work with US students because it is difficult to obtain other higher education jobs, particularly in teaching, at Italian universities that serve primarily local students. Another thematic area of interest was that of empathizing with US

students because host community members themselves were once new to the city of Florence. All administrators and faculty who were interviewed fit the study definition of ‘local’, that is, having lived in Florence for at least 10 years – but had ultimately come to Florence as students at one time and chose to stay for various reasons.

*i. Positive Prior International Experiences*

Fifteen of the seventeen study abroad administrators interviewed had traveled or studied internationally and more than half of them attributed that experience, in one way or another, to their motivation to work with US and other international students in Florence. Two study abroad administrators had worked as nannies in the US prior to their study abroad positions. Chiara, a study abroad administrator, in her mid-30s explained how she worked for a “half Italian and half Florentine family” in the US after finishing her bachelor’s degree. This allowed her to see much of the US and get to know its many cultures. Upon her return to Florence, someone that she had met in the US was working for a study abroad provider organization in Florence and after having an interview with her started her current job.

Leda, an Italian study abroad administrator at a study abroad center in Florence, was inspired by her own ‘traditional’ semester abroad experience as an Erasmus program exchange student in Germany. She shared that staying in Germany for six months “*completely changed my life*” and that the job she has now allows her to help US students experience their own life-changing time overseas. The job also brings together two of her favorite fields, she explained, education and tourism. In her role organizing events and activities she facilitates students’ discovery of Florence in a way she thinks cannot happen only inside the classroom.

Others came to be in their position through academic channels established overseas. Both Catherine and Enzo, who work for different study abroad centers in Florence, did their PhD work in England. Catherine, a brown-haired woman with a wide smile, went to London to do an MA in

English Literature and eventually stayed 9 years, completing a PhD in Italian Studies. She worked at a number of British institutions but explained that:

*It was always, you know, how the situation is in the States if you finish your PhD... it's always like a contract, every time I had a big opportunity the amount of publications, it was getting higher and higher and the competition was very strong, and I was never able to get a permanent job. I was trying to figure out what else I could do with my background and expertise. Somebody told me there was a position here and I thought, maybe I should try. I got an interview and I got the job. Just when my contract in Dublin was finishing.*

Enzo spent four years in England and then moved to Venice to teach for the British university's Venice satellite campus which he said opened his mind to this type of arrangement. He now works for a US university with study abroad center in Florence and reflected on his time in Venice and shared that: *"I discovered the world, as I'm discovering now, studying now, with a variety of differences but a huge number of similarities."*

Meanwhile, other study abroad administrators admit to 'falling into' their positions through professional networks. This was the case for Dominic, a tall man with thick black glasses, who works for a European institution in Florence which hosts students from around Italy and Europe, with a minority of students being from the US. He was asked by a colleague who he had known from living and working in the US if he would be interested in being the resident director for an art program affiliated with a US island campus in Florence. He agreed and called it *"an incredible experience"*. Through this experience he learned of the transformative power of study abroad, he said:

*I learned how the study abroad can transform and can change and can impact the vision and the life and the career of the students that come and do this. I will never forget the feedback from the first site visit the [US institution] director made. The first semester, when he came back, he wrote a report, and he said "it's amazing how this experience has changed the paths so strongly of my students. They are now more self-confident, more worldly". I remember the words he used, self-confident, worldly, and able to see the world well far beyond Washington square. Which was for me a shock, cultural shock. As an Italian, I always lived in the myth of New York City and the [US institution] director was telling me how provincial you can be sometimes even if you live in one of the biggest cities in the world.*



Jennifer, who was born in the US but has worked in Italy for over 20 years echoed these sentiments of realizing transformation in students as a motivating factor for her work. She said that knowing that she “*opens students’ eyes to the world*” is what keeps her coming to work every day. However, she thinks that it goes beyond the experiences of individual students:

*I think it does a service to the world. If not necessarily to the world, at least to Americans and America itself. I feel like we are kind of sheltered in a way and it’s important that people get out of that bubble and see what a little other smidgen of the world is like and what other peoples’ reality can be.*

These examples represent a rather wide variety of different types of prior international experiences. As detailed above, many local hosts in Florence, particularly study abroad administrators were inspired to work in the field of international education by their own study abroad experiences, as opposed to travel or volunteering abroad. The one exception being Chiara who worked abroad for an Italian American family.

#### *ii. Difficulty of Getting a Job at An Italian University*

While international experiences abroad were a primary motivator for study abroad administrators a number of professors and or PhDs working in administrative positions pointed to how difficult it is to get a tenure-track teaching job at an Italian university, which serves primarily local students. Catherine, who was quoted in the section above regarding her academic path through England and Ireland before landing her Academic Director position at a study abroad provider organization, explained that for many PhDs who are working in study abroad in Florence, the difficulty of obtaining working at an Italian university is a motivating factor. She explains:

*I think that the main motivation is, it probably doesn’t sound very nice, getting into an Italian university is very difficult. It’s extremely competitive. Not only competitive, it’s very much tied in with politics and favors, you have to have somebody protecting you and pushing you in a way. It’s not an open process. In Florence there are more than 30 American universities and if you are able to get into one of them then you start to get courses in other places. That would probably be the first motivation.*

She believes that many PhDs have a similar background as her, having been abroad or doing their graduate work abroad and they come back knowing the situation at the Italian universities. They also speak English fluently so want to use that to their professional advantage, which working at a US institution allows them to do. So, this combination of things makes working at a US institution an ideal situation for Catherine. Yet, she explains that for some, *“They’re going to be frustrated with the level and the lack of respect sometimes but generally I think they enjoy the opportunity to be able to do their job even though it’s not what they would’ve wanted to”*. She went on to describe how many local faculty understand that they will need to teach in a ‘different’ way than they would at a local university, firstly because they teach in English, but also because they often have to ‘dumb down’ their subject area because US students do not have an academic background in what they are teaching. Also, because students are studying abroad they might have a different, ‘less serious’ attitude than local students and therefore do not show their professors the same level of respect that a local student might.

Likewise, Luigi, who teaches art to US and other international students in Florence, explained how he sees the education system in Italy as being difficult to penetrate as a professor. He argued that one needs to be older and have much more education to get a position in an Italian university – it is not about the quality of one’s teaching. After taking a sort of placement exam, you enter *“the ranks”* and once you are called up, you can be placed anywhere in the country, *“even Sicily”*. You can refuse to go, but if you do, you drop out of the ranks and have to start all over again. He went on to say that if you do take the position, sometimes you are only reimbursed for travel and given a small stipend for housing, and that one must go on this way for years before getting on the tenure track. He said: *“It’s different than America. It’s very difficult.”*

*I was once in a new to city, too*

Six participants in the Florence case study were born in the US and came to Florence as students. Four of them reported falling in love with an Italian and finding a way to stay in Italy. Annette, who has been working at a US study abroad center in Florence for over 20 years explained her story in this way:

*While I studied abroad I fell in love with an Italian. I didn't know what I wanted to do when I graduated so by default I came over here. I was a psych major. I didn't want to go on at that point. I came over with him to live with him. I told my parents I was going to be teaching English as a foreign language. I got a certificate to teach English as a foreign language - I am a cliché. I came over, started pounding the pavement and finding jobs teaching English. We didn't work out; a couple others didn't work out. I finally met the one that I love. I've been here for 27 years. In the meantime, to stay here, I got my master's in Italian language and culture. Then, shortly after that, I got the job here in 1997.*

She and others explained that even though they have been in Florence for decades they can still remember was it was like to be here for the first time and how overwhelming it can be to be new to the city. That memory helps to motivate her, and others, to work with US students who are experiencing what they did years ago.

### *iii. Economic Benefits*

The theme of the economic benefits of working with US students emerged primarily from host mothers and study abroad administrators talking about the work of host mothers. However, the six participants who brought up money as a motivating factor stressed that it was never the only motivation, because, as one host mother put it, *"there are much easier and less stressful ways to earn a second income. Of course, the money is a motivation, but it's not the only one"*.

One host mother, Benedetta, explained that her sons had been studying English for a while, and they had an extra room, and so she hoped that they would be able to practice their English with US student visitors. A study abroad administrator who recruits host families agreed stating that *"it's*

*kind of an exchange they do between this international foreigner people, young people and the host family...because they have children and they can help them enjoy the city. Of course, the economic benefits.”* Likewise, Chiara, another study abroad administrator at a different institution said that, *“I have to say that that 100% of families that I have worked with are economically motivated, because they need to do that...”*

I did not sense any judgement on behalf of the study abroad administrators who spoke about money as a motivating factor for host families, they spoke in a matter of fact way. Host mothers who discussed economic benefits did so only after discussing other benefits, suggesting that the ability to make some money by hosting US students is not a primary motivator but does play some role in their motivation.

#### b) Methods of Educative Engagement

In this case much of the data around methods of educative engagement came from local instructors. In their interviews they focused on more traditional forms of education, but fully engaged in differences in higher education styles in the US and Italy and how this impacts the relationships that they form with US students and their approach to teaching. Local instructors also had a lot to share regarding their impressions of US education, based on the preparation of the US students whom they teach. However, host mothers also played an important educative role for US students.

##### *i. Host Mother as Teacher*

Host mothers played a large role in the education of visiting US students – their methods for which are often overlooked in study abroad research and practice. Host mother, Giuliana, a 50-year old woman with short black and hair and a kind smile, has been hosting students for over 15 years in collaboration with the same US institution. She spoke at length about what and how her family teaches the students who live with her. Beginning with *“our food, our habits, what do we like to eat, what’s*

*the food? Student are always very curious about that*". She explained that one of the earliest lessons she feels is important to teach students is *"not to spend all their time with American friends because you can spend time with them in the US. You need to meet Italian people so you can have new friends."*

She suggested that this is a particularly difficult hurdle for US students to cross and that some never do. But for those who make an attempt to disconnect from their US friends it gives Giuliana, and other host moms, an opportunity to really be teachers. Her favorite topics to discuss with her US student guests are *"beliefs, your political point of view, your vision of life, your values to grow your children, and how to respect people"*. She also thinks that it is very important for students to understand the city in which they are living, and, she explained, not all students are taking Italian history classes in school. Giuliana helps students think through:

*What is our culture in Italy and in Florence? The history of Florence because usually the first time I bring them to the old palace to show all the views and tell the history of who lived there in this building, why they built it, we go up to the churches. So, they have a historical view of Florence. You live in the country, you need to know it's history, it's not needed but it's a plus for you when you come back to know the history.*

She further added that she teaches the students who live with her about diabetes because her son is a diabetic. Most of the US students who come to live with her are not familiar with the disease, and so they learn a lot about it, as well as about how to cook and eat in a healthy way, since the family does so because of her son's illness.

All host mothers noted their role in helping students to learn Italian. Benedetta said, *"The classes are good but if they're here [in Florence], everything is in English. It doesn't help them really"*. Therefore, she makes a concerted effort to speak only Italian in the home. Yet, another host mother explained that speaking only Italian in the home is very difficult to maintain, because of the low levels of Italian proficiency that US students have when they come to Italy. *"I have never had a student with advanced Italian in my home, more often students don't know any, so it's difficult"*. She explained that her sons

help with translations and that they use translation apps on their phones to communicate, which is helpful, but she thinks that it makes communication much less natural.

*ii. The (Formal) Classroom*

Likewise, local faculty expressed challenges with communication in the classroom. As one professor put it, “*US students have a different cultural education and upbringing which results in gaps in their knowledge*”. Elena, a professor with bright blue eyes and blond hair in her mid-30’s who teaches courses in art to US students at a number of institutions in Florence, put it this way:

*They came from a completely different program, so they cannot have information about religion or medieval art. They don’t have the major challenges that they don’t understand the timeline of history. They came from a completely different place and they arrive at the renaissance. The most difficult time is building that chronology with them. Advice I would give is, do this job only if you enjoy being with students. They don’t have previous background so don’t have super high expectations.*

Her perspective is likely connected to the difficulty, expressed by others, of getting a teaching job at an Italian university – in that it seemed like, while Elena expressed enjoying her current job, she does not find it as intellectually fulfilling as she might hope. She finds US students to be unprepared for the level of work that she would typically assign and therefore has to spend classroom time bringing them up to speed on things that she thinks they should already know.

Interestingly, Luigi, a sculpture and art professor at a different institution also shared his impression that US students are not well prepared, and they struggle specifically with chronology. He shared an example of an exercise where he writes the name of different great civilizations on the white board and asks students to list them chronologically on a piece of paper and consistently, semester after semester, there are very few, if any, US students who even come close to the correct order. He said that in a true Italian academic setting this would be a huge problem, but he sees it as US students being prepared, academically, in a different way:

*They're educated to resolve things for the process. Whereas Italians are more about knowing. What I see with American students and maybe sometimes only some of them, they progress much quicker when they are faced with a new task. I don't think it's a negative part. It's just education there in America is less about knowing specific things and more about learning how to resolve problems.*

Another professor, Everett, who immigrated from Scandinavia to Florence in the mid 1980's and now teaches art for a study abroad provider organization, thinks that it's less about lack of preparation and more about the emergence of the cell phone as a primary tool in students' lives. He shared that in past decades, students had to memorize things, and committing facts to memory is what gave them the background they needed to advance their studies. However, now, there is no need for students to memorize facts, because they can always look things up on their cell phone. He reflected at his surprise that US students have not memorized basic facts about US art, because "US art is all about the last 150 years. So, yeah. It's surprising, nobody knows anymore. Even Jackson Pollock sometimes."

Regardless of the reasons why students do not have the academic background that is expected by Italian instructors, this perceived deficiency changes the way many Italian instructors approach teaching US students. Catherine, a study abroad administrator with a PhD in Italian Language and Literature, explains that Italian instructors tend to use lecture as their primary mode of instruction and that often US students are not used to that. "US students expect there to be constant activities, and we do go outside and visit places, but the classroom is primarily for lecture", she explained. Study abroad administrator, Tony, said "here you can just lecture people for three hours. No one will complain because they're used to that. Imagine lecturing a US student for three hours. Thirty minutes and they are lost, you lose them."

Tony went on to say that instructors should expect to have to adjust to the US style of teaching and learning:

*If you want to work for me or any of the other 44 universities that we have in Florence, you have to adjust to the American system. An average American student on study abroad is already*

*exposed to culture shock, which is really strong, so imagine if you had to expose that kid to another completely different teaching methodology. It would be impossible to cope with that. So, we try to, all the faculty that I hire, all the people I've been working with, know they have to adjust to an extent. You cannot become American 100% because you keep something that is yours. For example, being more open. Speaking about your life, giving examples related to your personal life, is something they usually don't do in the US. They are very reserved. You consider that there is a boundary between, sort of a metaphorical fence, between your private life that should never be shared with students. Whereas we use examples, not because we want to expose ourselves. You use yourself, use your life. It's interesting because in many cases you can compare your perspective to theirs. They are here as a guest, a cultural guest, while we're here as a guest in your system. It's interesting.*

The last line of Tony's quote introduces a very peculiar phenomenon – the idea that an Italian instructor and administrator considers himself a “guest” in the US educational system within his home country of Italy. This suggests that not only do some local hosts recognize the US bubble created by the saturation of US educational institutions in Florence, but further see themselves as *guests* in that bubble. While from Tony's perspective this seems to be a matter of course, it is problematic, as it helps to establish for US students that, no matter where you go, others will create spaces where you feel comfortable and will adapt to you, as opposed to you having to adapt to them.

Professor, Alberta, also shared her thoughts on how US students are differently prepared than Italian students, and also differently motivated. She explained that she perceives US universities to be more interdisciplinary in nature, whereas Italian universities are more disciplinarily focused. Italian students choose a focus and then only study within that field. She thinks that *“they are already prepared but they are less motivated because they know when they graduate, they have no work. So even if they do well or poorly it's the same”*. So, this leads to there being one or two stand out students who will “make it” and the rest become disinterested, she explained.

Again, sculpture professor, Luigi, had the unique perspective of having studied in the US himself so spoke at length about how he perceived US education and teaching styles. He shared:



*In America of course, when I was there, it's much more mechanical. You go from 1 to 2, 2 to 3, and you go on like that. I don't want to use the expression of spoon feeding but it's more like that. I have to say that that system is very efficient. Our system causes a lot of confusion. Our socialist call has made it a goal to cut down [on the number of students in higher education programs], because it's free, we are in some ways doing the opposite of American schools. How many in the first year? They want to get rid of most of them. 100 we started with, we finished with 10. We got rid of 90 and we're very proud of it in a sense. Those 90 didn't deserve it maybe or didn't want it really. Something else maybe better in life. The American system is a little more efficient. Everyone grows step by step through the project and as well the American system is very flexible. It allows a lot of changes and our system is very rigid.*

What Luigi describes as the efficiency of the US higher education system; others might describe as a symptom of neoliberalism. He says that “*because it [Italian higher education] is free, we are in some ways doing the opposite of American schools*” and indeed the pay-to-play approach embraced by many US college and universities create the “spoon feeding” effect to which Luigi refers. The US higher education system would fail financially if programs “*started with 100 and finished with 10*”. However, Luigi expresses appreciation for the flexibility that is built in to the US higher education system, which he feels is lacking in the Italian higher education system.

Leda, a student abroad administrator, shared similar sentiments – saying that what US students do in Italy is “*like what Italian students do in high school*”. She explained from her own educational experience that at Italian universities students might study six or seven different books and then have an oral exam with the professor to perform their understanding of the materials. Whereas, US students seem much more used to written exams or tests, which is something more akin to the high school experience in Italy.

Maria, a librarian, at a US educational institution in Florence, further explained that what US students are doing in Florence is “*more similar to our high school system because in high school we have exams once a month and the oral assessment once a month*”. She shared that multiple choice or true/false questions is something that she has learned about primarily through the US students that she works with. For

Maria, she is unsure about the effectiveness of these types of exams, but she does like what she perceived to be the “American idea” of continuous assessment.

Likewise, Carmella, a professor of history at a US university center in Florence said that these differences are what make her love teaching US students. She used to teach Italian and Greek at an Italian high school and the rigidity of the system presented a number of constraints. Whereas US students are used to a more flexible system and therefore it challenges her, as a teacher, to engage with the problems that US students present in her classroom, which are often very different than those of Italian students. For example, she found that her Italian students all had very similar academic preparation, while her US students come from different institutions and have varied background knowledge.

Like at home in US university classrooms, local faculty had a lot to say about challenges that they face in the classroom in regard to student behavior and attention – much of which is perceived as a lack of respect for the instructor and the class. More than half of the professors interviewed cited cell phone usage as a major problem in class. Carmella noted that “*We have rules, they can’t use cell phones in class, they can’t send messages, we have rules but sometimes they don’t respect it. I can call them once, twice, no more at the end of it. After that if you miss out it’s your fault*”. Catherine agreed, and shared that as an administrator she receives complaints from students who feel that they are missing out on class content because their instructors are constantly having to tell other students to put their phones away.

Rosanna, who has been teaching US students in Italy for over 30 years, has noticed that she is able to cover less and less material as the years go on, “*in the past, we used to do more and more things. Now, we cut, we cut, we cut. If I come across what I did 30 years ago, the syllabus, now we do fewer things.*”

Perhaps this is due to the lack of background knowledge that other professors cited, the cell phone

usage, or something else.

US student absence from class is also a problem that more than half of the professor participants cited. Study abroad administrators, like Ingrid, said that she notices this too.

*Students have a limited number of absences. We insist on respect from the very beginning during orientation. When we are getting close to the end of the program, students tend to skip classes to travel. Most of the fun is here in Florence so it happens that we need to take seriously about the absences. Sometimes we need to change the classes at the beginning and sometimes they cannot do it for administration reasons, bureaucratic reasons, they have a very strict academic policy. Many things have changed during these years. Beginning students have problems with Italian classes because they are mandatory for all the students. Now they aren't anymore.*

In this example we see that instead of insisting on requiring Italian classes for all students, because of absences and what participants see as lack of respect, they no longer make these classes mandatory. This is a further example of a study abroad provider organization loosening its academic policies to accommodate US student's non-academic motivations for being abroad. This may also have economic underpinnings as more strictly enforcing attendance policies or making classes mandatory would likely decrease US student participation or encourage them to choose a study abroad center with looser policies. In a market as saturated as study abroad centers in Florence, competition for students likely plays a large role in policy decisions.

### *iii. Differences in Higher Education Styles*

While no interview questions focused specifically on the differences between the US and Italian higher education system, many professors talked about the difficulty of being trained in one system, and then teaching in what they perceive as a completely different system. This is particularly important because this theme implies that, from the perspective of local instructors, US students are not studying abroad in Italy in the traditional sense. Rather, local faculty see themselves as teaching as part of the US system and not the Italian system. This has implications for the teaching

experience of local faculty, and their perspectives help us learn more about US students and the US system.

Professor Alberta lamented about the less than ideal teaching and learning conditions in a typical Italian university classroom:

*We are 300 people per room, often with the toilet not functioning, often with the heating not functioning. So, it's very different at Italian universities. There are students that are very motivated. They study on their own, they research on their own. But professors don't just give you the books or send you to the store, they give you bibliographies of books you can't find. You have to spend a lot of time to find your sources. So, it's literally fighting for a degree, when the teachers and the environment is an obstacle for you. In a way, the excellent Italian students are double prepared because they have been impeded to study. The excellent US students are good, fantastic, extraordinary, but spoiled.*

Along the same lines as US students being “spoiled” study abroad administrator, Leda, reflected that US students “*don't realize that everything here is for them*”. She does not think that they have any idea what it would be like to go to an Italian university or what Italian students have to do if *they* want to study abroad. If Italians want to study abroad, through the ERASMUS program, they first need to be fluent in the language of the country where they want to study. This is not true of US students in Italy, she explained, and because of this “*there's no exchange of ideas, of people, they remain in a bubble. They are Americans, studying with other Americans, at American schools*”.

Lorenza, a volunteer coordinator for US students, explained that the shape of Italian and US education looks so different because at Italian universities “*the business concept of making money is not part of the job of the university, its education. We do not have to advertise or look for foreigners because we are not a business.*” She went on to say that the idea of having donors to a university is absolutely out of the question, because “*of course donors are political and have an agenda*” that is not what education should be about. This is yet another example of a local host recognizing the corporatization of US universities.

Despite all of these differences in educative engagement, local faculty, staff, and host families find ways to connect with US students. In the sections to follow data will be shared that focuses on

the different types of encounters that US students and local hosts share. Organized around the idea of instances of harmony and dissonance, we see how local hosts understand their engagement with visiting students and make sense of these encounters.

### c) Instances of Harmony or Personal Connection

#### *i. Care*

It was clear that one of the primary ways that local hosts experience instances of harmony and personal connection with US students is through care. Host mothers, in particular, shared many heartwarming stories of how they see the US students they host as their own children. Host mom, Augusta, shared that she sees herself as a second mom to her US student guests. She shared that *“I speak with them if they have some problems, so, I am the second mother really. If they are sad, I sit down in their bed and try speaking to them. Sometimes they cry and say, ‘my boyfriend is bad’. So, we think about it together.”*

Continuing the story about the student she hosted who was having issues with her boyfriend, she went on to explain that the student found out that her boyfriend, at home in the US, had started seeing someone else, and that her host daughter was “distraught” over it. So, she proudly explained *“I called my friend, who has a son who is a model in Milan, I invited him over and we took some pictures of him and the girl together. She posted these online”*. One week later, Augusta heard her door bell ring, and she opened it and it was her host daughter’s boyfriend who had flown to Italy from the US, *“he showed up with roses”*.

Host mother Giuliana, emphasized how important it is to treat the US students who stay with her as she would her own children. She explained that you don’t just get used to living with students, they become part of your family. Her family makes a consistent effort to ask how they are and what they are doing every day because *“they need to feel they are important for us”*. Giuliana always

requests a female student be placed with her because she has three sons and is always hopeful that she can take her host daughter shopping. She explained her approach in this way:

*I'm not your real mom but for a short period I'm your mom and I need to take care of you like my sons. Exactly the same, maybe more because if I think of my children abroad, I don't know who they live with I need to be sure that the people take really good care of them. It's why, people who decide to host need to open their arms and treat them as a real part of their family. Plus, with all the problems because I had people who lost keys, people went to hospital, but it's part of your family. This can happen in your family too, to your children. Treat people the way you would want another family to treat your children.*

While US students were not interviewed as a part of this study, several study abroad administrators talked about the genuine love and care they see many US students having towards their host family.

Federica, a woman with curly black hair, who works placing US students with Italian host families, reflected on how important the experience of living with a host family is for US students. She shared that her organization has an evaluation that US students complete about their homestay experience and that most of them are great. Students say things like *"this is something that will change my life, I will be in touch with my host family forever, this is my second mom, my sister is coming to visit me soon"*. She thinks that, not all of them, but for many US students who spend the semester with a host family that *"when they leave, they really leave part of their heart in Italy"*.

Study abroad administrators also exhibit a great amount of care and concern for the US students they work with. Chiara, a study abroad advisor, shared a recent story of a female student who was drunk and very ill in the middle of the night out at a bar. Chiara happened to also be out with friends and saw this student. She ended her night early and called a cab and went to the hospital with the student to ensure that she would be okay and ended up spending the night there with her. She explained, *"we always try to help them to understand that they should behave responsibly for themselves. In any case, that's why we are here. We are providers, so we really care"*.

Both study abroad administrators and host families alike were very concerned with US student safety. Host mom Augusta explained that the students who come are young and many of them are experiencing this level of independence of the first time, so they need guidance. “*We have to remember that we were also young once*” she reminisced.

*ii. Personal Connection*

As one might expect, some of the strongest personal connections seem to take place within the host family setting. There were countless stories shared about connections made in the home that have led to host families going to the US to attend the wedding of their host daughter, or a host son who developed a best friend in his host brother and stay in touch 20 years later. Host mother Giuliana spoke in depth about the relationship that she was witnessing her children develop with the students that she was hosting at the time of the interview. She described the students she was hosting as being very generous with their time, watching Harry Potter with her sons in Italian, with English subtitles. The day before the interview the students had made friendship bracelets with her children and she loved to think about the fact that she created this moment, about the gift she is able to give to her children through this exposure to people from different parts of the world. They keep a journal with photos and letters from past students and they look at it together as a family at least once per month.

Augusta talked about how much social media has enabled her and her family to keep in touch with past students, explaining that they are friends on Facebook, so she can watch as they grow up. She also shared that at least once every few years a past student will return to visit and that they “*laugh and cry together*” and that their “*hearts are connected as if no time had passed*”. Yet another host mom shared that she keeps in touch with past students using skype and facetime, and that with “*the special ones*” she tries to connect with them around the holidays.

However, it is not just host mothers that are making strong personal connections with

students. Instructors and study abroad administrators all had instances of personal connection to share. Study abroad administrator, Eva, explained it in this way:

*It's like, I never thought of this, but I think it's like a trip on a boat, you know? The space is limited and so you're forced to have intimacy with people you don't know and you have not picked. You can build incredibly powerful relationships. We have students that are still in touch with their host families after years. They're invited to the marriage and so on. You can develop frustration and anger so, it can go both ways. It's an intense experience which I think is a great part.*

Professor Alberta shared how she thinks it is important to make connections with her students outside of the classroom, she explained:

*I bring them to my family, to my parents in the country, we have a barbeque, for me for those groups which are four or five or eight or ten maximum students, I treat them like they were Florentines. They don't want to go away anymore, that's the problem. When they have the full experience with the familiar roots and the traditional values. I bring them to the church also, because they need to know what goes on in the church if they want to work on the Italian art, since it's 99% catholic art. Also, if they don't understand the celebration, it's part of the class, everything is part of the experience. I feel that I am half American because I have so many cultural children there that hold me continuously. For me, it's a second family in the US.*

Other faculty spoke about the impact of their working with US students on their children.

One professor shared that because she is engaging with US students all the time, she has become much more aware of US culture and can teach her own children about it. She also thinks that it is good for her children to see her teaching students from different places, and that maybe this will give them an appreciation for the world that they may not have had otherwise.

### *iii. Formalized Methods of Community Engagement*

Many study abroad institutions in Florence create formalized programming that is intended to help integrate US students into the local community. For example, Brittany, a young woman originally from the US but working in Florence for a study abroad organization, described how she organizes different cultural activities that are intended to bring US and local students together. Her institution organizes a soccer league that engaged US students, local university students, and some



young refugees living just outside the city. However, most participants explained that the three primary methods for engaging US students with the community was their coursework that takes place outside the formal classroom, internships, or volunteering.

In the case of academic courses, US students often do not have a choice, as most do not specifically choose courses that will bring them in to the community, yet many classes do. Ingrid explained that at her institutions, the cooking classes often go to visit chefs at a local restaurant or bakery. Likewise, their Italian language classes have field trips during summer and during the semester “many courses have some activities to go out from the class and meet people”. She shared that many students are somewhat resistant to this, but it is required for the class, so they do not have a choice.

George, a serious and matter-of-fact dean of students at a study abroad institution, explained a special partnership that his institution has with a local museum whereby students take a museum management class inside of the museum. It is interdisciplinary, in that it incorporates business students, art students, graphics design students and others, who each have a role to play in the management of the museum. He shared that “*students are working together, let’s say graphic design students, they’ll be working with interior design students on projects that have to do with museum development. Everything from the signage, from the flow of people to the museum, to the way in which people learn in the museums, is managed by our students*”. Education students were engaging in a project to better understand how people with visual disabilities experience the museum.

Likewise, study abroad administrator, Chiara, described a similar partnership that her organization has with a store and restaurant which operate as a school. She shared, “*there are classes, tailoring, retail management, it’s in half the store. In the restaurant, it’s a school, they are even issuing their own culinary magazine and that’s the place that they do this*.” While this school is open to local Italian students,

Chiara explained that it is 90% US students who participate due to the cost being quite high and also because; *“It’s anyway an American school. It was born in Florence, but the school is American oriented.”*

Other students take part in more traditional internships with local firms. Study abroad administrator, Catherine, explains that *“maybe 10% of students take that opportunity to maybe work in a kindergarten where they can speak English to the students or in a school. We also work with an organization; they train guides to give a tour in the major locations and our students became tour guides in English”*. Catherine thinks that this is a great opportunity because they get to know important Florentine landmarks very well because they have to study them to give the tours. It also gives them the opportunity to show how much they know when their friends or family come to visit, and they can give them a tour.

Six of the organizations represented in the study cited some type of volunteer program or opportunity that they provide for students. Again, many lamented that very few US students participate but the few that do are able to make some lasting connections. One institution started a program in 2004 that is still in operation, that brings US students to local elementary schools to help teach English. Sometimes the volunteering is for credit and students write a reflective paper at the end. One volunteer coordinator recalled a paper that a student wrote entitled *“Breaking the barriers and sharing the wealth”* in which the student described ‘wealth’ as their love for Dr. Seuss and that the shared connection they had with local students *“broke barriers”*.

Yet a different way that one organization approaches bringing US students and the community together is by having local high school students intern at the US study abroad institution. Some students work in the library, others help to plan activities for US students, and in so doing they get to know and form relationship with visiting students. The program has been going on for 4 years and program administrator, Kirsten, thinks it’s been quite successful. It sort of flips the script on typical internships, instead of sending US students out, it bring Italian students in. She

explains that *“of course they need English skills to participate, but they really do get a lot out of it professionally and personally. They build a network.”*

Two study abroad administrators emphasized that they think US students are actually doing a lot of good in the city, despite their poor reputation, which is described in more detail in the ‘Instances of Dissonance’ section to follow. Enzo reflected:

*We always underline the bad aspect of things. It’s more shocking and effective if the journalist writes about the negative aspect. I want to say that, we have 10,000 or more students per semester, here in Florence. None of them are bad, well maybe 1%. How can you avoid this in such a large group of students as they’re hosted here in Florence? No one talks about the fact that students are doing so much volunteering. I think we need to rewrite this type of history. We need to write down the positive aspects of this world.*

Likewise, Eva thinks that generally the reputation of US students in Florence is improving over time. She thinks that the media likes to gossip and that there is a lot of anti-US bias. She asserted, *“I’m Italian and I find myself often taking the position of defending US students even though I completely understand the perspective of Italians. I do see how offensive the bias can be on the Italian side.”* She said that overall, *“if you take the 50 study abroad programs that are in Florence and you take that 30% of each study abroad program has a group that will go out and get wasted”* but broadly speaking, students are making efforts to engage in the city and make a positive impact.

#### d) Instances of Dissonance

While the section above details instances of harmony and personal connection, there were a number of themes that would be better categorized as instances of dissonance, conflict, or disconnection between US students and local hosts. These all revolved, in some way, around social identity. The first, and most, pervasive area of dissonance is the perception among more than half of the hosts interviewed that US students form an “American bubble” and that they are either unable

or unwilling to break out of this social pattern. Hosts also talked about various issues related to housing, US student drinking and nightlife, as well as generational differences between the young US student visitors and aging Florentines.

*i. The American Bubble*

Leda, a study abroad administrator put it well in her response to a question about the extent to which US students adapt to Florentine life, she said:

*Actually, they more or less live in a bubble. An American bubble. Everything here if you walk around, it's made for students, for American programs. It's more the city which tries to please them than they try to adapt to the city. I see this now a days. Maybe ten years ago it was different but now, it seems like it's the city to adjust to them. So, they don't have to do anything, they just have to speak their language.*

A number of local hosts pointed to weekend trips that are organized by companies that specifically target study abroad students – like “Bus to Alps” and “Florence for Fun”. They shared that because so many US students take advantage of their tours, down-time that they have that might otherwise be spent in the city, where they could meet locals, they are spending that time with each other. Rosanna, a professor of Italian, sees the popularity of these trips are strongly impeding students Italian learning ability. She lamented “*that's very bad also for our students because when they go during the weekend they're always together and they are not using Italian*”. Likewise, host mom, Giuliana, interprets students leaving every weekend to take their trips together as disinterest in getting to know “*the real Italy*” by spending time with her and her family.

Maria, the librarian at a study abroad institution, provided another perspective, sharing that many of the students that she works with never really cut ties with home, that they are very interested in keeping in touch with friends via snapchat and Instagram and that because of this they miss out of the experience that they could be having in Florence. She interprets this as students “*not trying*”, which she said she understands because “*it's much easier staying with people speaking your same*

*language and having your same habits*". However, she shared that she thinks that this contributes to homesickness, which creates what she refers to as a *"middle situation"*. She explained, *"they are in the middle, they're here but they're not actually here."*

Many local hosts expressed frustration with how the city has not tried to "pop" these American bubbles, but rather cater to them. Professors, Carmella, lamented that *"many of our bars are only for American students, many restaurants have English menus, and so the city tries to help the students to connect with them in this way"*. She thinks that it is important for US students to, as she put it *"walk in our direction"* meaning that there should not be so many signs, menus, and general communication in English.

Study abroad administrator, Chiara, agrees that the city is to blame for reinforcing these US bubbles – she sees bars and discos as playing the largest role in this regard. Students go to a hand full of bars and discos, mostly centered around Via dei Benci, they tell their friends about these places and they just become more and more overrun with US students. Chiara estimates that at night, the city is 90% Americans, she thinks that *"there is no way I can go and have a drink in the city center in the evening and not hear an American"*. Further, Professor Luigi, described it as *"a bubble inside of a bubble"*, by which he explained that US students form their own moving bubble, but they stay within the bubble of the city center, never going outside of walking distance, especially in the evening.

Most, if not all of the study abroad administrator participants spoke about programming that they organize in order to try to get US students to break out of the American bubble – much of which was precipitated by students complaining that they do not meet locals. The problem, however, expressed by multiple administrators, is that students call for this programming and then do not show up. Administrator, Jennifer, described a language exchange that her organization has developed with the University of Florence, saying *"again, if we have 80 students, we're lucky if 5 to 10 of them meet with their language partner beyond what they have to do for a grade"*. She tempered this by saying

that “*it could be a two-way street too. It could be the Italian student is too busy and they can’t make time to meet with our students at another time*”. Jennifer said that all she and her colleagues can do is provide these opportunities, and put people in touch with one another, the rest is up to them.

Administrator, Eva, expressed that she thinks that students looking for other people to make connections for them is part of a larger culture of students needing things spelled out for them. She shared an analogy of restaurant menus spelling out appropriate meals for every type of dietary restriction – “*a salad will list the ingredients, and then say “vegetarian” just in case you didn’t catch that there were only vegetables in the salad*”. She questioned if maybe increasingly students need, what some might perceive as obvious social steps to relationship formation, spelled out for them. One way that Eva’s institution is trying to overcome this is by partnering with a local university and inviting Italian students to take part in on-campus activities, so that US students might have more organic opportunities to connect with them, without having to take the lead.

## *ii. Accommodations*

As we saw in the ‘Instances of Harmony’ section, much of the authentic, personal connection, that takes place in study abroad is between US students and host families. Yet, administrators estimated that across the city fewer than 10% of students choose to stay with host families. Administrator, Tony, thinks that this choice is tied to a fear of going back to living with their parents, which he thinks is “*a completely wrong, misplaced idea*”. He sees this as a missed opportunity to be a part of a group of people, and to be immersed in “*the real life of Italy*”. One student, who had originally been hesitant to live with a host family, told Tony upon returning from his host-brother’s first communion that he felt as if he was “*in a movie, the enlarged family, 100 people, having a look at what does that mean*”. Tony went on to say that he thinks students do not choose to live with host families, because “*so many of them come [to Italy] together, with mates that they already know, and they want to party*”, calling it “*really quite tragic*.”

There was one study abroad institution that requires all students to live with host families, and prides themselves on maintaining this tradition, despite it being a lot of work logistically. The housing coordinator there, said that she tells students to approach living with a host family “like a professional environment” in that they do not get to choose their “co-workers” or in this case house-mates, but they do have to be respectful and find productive ways of communicating. She said:

*It will be a great opportunity for them to learn how to negotiate. I don't want green peas, how do I tell the host mother that I don't like green peas without offending her, she's cooked an entire dinner with green peas and I hate green peas, how do I say so without offending her? Yet also making sure I eat enough. Same thing in a job scenario. How do you ask your colleague to, I don't know, to make less noise? Similar scenarios, so it's a wonderful opportunity for them to train their skills in a scenario that may feel uncomfortable at the beginning.”*

### *iii. Nightlife, Drinking, and Relationships*

As mentioned above, many local hosts described evening time in Florence as being overtaken by US students. Many of the same participants said that they think that local young people specifically avoid going out in the evening to places where they know US students go. Tony was the first to describe this saying that “*local youngsters can't stand the constant presence of those people. Drunk, screaming, yelling, noisy, very loud. I hear this all the time, that's a fact, not a stereotype.*” Likewise, administrator, George, said that he sees the same thing happening, but attributes it to Americans and Italians having “*different cultural sensibilities... they are looking for different kinds of experiences*”.

Yet, others described the “type” of Italians who go to US bars. Annette, a staff member at a study abroad institution, explained: “*there's basically two kinds of guys. There's the guy that's actually really looking to hit on somebody and there's the kind that goes with a bunch of their friends, they have a girlfriend, but they want to laugh at the drunk Americans.*” And of those Italians who do frequent US bars, Catherine thinks that this is causing a negative change in drinking culture among young Italians. She said:

*...we didn't used to have a drinking culture like the English or the Americans do. We used to go out and get a drink with a meal and that's it. I think younger generations, maybe because they are more in touch with the British culture or the US culture. Now, even Italian students are at the bar getting drunk. Maybe from what they say to me it's maybe also the influence of the American drinking culture.*

A surprising number of local hosts, both women and men, discussed the dynamic between US female students and young Italian men, or men they perceive to be Italian. Two of the women I spoke to were born in the US, studied abroad in Florence, and met an Italian man that they eventually married. Professor Luigi's mother was a US student who studied in Florence and fell in love with an Italian man. He thinks that many young US women have this image in their mind of coming to Florence and falling in love with an Italian – he and a few others said, “*like the Lizzy McGuire movie*”. However, another host explained that this leaves US women particularly vulnerable to “*non-Italian men who pose as Italian in order to woo an American girl*”.

Annette, who works as a counselor for US students, gave several examples of US female students talking to her about uncomfortable or dangerous situations they were in with men posing as Italian. A female student once told her “*this guy I thought was Italian is not actually Italian, he asked to borrow my passport and I gave it to him, I'm really in love with him do you think I should try to get that back from him?*” She shared another reflection on US female students who have come to talk to her about similar issues:

*They will by default say the Italian guy was inappropriate, the Italian guy was hitting on me, the Italian guy stalked me, the Italian guy harassed me. Lots of times, when it becomes a more serious issue, I would say probably 100% of the time when it becomes more harassment and stalking, we've found out a sense of who it is or we get a name. They're not Italian, they just speak Italian.*

Both Leda and Nicole, who work at two different institutions shared very similar stories regarding this phenomenon of non-Italian men pretending to be Italian. Leda suggests that these men are immigrants from other parts of Europe or North Africa. She explained, “*They say... 'I'm*



*Italian". American girls don't know the difference. There's a certain danger in those relationships."* Nicole went further to suggest that *"these immigrants, they're not getting the respect that they would like to get maybe from Italians, so they pretend to be Italians to other foreigners because they can probably get away with more and be more respected"*. Likewise, Professor, Elena, added; *"I don't want to be racist, we as Italian understand if a person is Italian or Albanian or from Africa, you won't distinguish if you're not Italian."*

Annette and Elena describe an interesting phenomenon that is likely reflective of the current wave of anti-immigration sentiment throughout much of Europe (and the US). While I do not doubt that US women have come to Annette to report issues of stalking and sexual assault as she describes, and that perhaps non-Italian men perpetrated those incidences, it seems that some hosts may be perpetuating racist attitudes towards immigrants. Especially if hosts like Elena, Leda or Nicole share their perspectives with US students, even unintentionally, inspire fear within them that black and brown people they encounter in the city are pretending to be Italian, and are dangerous, this is problematic. Instead of pushing students to challenge anti-immigrant sentiments that exist in the US these encounters may serve to perpetuate racism abroad.

Putting aside the issue of non-Italians pretending to be Italians, many hosts spoke directly about what they perceive to be a love/hate relationship between themselves and US students. Study abroad administrator, Jennifer, described it in this way:

*It's a love hate with them. Love because they bring in money. I think there is still the idea of a nice picture of Americans. The hate part is that locals know that there is a huge contingent of students that come here and don't have any intention of integrating, or trying to learn the language, or do much else other than sticking in their own bubbles and causing a ruckus at night.*

All 31 local hosts who were interviewed spoke at one point about US student drinking and the reputation that they have developed because of it. The idea of US students "making a ruckus" at night was shared by many, and it is something that I witnessed during my time in-country. The apartment where I stayed was in the Santa Croce neighborhood of Florence, just a few blocks from

Via dei Benci where many American bars are located. Most nights, starting around 10pm, I could hear yelling and screaming, in English, up and down the street. However, a few hosts chalked this up to being young and feel that US students' poor reputation is overblown. Others, like Professor Elena, expressed that local study abroad organizations are doing a lot in their on-site orientations to instill in students the concept of "*conscious drinking*" but that the US bubble that students keep themselves in leads to them falling back on old habits that they "*must have picked up in America*".

*iv. Gender, Class, and Age*

One of the more interesting themes that came out of talking about instances of dissonance was the revelation that local hosts perceive very few US women students are making friends with local Italian women. Most of the local interaction, Annette suggests, are between US women students and local Italian men, or, as previously mentioned men who are pretending to be Italian. Another host suggested that this is because "*young women in Italy don't like the way that many US women comport themselves here, they are loud and drunk, and don't dress appropriately, there is nothing there that makes them want to be friends*". Likewise, Annette suggested that you do not see very many young Italian women dating US men, because "*They don't know how to court someone. I think they are used to the American women doing it for them.*" She went on to say that the popularity of "*hook up apps*" in the US have not really been taken up in the same way in Italy, she thinks that young Italian women would be turned off by that type of encounter.

Another gender-based dynamic that study abroad administrator, Tony, shared is one where, as he explained, US women dress very provocatively, and so Italian men get the impression that they are easy. So, they hit on them, or try to buy them a drink, and are surprised to learn that "*the girl is not as easy at all as she shows from the way she is dressed, and then BOOM a CLASH*". He says that often times, a US man from their cohort will intervene and want to "*play the tough guy*" and defend the

young woman, and sometimes altercations with break out. These sometimes end up involving the police.

Professor Alberta, whose son met a US woman while she was studying abroad in Florence and subsequently moved to the US with her, reflected on how only *some* Italians engage with US students in the bars, in town, or at all. She thinks that in many ways it comes down to socio-economic class, because *“only middle and upper-class Italians speak English”* and that because so few students speak Italian, in order for there to be any mixing Italians need to speak English. Alberta said, *“people who have had poor education within their family are not so prepared in English”* so they do not have the opportunity to engage at all – for better or worse.

She also spoke about the intersection of class and globalization, explaining that in the past the center of the city was “for everyone” and that there were many artists and intellectuals that hung out in different places within the city center and everyone knew where those were. These people became important figures in artistic and intellectual history. But now, she lamented:

*There are rich Russians, or rich Chinese, maybe tomorrow these people will be important, but they seem more rich than important. That’s what I mean. We had the social and the discussion, intellectual dining room, in the center of Florence. Now, no. Now it’s only the highest price for the highest richest people and mass tourism. The artists, we have lost them.*

Likewise, Maria, a librarian at a study abroad institution in Florence, noticed how older people living in Florence, have a particularly difficult time with the young US students, because they remember how the city used to be. She explained that, of course, if you are older and own a business, US students *“are a treasure”* but *“for the old lady who lives in an apartment just below an apartment with eight American girls, you know, coming up and down with heels and very short miniskirts, shorter than this, not saying good morning. Not saying goodnight, it is terrible”*. Maria described it as a *“generation gap”* which disadvantages older people living in the city.

One of the most insightful reflections regarding instances of dissonance between locals and US students came from George, a study abroad administrator, originally from the US who has lived in Florence for 20 years. He essentially understands the issues described above as issues of town/gown relations, similar in nature to those of colleges in small US towns, whereby there is a clash between young students, many of whom come from another place, and who do not mix well with people who have lived in that town for generations. He said, *“you know, even probably in towns, populations in small college towns, tend not to mix as readily with students as students do with one another. I think it’s normal, kind of to be expected.”*

#### e) Making Sense of Self

Incidents of harmony or dissonance are interpreted in different ways and through listening to these interpretations I heard local hosts making sense of themselves, as Italians, or Florentines in the light of the connection or clash that they experienced with visiting US students. Melanie, a study abroad administrator, who grew up in the US and has lived in Florence for 10 years, provided a good starting point for this meaning making process. In reflecting on how she would define Italian culture, she said:

*I would say that Italians tend to be more reserved, when they’re in public at least. Especially if you go into a restaurant, without even really listening to language, you can tell which groups are American and which ones are Italian based on their behavior at dinner. Italians tend to be quieter, soft spoken, not all of them obviously.*

She, and others, discussed the concept of “la bella figura” which has to do with the way one dresses and presents themselves. Melanie suggested that, *“Italians dress to impress”* and that they would never go to work or go out of the house in a pair of sweatpants or without makeup or their hair done. She did not interpret this as being superficial, but rather *“it’s more that they feel more put together and able to put a better face on even if they’re having a bad day”*. Melanie further shared that you do not see Italians generally coming from the gym in their workout clothes, rather they will shower, change, put

their makeup back on at the gym and *“it’s as if they never went to the gym at all”*. This explanation was juxtaposed to what she perceived to be Americans dressing much more casually and not caring about impressing people with their style or *“how put together they are”*.

Melanie also spoke to Italians having a *“completely different culture when it comes to alcohol”*. Because, she explains, Italians grow up knowing about wine and drinking it at dinner or celebrations, they tend to not go to the bar by themselves. Drinking is social and is meant to be done with friends, family, and colleagues, it is not about getting drunk. However, she suggested that *“maybe younger generations of Italians who have been more exposed to American cultural norms, they tend to drink more”*. Even though there are technically open container laws, many Italians drink outside, in the piazza (town square) but, she said, *“Americans tend to go way overboard with this.”*

While Melanie privileged an Italian way of being in regard to demeanor, dress, and drinking; art professor, Alberta, reflected on her preference for the US style of living. She said, frankly:

*I prefer to have contacts in the US and not have to remain part of the corrupted Italian state. I do prefer the dynamics of your country because even if there is corruption in every country, in the US if your brain works they always find a way to give you a chance.*

Alberta went on to explain that she speaks with friends in the US that are able to have a home and support themselves doing art, which she said is impossible in Italy. *“People with power and money have very fragile egos”*, she explained, so you have to be good enough to be noticed, but not so good at what you do that you make others look bad. *“Some of the best brains are impeded to work, this is the Italian dynamics and I hate it”* she lamented. She thinks that the best-case scenario would be *“to be paid in America to work in Italy”*, which many of the local hosts working for US institutions abroad are.

#### *i. Florence Has Always Been Full of Strangers*

Alberta, who grew up in Florence, talked about how it is uniquely Florentine to *“put up with strangers”* because Florence has been filled with strangers for centuries. For many years merchants

and traders would come to Florence to buy and sell their goods. In some ways, she sees this current generation of “strangers” or foreign students, as not being that different than centuries ago.

Domenico, a study abroad administrator, shared that foreign students are not really even thought of as students in Florence. He explained that there are many Italian and European students in Florence, who are there to study and who generally keep a low profile. But that US students act much more like tourists. However, he explained, *“Florentines tend to think that anyone that is not Florentine, even me I come from the west of Tuscany, I’m not from Florence so somehow, I can be considered a tourist.”*

Whether locals view US students as students, or tourists, I was surprised that four local hosts thought that Florence is “underutilizing” US students. Domenico sees every person as an opportunity to learn and blames the city of Florence for *“missing the opportunity to engage more with the guests”*. He does not blame US students but rather the city. He thinks each of us has a unique history, and unique story and that *“the good professors, good faculty, good administrators, always start from this”*. He suggested that:

*Other people that like to make simple, to live in a simple dimension, they generalize. They put people and things in categories. You cannot change that. For sure, the impacts of a study abroad teaches a lot. It’s up to the people if they want to learn the lesson or not. Florence is a city that is burned out from tourists and with a specific attitude of not being aware of where the wealth of the city comes from. Florentines sometimes they are not as open as they should to the incredible wealth of opportunities and stories that every day is in the city. It’s their problem.*

Host mother, Benedetta, and I met near a park just north of the city center and she used the park as an example of how the city is not catering to visiting students. She asked me to *“look around, there are few benches, no public bathroom here, it’s a waste”* if the city wants students to integrate, she suggested, *“we need to do more to make these public spaces more usable”*. Likewise, Kirsten, a study abroad administrator, thinks that all of the students in the city are “precious” and that Italians living in the city should not avoid the places with US students go and should make more of an effort to engage.

We spoke about what US institutions are doing to connect with local universities, and she turned it around and asked, *“what are Italians universities doing to connect with US students? It goes both ways”*.

Further, Professor Elena, spoke about how much US students are bringing to the city in terms of employment for people at study abroad organizations and related companies, people who are making a lot of money renting their apartment to US students, or making a living off a restaurant or pub where US students go. She suggests that, *“the city has to do something for them in exchange”*. She and others are advocating for a museum card for students, so that they could see many museums in Florence for free, and also adjustments to the study visa so that students could stay longer or come without a study visa at all.

Professor Elena, and all of the other hosts with whom I spoke work for US or other non-Italian owned study abroad organizations and I wondered how this impacted her position that US students are doing so much for the city and the city is not doing as much as they could *“in exchange”*. I quickly began to question why local universities were not getting in on the action, so to speak. There are a number of US institutions that have partnerships with local Italian universities in Florence, yet all but very few students study abroad through a US based institution or organization. Local hosts had a variety of ideas about why Italian universities have largely stayed out of the business of study abroad in Florence. Study abroad administrator, Enzo, suggested that because local universities teach in Italian, there is no way they could incorporate programs for US students.

Study abroad administrator, Eva, explains because many study abroad programs started in Florence in the 1950's as relatively small operations and have really increased drastically in the last few decades, it would be very difficult for local universities to compete at this point, even if they wanted to. There is so much infrastructure built up around some of the US university programs that have been in Florence for over 60 years, it would be *“almost impossible to catch up”*. Yet, others,

like professor Nicole, think that Italian universities are likely not interested in US students, *“the system is so different, the focus is so different, I think they are probably happy to have US students managed by someone else”*. Unlike US institutions, she went on, *“I don’t think that Italian universities see themselves as a business, they are a school, a place for learning, and US students who aren’t focused on academics, which I think unfortunately may be a majority, wouldn’t do much to add to their institution of learning”*.

This is particularly troubling as it adds support for the idea that not only are US students not typically studying abroad at Italian institutions in Florence, some local hosts think that Italian universities would not be interested in US students because they would not have much to offer. It seems that the negative reputation that US students have developed in Florence, either based on their behavior at night or their ill preparedness for academic work, perpetuates the current study abroad system whereby some faculty see themselves as guests in the US academic system *in Italy*.

#### f) Making Sense of US Students

##### *i. US Student Motivation to Study Abroad in Florence*

So, if as Nicole suggests, US students do not come to Florence to learn, why do they come to Florence? This next section details hosts’ perceptions of US students’ motivation to study abroad in Florence, as well as how hosts make sense of a variety of US student dispositions and behaviors. They also reflect on things that they have learned about US students or the US more generally through their extended contact with US students.

Four hosts suggested that US students flock to Florence because of the “study abroad lite” atmosphere that is created by the sheer number of US students in the city, the number of English speakers, the walkability of the city and its central location in Italy and Europe, as well as the variety of US based programs and organizations operating in the city. Study abroad administrator, Jennifer, explains that *“everything that they want is really catered to them and they don’t really need to put too much effort*



*into busting out of their bubble, learning new things, or meeting new people.” She added the caveat that “it’s the exact opposite of what we want students to experience on a study abroad program”.*

Professor, Rosanna, added that there are so many activities that are tailor made for US students. Even some of the things that might make them stretch outside their comfort zone, like planning travel around Italy or Europe is done for them. *“For example, during the Spring break, students don’t organize themselves, they just buy a package because they want it to be easy.”* More than these companies organizing trip, Professor Everett, thinks it comes down to language, suggesting that *“20 years ago, it was maybe 1 of the restaurants you would find a waiter that was able to help you out in English, now it’s in all 10”.* This gives students a sense of comfort and ease.

Four other local hosts discussed *“heritage seeking”* as a primary motivation for US students studying abroad in Italy. Host moms Augusta and Benedetta both talked about students whom they have hosted who came looking for their roots. Professor Alberta explains that *“they [US students] feel that they belong to this country a little bit.”* Study abroad administrator, Jennifer, explained that though students sometime have Italian ties, they are almost never students with ties to the city of Florence. *“So, while it’s nice and they do appreciate the fact that students do want to come here and learn a little more about their heritage, I don’t think Florentine’s consider their southern [Italian] heritage as their own.”*

Other local hosts, like study abroad administrator, Tony, thinks that friends and targeted marketing are what is driving so many students to Florence. Of course, he suggests, *“Italy is featured in so much cinema and students are attracted to the idea of it, but they want to go where their friends go”.* Tony explained that his organization has a number of regional representatives in different parts of the US who are promoting to students on campus and in the dorms and that these people understand that students want to study abroad with their friends, so they target large groups.

ii. US Diversity & the Student Consumer

Local hosts expressed that something they have learned about the US through their engagement with US students is how diverse the country is. Host mom, Augusta, explained that *“some will discover there is not one culture in America, there are many. It’s very different from New York, California is different. It’s all different. You think America is New York but it’s not really. America is many parts of America. All are very important.”* Host mom, Giuliana, talked about how she and her sons have learned a lot about US sports like American football and lacrosse, two sports that she admits she does not think she would know anything about if she didn’t have US students living in her home.

Economic diversity is also something that many local hosts discussed – the idea that there is a misconception that all US students have money, but that is not necessarily the case. Some hosts noted that students have shared the sacrifices that their families have had to make to send them abroad, and that these students tend to be the ones that travel less on the weekends. Professor Elena mentioned that she thinks for the majority of her students, it is their first time on an airplane when they come to Italy. However, there are other students, as study abroad administrator Federica, explains, who have *“a ton of money and can travel all the time. Their host families say they only see them Monday through Wednesday and then they are gone”*. Host mom, Giuliana, agreed saying that she knows that the students whom she hosts must have money to be able to come to Italy to study, *“what I see is the rich America, not the poor one, those people can’t afford to come to Italy, but I know if I went to the US what I would see would be different than the students who live in my house”*.

Local hosts interpret US students with money in different ways, but Rosanna, suggested that because so many US students who come to Florence come with money to spend, she thinks that local people *“think they are consumers. They see themselves as consumers, people that can spend and that’s it.”* Tony sees this consumer attitude playing out in the classroom as well, where he perceives many US

students have an attitude of “*I pay, I deserve*”. He sees this as an extension of the way students see themselves at their home universities in the US saying:

*Education is too expensive in the US, not to be considered an exchange of something. Which is being given to you in terms of being paid for. That something happens and obviously the relationship between US educators and those that should be educated goes through the fact that you have a massive amount of money involved.*

### *iii. US Student Behavior*

The local perspective on US students’ social presence in the city was discussed in the section on ‘Instances of Dissonance’, so below are examples of how local hosts *interpret* various US student behaviors. In terms of the perceived US student drinking problem, Professor Luigi thinks that students’ behavior is connected to cultural expectations. He explains that, “*for Italians to get too drunk it’s a sense of shame to present yourself*” and for Americans “*you can get drunk and do whatever you want, it’s your life, it’s about freedom, there is almost a sense of pride getting drunk and being on a stage*”.

There seems to be a sense that US students are looking for freedom abroad, implying perhaps that there is a perception that US students do not feel free at home in the US. Further, Luigi’s comments reflect a difference in the collective nature of Italian culture which privileges social connections as opposed to American individualism – the “*it’s my life*” attitude. He also refers to US students as having a desire to be on stage, and perform their drunkenness, perhaps in a way that they feel is socially expected by their peers.

Professor Everett thinks that this dynamic is exacerbated by US students frequenting bars and clubs where only other US students go. Years ago, he explained, these places would have 20 euro all you could drink nights, which encouraged students to overdrink. There are laws that have been put in place now that try to stop this, but overdrinking is still an issue, he thinks, because it is so engrained in US college culture. He thinks if the city did more to shut down the bars that cater to

US students so that students were forced to go outside the city center, where there are more local people, maybe they would be positively influenced by them and they would need to fit in with the young Italian culture, instead of separating themselves so they can do whatever they want.

Interestingly, study abroad administrator Annette shared that when she rides in taxis, often drivers will recognize her US accent and will press her on US students' drinking behavior, saying: *"What is wrong with American kids? Why do they drink like that? Why are they so sad that they feel they need to? That is the Italian mentality. Why do they need to medicate with alcohol?"*. She thinks that there is a common interpretation that US students are depressed and feel the need to lose control with alcohol to escape what is bothering them. However, she explains that every semester she meets with about 100 students one-on-one and the majority of them say that they are not interested in getting drunk or losing control, and many do not engage in this behavior, but *"that's what we see and that's what the host culture sees. That's the problem."*

This overdrinking can lead to police intervention in the city. Tony explains that *"in the morning all the police stations here are packed with people being detained for hours waiting to pay a fine. It happens. More and more frequently"*. Data from the police are shared with Tony regularly and he sees that *"Americans end up in trouble without realizing that they're in trouble"*. Professor Luigi attributes this to a feeling of invincibility that he thinks many US students have while they are studying abroad, *"they think nothing bad is going to happen to them in Florence"* he suggested.

#### *iv. US Women Students*

US women were a primary focus of criticism among local hosts. This could be because across all US study abroad destinations, female students make up close to 70% of the study abroad participant population. So, in terms of sheer numbers, there are more women students than men students studying abroad. However, several hosts talked about the perception of US women

students as loud. Tony explained that *“people complain that American girls are extremely loud, why do they constantly scream? Boys don’t do that”*. He is unsure of why this is but thinks that it may have something to do with *“them wanting to be heard, not wanting to go unperceived”*. He shared a story a friend told him about a group of three US women students on a bus, talking about their personal lives very loudly, and a local Italian confronting them in English by saying *“do you think everyone is interested in sharing in a taste of your private life because you’re screaming”* and it seemed that the young women were not perceiving that.

Besides US women students’ spoken volume, several hosts commented on US women students’ dress, some linking this to stereotypes of US women promiscuity. Tony shared *“you have a misconception of locals thinking of American women as being very easy. Then they see them hanging around half naked because in the US nobody would even comment on how you are dressed”*. He went on to say that he thinks that in the US this is unperceived, US women do not understand how others form stereotypes of them based on how they dress. He sees this as a cycle whereby *“you have the misconception from the beginning, then the stereotype, and then the confirmation of the stereotype from reality.”*

Host mom Giuliana agreed that there is a stereotype of *“racy American girls that like to go around the city undressed”*. She tells the women who stay with her that there are *“lots of stupid persons who follow persons because they’re really undressed”* so they need to be careful when they are out at night. She goes on to say that *“you don’t need to be undressed just because you’re abroad or go to drink too much”*. She further explains that *“girls go out in very short skirts and people look at them. From my point of view, it’s not that beneficial. You need to represent yourself well”*. She does not understand why US women feel the need to have their bodies on constant display.

Host mom Benedetta, went further to make a connection between the way US women students dress, drinking, and incidents of sexual assault. She explains that because they are not

allowed to legally drink the US female students arrive in Italy without much experience and therefore do not know their limit. Because of the way they dress, *“especially in the summer, you can see them from very far away, and maybe they provoke”*. She went on to say that she was trained at a young age, in her home, how to dress to not draw negative attention, and that because she has sons, she trains them that how women dress is not an invitation. But, she explains, not all boys are trained this way, and *“the American girls are naive, we hear often about rape, they trust too easily.”* The host’s words are shared here in order to convey her views literally, the issue of victim blaming for sexual assault is problematized explicitly in chapter 6 and 7.

#### g) Cultural Change

After learning about how local hosts are making sense of US students and their behaviors, I asked local hosts to shift to a broader more longitudinal lens, focusing on how they perceive their culture changing as an effect of US students, tourists, and other outside influences on themselves and their city. Globalization presented as a major theme, as local hosts unpacked how they see globalization as being a primary force in cultural change. Nicole and Jennifer, both of whom were born in the US but have lived in Florence for over 15 years, point to changes in the commercial life of the city. Both expressed that things have become “more international”, with Jennifer pointing to an increase in stores owned by Chinese immigrants. Nicole noted *“international shops, like H&M, Coach, the Apple store, have come in and Florence has lost its own personality. If you go to the old town, there’s still some little artisan shops there, but they are closing. That’s the detriment, I think. That’s the ugly side of all of this.”*

While Nicole sees this as something “ugly”, study abroad administrator, Enzo, sees these changes as a necessary inevitability. He put it this way:

*Can you stop history? You cannot. Can you stop globalization? You can't. You can't fight it. This is what will happen in the future. We have to be open to be more globalized. Think of the migrants that are trying to get into Europe, we're trying to preserve ourselves, but can you try to*

*stop this? You cannot. You can even create walls or whatever you'd like but you won't stop them. People try in every possible age of history, to find the best, to reach the good government, to reach the good quality of life. Sometimes you can hear from Florentines, too many tourists are gathering around the city, it's no longer ours. This is, again, can you stop history? Can you stop any of that? ... We're nothing more than passive change and evolution.*

Many local hosts, including Alberta, described how US students, and tourists more generally have pushed Florentines out of the city center. She lamented the loss of Florentine “*traditional habits*” which she claims, “*can't be accessed anymore because the tourists have taken them*”. She explained that now Florentines live in the hills, and “*look down at the city from the top*” staying away from the mass of tourists because she “*really hates it*”. Alberta described how her mother used to take the car into the city to have her hair done, but this is impossible now, and “*quite a shame*”.

Study abroad administrator, Leda, explained how she thinks US students contribute to this cultural loss saying, “*like every semester we receive so many students that we lose completely what we are*”. She attributes this to local hosts “*wanting to give them what we think is appealing for them, so fast food and things like that. So, we lose the original identity of Florence. I think this is the big risk.*” Tony agreed and added further that the number of “*food places*” in Florence is out of control, but they are required in order to meet the needs of masses of tourists. He said that “*you have to feed them with the typical type of food that they're expecting to eat here, which is pizza, pasta, and the typical. With the cost, you are lowering the quality in terms of what is offered in these places, and it's not authentic, it's just pretending to be*”.

Domenico, and others described life as being “*totally about tourists*”. He shared that his non-Italian friends think that “*it's strange that our life is all for tourists. You can see in the restaurant, you can see in the grocery stores, it's completely different and it changes your way of thinking*”. While host mom Benedetta noted that she thinks that the influx of tourists and businesses to serve them has “*removed the elegance from Florence*”. In the past, she suggests, “*everything was more old-fashioned, more classy, more elegant. The people were more elegantly dressed. They had a kind of certain gentleman, gentlelady behavior. This is fading.*”

While Benedetta and others described a yearning for a past version of their city, others rejected this attitude and think that Florence is not evolving as a city and places too much emphasis on the past. Study abroad administrator, Chiara, who is in her mid-30s thinks that especially in comparison to other European cities, Florence is not *“moving forward”*. It relies on tourism and keeping things the same so that tourists come and get what they expect and that’s it, *“there is no real cultural innovation”*. Likewise, professor Luigi, talked about an airport project in Florence that has been going on for quite some time, but is not moving forward. In speaking of Florentines, of which he is one, he said, *“they think that because they have been living like this for centuries it’s worth the constant work to live like that. There’s a very strong resistance to progress”*.

#### h) Host Perceived Impacts

##### *i. Economic Impact*

I spoke at length with local hosts about what they perceive to be the impact of US students and study abroad programs on themselves and their city. Many expressed that this was difficult to discern because in many ways US visiting students and tourists are difficult to distinguish from one another. However, Professor Alberta suggested that *“American students who come, especially at university level, they also have stolen some of our traditional places, but they leave and love the town differently from the mass tourists”*. Another professor said that she can distinguish between students and tourists by the size of the group and because *“flocks of tourists have this guide with them, with the flag, the microphone”* you can spot them from far away. Taking into consideration the caveat that at times students and tourists can be hard to distinguish from each other, especially when it comes to the perceived impacts of visitors, the section below details the different ways that hosts see themselves as being impacted by this combined group.



In terms of economic impact there were three primary themes that came to the fore. Firstly, hosts emphasized that the influx of US students in Florence employs many people both directly and indirectly. All thirty-one local hosts I interviewed were employed by a US student serving institution or organization – this included study abroad administrators, professors, and host families. Professors in particular discussed the difficulty of finding work at Italian institutions and how US student serving institutions provide them another way to teach and, in some cases, do research. Likewise, study abroad administrators stressed that their jobs are dependent on the presence of US students in Florence. Host families seemed to be much less dependent on US students financially. They indicated that the extra income is nice, but emphasized the other, non-material benefits of hosting US student.

Many agreed that the largest economic impact on the city may come by way of the US students need for housing. Study administrator, Jennifer, explained that: *“Florentine’s have realized that there’s a lot of money to be had renting your house, your apartment, to students. More recently, even tourists. They’ve evolved and hopped on to the wave of AirBNB”*. She went on to say that particularly due to AirBNB study abroad organizations are having a hard time finding housing for their students. Tony reiterated this saying *“Imagine 7,000 students multiplied by a potential number of apartments that you need to have. It’s a fight. 44 institutions fighting for apartments to rent or homestays.”*

Yet while this puts stress on study abroad organizations, Tony shared how he sees the high demand for student housing in Florence changing local people’s lives considerably:

*The economic benefits are undeniable. I know people whose life has changed considerable because just imagine you had a flat, not rentable because it was in a position no Florentine would be keen on renting because of the area. Whereas now, you just you fill it with Ikea furniture. It’s ok. If they break it, it’s cheap. Your life can change because rent is pretty high. It’s pretty high compared to what you can ask of someone else who is coming to ask to rent your flat for four years versus months.*

Beyond housing, there are a number of businesses that have sprung up out of the needs presented by US students. Not including restaurants, bars, and other establishments that in theory serve both US students and tourists alike, there are a number of businesses that have developed specifically for study abroad students. For example, organizations like “Smart Trips” or “Florence for Fun” are tour companies that specialize in European travel, on a shoe string, primarily for US students. Study abroad administrator, Leda, and others expressed frustration with these organizations and said that they try to steer students away from using them. She explained, *“We say to them “please don’t leave your brochure” because we don’t want to advertise those types of trips. We encourage our students to make their own trips. To think about what they want to do and not just book your trip because it’s easier.”* There is a concern amongst many local hosts that these tour providers enable negative behavior, particularly overdrinking. Rosanna, a professor of Italian, agreed that she thinks these trips are not beneficial for students. She said:

*...that’s very bad also for our students because when they go during the weekend they’re always together. I can tell being a teacher of Italian, that they don’t even have the chance of practicing their Italian. Even during the weekend, I would say maybe 1% or 2% of students, they go by themselves. The majority they all go with these organized tours. Where they don’t have to think anything at all.*

In addition to tour companies, there are a number of more peculiar businesses that have developed in response to the US study abroad student market, one being, Study Abroad Portrait providers. While waiting for an interview at a study abroad provider organization, I came across a flyer advertising portrait packages ranging from \$150 - \$500 that included a number of photos of students *“in different iconic places”* around their *“new city”*. I asked study abroad administrator, Leda, about this. She indicated that this is a very new type of business and she does not know yet whether it will take off, but, she said *“they are trying to make money however they can”*.

## *ii. Mutual Learning*

A number of hosts talked about mutual learning or mutual exchange as an outcome of their engagement with US students. Professor Alberta spoke about how students bring their traditions and how she is *“like a sponge”* learning as much from her students as they are learning from her. Further, because of the diversity of the United States and the way that students have grown up in that diversity, she thinks that *“with all this migration from Africa, from East Europe, we have to become different and the Americans can really help us become different and more open”*.

For study abroad administrator, George, local hosts learn about another culture through their engagement with US students. However, he said, *“sometimes they learn negative things about the culture but that’s ok because we are all learning. It’s a learning experience and I think that’s very positive”*. He went on to say how in his position he is always thinking about students learning, but upon further reflection he thinks that local hosts are learning a lot too. Likewise, host families shared that they have grown through learning about the students they host as well as through dealing with some of the issues that they present. A host mom shared that *“the American students have some different problems than our children and we have to deal with that as a family and we grow because of it”*.

Several local hosts commented on how hosting US students makes them see their culture through different eyes and how they see this as a positive impact. Study abroad administrator, Eva, commented on cases in which *“there are many students who are genuine in their desire to learn and to discover and they’re passionate about Florence and the art. They can teach Italians to appreciate the beauty that many of us take for granted day to day”*. Likewise, host mom, Benedetta, offered:

*I think it’s nice they see it [the city of Florence] as I saw it in the beginning. They [students] are really amazed by the old things they see. Sometimes I get pictures from things you’re getting used to. It’s very nice if you have cappuccino faces or some sculptures which you know very well, but you remember your own amazement when you saw them the first time. That is nice to be reminded of that.*

Maria and Elena also shared how they feel being a part of US students' discovery of Florence. Maria remarked that her favorite part of the exchange is learning about new places, restaurants, or events in Florence through her students. Because they are so hungry to discover the city and all it has to offer, she thinks that students are hyper-aware of their surroundings in a way that perhaps locals are not. Elena said that her students make her reflect on things that she's never observed, like *"how is this possible to paint such high ceilings on scaffolds or how much did it cost back in time?"* She says that as an Italian who has studied art history, she may know about minute details of a painting, but perhaps she has lost *"the general beauty or broad observation of the things"* and that her students' questions help her to see things differently.

However, Tony pointed out that along with mutual learning can come mutual negative stereotype reinforcement. He provided the example of US students who come to Italy with a typical *"all romance"* stereotype. He said, *"they want romance and then they find out that the average Italian man is obsessed with sex. Bad surprise."* On the other hand, he points out, Italians are watching US students too. *"The more you will see drunk people or people vomiting in the streets, the more you think Americans over drink."* Yet, he thinks that this is useful in the end, as no one wants the other to believe negative stereotypes, *"so maybe people will work together to try and dispel these myths"*.

### *iii. Impacts on the City*

Local hosts tended to personify the city of Florence. There is a love, respect, and admiration for the city, a sense of pride that is palpable and local hosts seem to be equally interested both in its preservation and its evolution. Hosts held a variety of different views on the impact of the US students on the city – some focusing on benefits, and students "bringing life" to the city, while others focused on the "saturation" of the city with tourists and students that make it difficult for Florentines to live in the city at all. The material impact on the city was also of concern to many,

who talked about US students who “leave trash everywhere” or “sit on 1,000-year-old church steps” and seem oblivious to their environmental impact.

Hosts’ opinions on how the city benefits economically from students and tourists has been well documented in the sections above. However, Catherine summarized it well but expanded upon what she called “cultural contamination” in the city, by saying:

*I see lots of advantages. Economical because of course they bring money, they rent the houses, they shop. Even in the fact that we hire a lot of Italian professors to teach for us so there is also that. The job opportunities and the economic flow. That’s a benefit. Also, cultural contamination it’s a good thing to have foreign people around. You can maybe become friends with them, you can speak the language. It broadens your horizon even if you don’t travel too much and you stay in Florence. If you kind of meet with different people, it’s always a benefit. I believe in cultural contamination, so I also think that’s a good thing.*

Not putting in the terms of “cultural contamination” per se, Augusta and George both talked about how cultural mixing is a benefit to the city, and that the youthfulness of student visitors helps to keep “an old city alive”. Augusts shared that she thinks that having so many international young people in the city makes her children excited to live there, they think that the city is cosmopolitan because there are so many young people from different parts of the world who come there. George thinks that “culturally, students keep things fresh. You could fall into a very stacked mind frame but it’s hard to do that when lots and lots of people are coming to visit your city and learn from your culture”.

Further, professor Everett, shared that he thinks the prominence of young people in the city keep it “alive and happy”.

Others, however, expressed concern with the “saturation” of tourists and visiting students in the city. Annette suggested that this saturation may influence the outcomes of this study, saying:

*I think we’re saturated. I think it’s too much. I would say that probably in places where there’s one or two programs, it would be better to ask one of those programs what those Americans do for them. I think here we’re a saturated market. I think that we’re tolerated in a sense. I think there’s been so much globalization and Americanization that it’s made it not even all that fascinating or exotic anymore. Oh god those Americans. That’s my impression.*

Her colleague, Eva, referred to Florence as “the pizza of study abroad” everyone has had pizza, but you always come back for more. She thinks that Florence will continue to attract more and more US students each year. Enzo, who is involved in a country-wide organization that tracks study abroad participation shared that at the beginning of his tenure, two years ago, *“there were 148 study abroad programs in Italy, there are now 161”*. He said that a city the size of Rome is not so compact, so you don’t feel the saturation as much, but Florence has a small historic center where most of these programs are based, and so for someone living in the city center, Lorenza commented *“it’s a sort of assault”*. She described how the presence of so many US students and foreign tourists make it impossible to live life in the city.

Over half of all host participants interviewed commented on how difficult it is for Florentines to live in the historic city center and how this migration of Florentines out of the city has impacted both them and the city itself. Leda explained that many Italian families have an apartment in the city and maybe a home in “the hills” outside of Florence, so it just makes a lot more economic sense to rent the apartment in the city for a lot of money even though it means changing their lifestyle. Leda suggested that even if they wanted to live in the city center apartment they may not feel safe because *“when you have the bars and the clubs open till 3 in the morning you can’t really sleep if you have a real job, a 9 to 5 job, it’s really hard to do that living in center”*.

Likewise, several hosts, including study abroad administrator Brittany, mentioned that the pedestrianization of the city center, which she thinks was done primarily for tourists’ benefit, has made it difficult for Italian families to live in the city center. She said, *“older families can’t live there anymore. They can’t park their vehicles. If you think about it even 20 years ago, cars were allowed to go through and then they stopped that. It’s not convenient to live in center anymore for various reasons.”* Ingrid, who lives outside the city center says that it’s a running joke with her friends and family that they “go into Florence”

on Saturday. Even though they technically live in Florence *“it doesn’t feel like it because the city center really isn’t ours”*.

Two hosts claimed that Florence has become *“a Disneyworld version of itself”* while another host claimed that *“it’s becoming like a museum in the city center”*. Both similarly engendering the idea of the city center not being real, or authentic, in some way and that inauthenticity may be linked to the saturation of tourists and students. Augusta noticed that there are a lot of Americans buying houses in Florence, and opening up businesses, like gyms that cater to US students. She also has noticed a rise in what she called *“illegal immigration”* such that *“at a certain point only immigrants and Americans would live in the center”*. Further, Maria suggested that while there used to be a tourist season, in May and June, now *“every season is tourist season. Between them and all of the US students you can’t move in the city center, who would ever want to live there?”* Professor Alberta, perhaps described these changes in particularly strong terms, saying:

*The city is now all that is left. The city center is a dismal world. It’s a machine. I don’t think you can change it. The fear is who is going to run it. More and more Chinese people are buying houses and shops. Where are we going now? We are colonized. That’s why we are out of the town.*

She went on to explain how she feels that outsiders – including US students, have colonized her city. When pushed to further unpack her feelings on colonization, she went on to say that a variety of different outsiders have come to the city *“to take”* – they take up space, time, and attention, so much so that any Italian that lives in the city likely does something to *“serve them”*. With every season now tourist season, local hosts are very concerned about the material degradation of their city. Professor Alberta lamented that the taxes in Florence are some of the highest in Italy, *“because students come here to have fun and destroy it”*. When asked what makes her think that students are being destructive in the city she said:

*These are unreplaceable culture values; you can’t come here and destroy them. So, no Italian would do it ok, no Italian would do it. This is the difference. An Italian can be as drunk as*

*you want but nobody would destroy a sculpture. This link we have with these objects, they are our soul, really, if you harm one of my monuments, also because of my art conservation background, it's like you punched me in the face. I don't want people to come and punch me in the face. This is a little bit, the respect because unfortunately people take it as a Disney world. It should be better explained to students that this isn't Disneyland.*

Jennifer and others link at least some of this material degradation to local politics. She explained that every store front that closes becomes a restaurant and they all get liquor licenses, which she sees as wanting to take advantage of the drunk American stereotype. She thinks if there were a cap on liquor licenses that it might make a positive difference. But further, she does not think that students have the same understanding of cultural preservation as Italians. She explains that, *“by sitting and eating in a place on the steps of a church that is 800 years old and is sandstone and if you touch it, it starts melting away, pigeons come because you have food.”*

Professor Carmella echoed these sentiments describing her displeasure for how US students behave around churches and other monuments in the city. *“Many of them don't have respect for our monuments, or streets, or gardens”* she explained, *“if you walk around sometimes, especially in the early morning, you see the sight of the students. Many of our bars are only for American students, many restaurants have English menus, and so the city tries to help the students to connect with them in this way.”* She went on to say how she thinks it would be better if US students “walked in our direction” meaning integrated into Italian society as opposed to Italian society catering to them. She, and others, said that they do not like to see students sitting on the steps of churches or laying down in parks or gardens, as she sees this as very disrespectful.

Ingrid and Lorenza both drew my attention to the amount of trash that is generated by the thousands of students who are constantly moving in and out of apartments in the city center. Ingrid shared that the department that is responsible for trash collection will tell her and her colleagues that their US students *“leave trash around the city sometimes or it's not brought to the right bin, they leave it by the door”*. Lorenza talked about how this can lead to resentment from local neighbors when *“students come*



*and they leave the trash on the door, outside the door, they do not know how to deal with the things, so the neighbors end up cleaning it up”.*

## i) Overarching Discursive Factors

### *i. Politics of Language*

While local hosts expressed both negative and positive outcomes of the presence of US students in Florence in the section above, this section will focus on factors that influence those interactions, again as perceived by local hosts. These overarching discursive factors include the politics of language, students’ choice of accommodation, as well as a variety of program design choices. Additionally, US imperialism and global capitalism will also be discussed as overarching discursive factors influencing the US student/local host encounter.

More than half of local host participants discussed how the language barrier between US students and many locals limits the nature, and depth, of their interactions. While the existence of the language barrier is not contested by local hosts, who is to blame for this is contested. Some place the blame on US students, who they see as not making an effort to speak Italian. Study abroad administrator, Brittany, shared that *“most students do try to attempt it but then I’ve noticed, we have a little grocery store at the back of the school, I’ll go in at the end of the semester and they’re still ordering their turkey sandwich and not even making an attempt to say it in Italian.”*

Nicole thinks that at least part of this is due to *“US students isolating themselves within monolingual English-speaking groups”* to which she asks, *“how would they ever learn Italian that way”*? Likewise, Tony thinks that US students living with other US students in apartments is a huge impediment to English language learning. He said that 10 years ago his organization tried to make living in a homestay mandatory *“for the purpose of language learning”* but there was intense resistance from students

who said they did not want to learn Italian. They shared with Tony that even without taking any Italian language classes, *“they knew they could survive in Florence, and that was enough”*.

Others blame students’ home institution for not placing enough emphasis on the importance of language learning. Kirsten and Maria both discussed how they see students disincentivized to study language at home and how that translates to their experience in Italy. Kirsten shared that many students she works with say that there is no point in taking Italian in Italy because their home institution does not offer Italian so they will not get academic credit, or there is no language requirement for their major, so it would be a waste of time. Maria added that she thinks there is a lack of understanding amongst US students about the importance of language in communication. She noted that many of the students she works with are Communications majors and they do not seem to think that language is that important to communication.

Even for students who do appreciate the importance of language, some hosts blame locals’ use of English as a “crutch” for non-Italian speaking students. Professor Alberta suggested that, *“everybody especially in the shops and in the super market, everywhere that there are tourists, they all speak English at least, if not also German and Chinese. For US students, there is no need to learn Italian.”* Further, she suggests, there is an intense fear amongst students *“of not being perfect”*. She said, *“US students are more like, this is my theater, if I’m not perfect I don’t come out of this mask.”* Alberta thinks that US students are afraid of not being in control, and when you are speaking someone else’s language, you are not in a position of power. By this I think she means that when you are not able to speak in your native language, there is always a bit of hesitance around whether you are expressing yourself clearly, and the this leaves you vulnerable – you give up power to the person whose language you are speaking. Enzo shared that he once had a student ask him, why Italians speak only in Italian to which he responded, *“because*

*we are in Italy*". He thinks that this is why students stay within the city center, *"because they don't have to make an effort, everyone speaks to them in their language"*.

Professor Everett said that he has seen many of his students make an effort to speak Italian in the streets, as at his institution taking an Italian class while studying abroad in Italy is mandatory. Yet he sees many people working in restaurant and shops speaking English to students who are attempting to speak in Italian. *"I think it's about money"* he suggested, *"time is money, right? If you can spend one-minute communicating about what a customer needs in English, instead of 5 minutes in Italian, why wouldn't you."* He thinks that Italians should be speaking to US students in Italian in order to help them integrate better.

#### *ii. Students' Choice of Accommodation*

Many local hosts commented on how students who choose to live with a local family integrate into Italian society much faster, use Italian language more often, and spend less time in the American bubble. Study abroad administrator, Eva, thinks that students living with host families is essential for two reasons, the first is help acclimating to local culture. Students are in Florence for such a short period of time that they really need to "hit the ground running" in terms of their cultural learning and a host family can help with that. Secondly, she thinks that safety is another reason that students should be living with host families. *"You can bet that if students, if something is wrong with a student we know right away because host families act as a safety net"* she said.

However, despite these benefits, hosts perceive an overall resistance to living with host families. There are some study abroad organizations that require home stays, but very few. Of those that do not require it, representatives from those organizations estimated that fewer than 10% of students choose homestays. There are different opinions on why this might be, but some include; students not wanting to be separated from a big group of friends that they came with to Italy, as

home stays cannot typically accommodate more than one or two visiting students at a time. One host suggested that students think that living with a host family will be *“like moving back in with mom and dad”*, they are afraid that they will lose their sense of freedom. Others are intimidated by the idea that their host family may not be fluent in English.

There are challenges of administering a home stay program that study abroad administrators and one host mother indicated as well. Tony described some of the challenges of working with host families from his perspective, saying *“home stay is a very long process because you have to select a family to fit with them, to meet with them, to make sure they really are the ones that want to do that, not just for money”*. Chiara suggested that despite the benefits, administering a home stay program does involve managing another set of relationships with which there can be conflict. And host mother, Benedetta, said that often they do not learn which student will be staying with them until a few days before arrival which makes it difficult to prepare.

### *iii. Program Design Choices*

In addition to students' choice of accommodation local hosts identified a number of program design elements that act as overarching discursive factors of their engagement with US students, including pre-departure preparation, length of stay, participant selection, and program developers themselves. Domenico discussed how pre-departure orientations on US campuses have become an exercise in risk management. He thinks that *“orientation now is an administrative process that consists of a lot of waivers, it's all about liability, schools don't want to be sued”*. He thinks that this is fine but asks, *“where is the real orientation, the one that prepares students to live in another culture?”*

Professor Rosanna suggests that:

*...when they stay, our students, it's short term. I remember when I started a lot of students stayed for two semesters which was, I used to say one plus one makes three, not two, because*

*in the second semester you learn twice as much as in the first semester according to me. Now everything is so short we don't have students that stay two semesters. According to me they just use the town, the city.*

Nicole thinks that this short-term program orientation impacts US students' "courage" to interact with Italians. She said that "*especially the ones that are here just for the summer or short term*", they are very busy with intensive coursework and spend so much time with their classmates that they may not have time to be involved in other things. She has seen that Masters students, or even those undergraduates who stay for two semesters, are much more involved with locals.

Francesca shared a saying, "*I always say, one plus one equals three, because students who stay for two semesters instead of one get that much more out of the experience.*" Yet, the number of students who stay for a semester, let alone two, is very low – with more students doing short term summer programs.

Professor Everett thinks that fewer students are staying for longer periods of time due to financial reasons. His students have shared with him that they can gain more credits at home for less money, "*and many of them are already in debt*" so they want an international experience, "*but are not really thinking about how staying longer could be beneficial for them*".

Another area of disagreement amongst local hosts was that of whether or not study abroad should be for everyone. Some hosts think that some of the negative impacts of study abroad programs on Florence are born from the fact that programs are not very selective. Annette put it this way:

*Do I think that every student should go study abroad? Absolutely not. I even talk about that from a mental health perspective. I think that students are much more delicate now. I don't know what that is, there's a lot of theories, helicopter parents. I think it's not an easy experience. It's challenging. You have to have a sense of humor, you have to be relaxed, easy going. Resilient and some people aren't.*

She went on to say that she thinks that study abroad administrators need to better understand students' motivation for studying abroad in Florence, "*Do you like art history? Do you like*

*Italian language?*” If not, she thinks that they are communicating that they are part of the party abroad crowd, which can be detrimental both for the local community and for the student. She thinks in the end it would be “cost saving” as *“we do have to send students home, or they choose to go home, they end up losing tuition”*. Interestingly she shared that *“it’s so taboo within study abroad circles to ever suggest that someone shouldn’t study abroad...If you hadn’t told me you were going to interview a bunch of places, I would’ve stayed quiet on that.”*

Part of the reason that suggesting that not everyone should study abroad is taboo is likely in part due to the fact that, particularly in Florence, it is responsible for such a large economic impact. *“Everyone wants a piece of the pie”* Domenico suggests, and because of that programs vary widely in terms of the quality of education that they offer. Domenico shared an example of a group of students who *“came from an agency and the agency wouldn’t care about anything but making money. The students would arrive here, and they won’t do anything.”* For him, it was very frustrating, and he hated exposing his faculty to the frustration. Professor Luigi went further to say that *“you have a lot of schools in Florence, some of them are more serious and some of them are very superficial. The ones that are superficial they just give students what they want, a fake experience.”*

Leda walked me through a thought experiment where she imagined what study abroad would look like in Florence if there were fewer students, and half or so spoke Italian. *“They could actually form relationships with local people, immerse themselves in that way”* she suggested, and that if they have taken the time to learn the language of course they would learn the culture. She thinks that it would be beneficial both to students and to the local community, but *“not for the people that want to make money off of having a lot of students here”*. Even at her organization, she imagines that the staff would be reduced, and both administrators and professors would lose their jobs. So, she thinks, *“it’s quite political and complicated”*.

Domenico thinks that a good start would be for US universities and study abroad organizations in Florence to “*focus less on business and more on collaboration*”. He went on to say:

*I think we really, if host institutions will work more closely together, taking less care of business in terms of just making money, but being more really focused on the experience and the quality of the experience, which includes the relations between expectations that students develop and the actual experience, I think that the final experience of the students will be...students and all the people, the faculty that work with them will be greater.*

This Florence based case brought to light several aspects of the study abroad encounter from intentional host perspectives. The examples included in the beginning of this chapter suggest that there are a number of factors that motivate hosts to engage with US students. While having had positive prior international experiences and/or having been new to the city themselves motivated many, several hosts shared that it is difficult to find similar work at Italian institutions. Hosts described a variety of ways that they seek to educatively engage US students – local faculty shared challenges that they encounter in doing so, namely the ill preparedness of US students for what they see as university level work. Three local hosts referred specifically to Florence as a city that is “saturated” with US students and even more so with tourists, which has pushed many locals to live outside the city center and those who remain work in sectors dedicated to “serving” US students. There are concerns regarding US students’ behavior, especially at night, when some lamented that they take over the city center. This is exacerbated by the fact that very few US students try to speak in Italian and/or engage with local peers. Others, however, feel that the city of Florence is not doing enough to welcome students to the city and that both sides are to blame for a lack of mutual engagement. The chapter to follow traces across this case and the Costa Rica case to determine and analyze comparative findings.

## CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The two preceding chapters presented data from two individual case studies involving a total of 57 interviews, 26 in San Jose, Costa Rica and 31 in Florence, Italy. Each chapter was intended to provide a descriptive case focused on more fully understanding the experiences and perspectives of intentional hosts in regard to the study abroad encounter and their contribution to producing the global classroom. In line with the comparative case study method, this chapter traces across the two cases, using my research questions as a way to organize a comparative analysis.

In some ways the San Jose and Florence cases are similar in that both sites receive a relatively large number of US students each year, both ranking in the top 10 study abroad destinations for US students. Both cities have intentional hosts – local study abroad administrators, instructors, staff, and host families who engage with US students. Yet, the two cases are quite different as well – in many ways that became clear to me during and after my field work. In terms of the study design, as outlined in the Methods Chapter, there was a significant difference in the type of programs by which my participants were employed. In San Jose, all study participants were affiliated with one of two local institutions, that primarily serve local students, and also have English-medium study abroad programs for non-local students. While in Florence, all study participants were affiliated with US (or foreign) based organizations that provided primarily, or in most cases, exclusively, study abroad programs for US and other international students.

In addition, Costa Rica and Italy are quite different geographically, historically, culturally, linguistically, and economically. Costa Rica being much closer geographically to the United States and known as one of the safest and most stable countries in Latin America with a steady increase in tourism, and Italy being centrally located in Europe. The historical relationships between Costa Rica, Italy, and the United States, no doubt influence the engagement between US students and their local



hosts in those countries. Yet, despite these differences in context, there were a number of themes across research questions that presented in both cases. These similarities in themes provide meaningful insight into the experiences of intentional hosts *across* sites. This is important in that it suggests some commonality in the experiences of intentional study abroad hosts. Likewise, there were areas of thematic divergence in the findings across research questions which suggest that differences in context play a significant role in the experiences of hosts. Below is a chart summarizing themes across sites, many of which will be analyzed in this chapter:

*Table 7: Comparative Themes Organized by Research Questions*

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Both Cases</b>	<b>San Jose (Only)</b>	<b>Florence (Only)</b>
<i>1. What motivates intentional hosts to engage with US study abroad students?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive prior international experiences</li> <li>• Economic benefits (but not to be overstated)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunity to learn or improve English for self or family</li> <li>• It's like having kids again (aging host moms)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty of getting a job at an Italian university</li> <li>• Being new to Florence once too</li> </ul>
<i>2. In what ways do intentional hosts engage with US study abroad students?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Host mothers through cultural guidance and language education at home</li> <li>• Study abroad administrators attempt to create programming to immerse students in community</li> <li>• Care and personal connection, keeping in touch</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Host moms teach US students how to live as part of a family</li> <li>• Faculty engage in research collaborations with US students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faculty struggle to engage as US students are often ill-prepared, distracted, or absent</li> </ul>

<p>3. <i>How do intentional hosts make sense of that engagement?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little engagement between US students and locals – lack of interest (US student bubble)</li> <li>• Lack of Spanish/Italian language skills or effort shows lack of respect for hosts</li> <li>• US students overdrinking because of depression</li> <li>• US students with money travel on weekends and don't get to know locals</li> <li>• US is a diverse place</li> <li>• US students lack pre-departure preparation – have unrealistic expectations</li> <li>• US women students are perceived to dress inappropriately and cause trouble</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Costa Rica does not have 'US style' patriotism, is much more outward facing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• US students don't want to live with host families</li> <li>• US students and tourists taking over city center, uninhabitable by locals</li> <li>• US women students do not know when men are pretending to be Italian, get themselves in trouble</li> </ul>
<p>4. <i>What do intentional hosts see as outcomes of that engagement?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural changes – Americanization and/or globalization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More Costa Ricans interested in study abroad</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Locals can no longer live in city center</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rising prices for all</li> <li>• Personal connections and cultural learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased neighborhood security</li> <li>• Increased access to “the global”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive economic impact – renting apartments, teaching, restaurants, tour companies</li> </ul>
<p>5. <i>What, if any, overarching factors or discourses influence the engagement between intentional hosts and US study abroad students?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Politics of language</li> <li>• Foreign (US) economic and cultural imperialism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ubiquity of US cultural presence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program design choices</li> <li>• Student choice of accommodation</li> </ul>

Research Question #1 – Why?

***What motivates intentional hosts to engage with US study abroad students?***

In both cases a primary motivating factor, across host types, for choosing to engage with US students was having had positive prior international experiences. Hosts in Costa Rica were highly mobile, most of them having traveled, many to the United States. Likewise, amongst hosts in Italy, more than half reported having some kind of positive international experience. One study abroad administrator was a nanny to a US family in New Jersey, while other received their PhDs elsewhere in Europe. Amongst those who were educated outside of Costa Rica and Italy respectively, many pointed to reciprocity as a motivator. For example, Karla, a professor of Spanish in San Jose, studied French in France and had such a positive experience that she came back to Costa Rica and decided that she wanted to teach her native language to non-Spanish speaking students who study abroad in Costa Rica.

Both Costa Rican and Italian hosts identified economic benefit as a motivating factor – as all intentional host types benefit economically from the presence of US study abroad students.

However, the way that this motivation was framed was different in the two cases. In Florence, study abroad administrators and local faculty described their jobs as being obsolete without the presence of US students in Florence, because they are working for US-based study abroad institutions in Florence. Further, something that was brought up in the Italian case that was not in the Costa Rican case is the difficulty of finding academic jobs at local, Italian, universities. Because Costa Rican faculty were already working at a Costa Rican university that served both local and international study abroad student this was a moot point.

An interesting similarity was that in both cases study abroad administrators spoke about how they perceived economic benefit as a primary motivator for host families, but the host mothers themselves did not identify this as a primary motivation for them. In San Jose, one host mother described how the money she makes from hosting students gets immediately invested in things that US students require, like faster internet, more electricity, and water. And likewise, in Florence, a host mother said that while the extra income is nice, “there are much easier ways to earn a second income”. So, what accounts for the discrepancy is study abroad administrator and host mother narratives regarding the importance of economic benefit as a motivating factor?

Firstly, there may be a social stigma around the discussion of money – especially with someone, like me, whom host mothers did not know well. Study abroad administrators may have felt more comfortable to talk about someone else’s financial motivation, as opposed to their own. It is also possible that the economic benefit of hosting students is thought of as implied, so host families did not think to bring it up. Further, study abroad administrators could have an inflated sense of how important making extra money is to host families and may not fully understand the costs involved in hosting students.

The three other motivating factors were not shared across cases. In Italy, having once been new to the city and wanted to help visiting students acclimate was a motivating factor for many of the intentional hosts who were born outside of Florence and have since moved there. This included a few women who were born in the US, came to Florence to study and who never left. While they have been in Florence for over 10 years, and most for over 20 years, and so for the purposes of the study were considered “local” there was not the same population of non-Costa Rican-born hosts. Perhaps if there were, they would have shared a similar sentiment. However, San Jose is quite a different city in that, as described by study participants, it is very welcoming to outsiders. Whereas in Florence, there is a common attitude that anyone who is not Florentine is an outsider. So, this is a natural catalyst for those who have come to Florence from the outside and acclimated to help others do the same.

In Costa Rica, study abroad administrators, faculty, and host families all identified an interest in practicing their English as a motivator for working with US students. Study Abroad Administrators in particular talked about how their English language skills played a large role in them gaining the jobs that they have and that a love of English is required for the work. Host mothers identified language learning for themselves and their families as a motivator. Another difference, in terms of host families included in the study from San Jose and Florence, is that most host mothers in San Jose were older and had adult children, so they identified hosting US students as “like having kids again”. Many of them enjoyed this dynamic and the life and youth that was brought back to their house. Whereas in Florence, most of the host mothers interviewed still had young children at home, so they were motivated by the exposure their children were getting to English and US culture.

Research Question #2 – How?

**In what ways do intentional hosts engage with US study abroad students?**

This research question is addressed with data in the *Methods of Educative Engagement*, *Instances of Harmony*, and *Instances of Dissonance* sections of each case study. The ways in which intentional hosts engage with US study abroad students, varied widely by host type. Study abroad administrators, both in San Jose and in Florence, made the fewest references to seeing themselves as part of the educative process for US student abroad students. While none of them identified these activities as such, study abroad administrators across organizations are typically responsible for organizing on-site orientations, which certainly serve an important educative purpose. Yet, there was only one study abroad administrator, in the San Jose case, who identified herself as a teacher – but not of US study abroad students, but rather of her campus community.

This administrator, Olga, spoke at length about her role in educating her university and the wider community about the benefits of international education. What was particularly striking about this was the similarities between the challenges that she faces as an international educator in San Jose and the challenges faced by study abroad administrators at many higher education institutions in the United States, despite quite different institutional contexts. Likewise, a cafeteria worker at the same institution, Maria, quickly and easily identified herself as a teacher of US students, sharing how she helps them understand the local currency and how to order different types of food. Both instances are examples of educative engagement that fell outside of more traditional forms of formal, in-classroom education of US students.

These types of examples were absent in the Florence case, likely because of the difference in institutional structure. Olga and Maria in San Jose both work for a local Costa Rican university where international programs are a very small part of the university's operation and therefore there are many faculty and staff who may need to be convinced of the benefits of international education. Whereas, in Florence, all study participants worked for institutions whose primary focus is

international education, namely the hosting of study abroad students, and therefore, at least in theory, all faculty and administrators are intimately involved in international education.

Beside study abroad administrators, host mothers also played an important role in the educative process for visiting US students and their interactions also took place outside of a traditional classroom setting. The ways in which host mothers described how they play a role in the educative process for US students was slightly different in the San Jose and Florence cases. In San Jose, host mothers emphasized their role in learning language, citing examples of the ways that they help students better understand and speak Spanish while in their home. These examples were noticeably absent from the Florence case, perhaps because, as Italian host moms indicated, the Italian language level of the students that live in their home is often so low that the family speaks in English at home.

Italian host moms cited more discussions around Italian history and culture, particularly as it related to the city of Florence. Whereas in San Jose, none of the host moms who were interviewed discussed talking to students about the history of the city of San Jose, despite its equally rich history. In both cases, host mothers identified themselves as cultural guides, helping the students who stay with them better understand the local culture. A strong theme that bridged both cases was host mothers approaching educating visiting US students in the same ways they do their own children. This manifested itself through conversation about what it means to be part of a family, what it means to respect people, and show compassion. Given that many of the US students these families host stay with them for 15 weeks or less, it was surprising just how much host mothers attempt to integrate them into their family and use many of the same modes of educative engagement that they do with their own children.

Lastly, more traditional modes of educative engagement were discussed by local faculty members in San Jose and Florence. While professors in San Jose focused on how they help students make intellectual connections and, in some cases, even involve them in their research, professors in Florence focused on the challenges that they face in educative engagement with US students. Italian faculty overwhelmingly agreed, with few exceptions, that they see the US students that they teach as being unprepared. Faculty working at different institutions in Italy talked about how they perceive US students as struggling to understand the chronology of global history, as well as their lack of knowledge of common facts. One professor attributed this to cell phones, which in addition to lamenting what a distraction they are in the classroom, also argued that having access to any fact you need at your fingertips disincentivizes students from memorizing anything. Whereas another faculty member stated that he sees US students as being trained as problem solvers, as opposed to fact memorizers.

Among local professors in Florence there was a great deal of comparison to the US and Italian systems of education, and much analysis as to how these differences lead to a kind of mismatch in educative engagement in the study abroad classroom. One study abroad administrator, who was educated in Italy, said that US study abroad students are performing academically at a similar level to Italian students in high school. Another faculty member said that US students expect to be “spoon fed” and that all of these things present challenges in the classroom that local faculty must overcome. Study abroad administrator, Tony, who is in charge of hiring faculty at his institution said that he expects that local faculty will accommodate US students’ expectations and will teach at their level, using methods that they are comfortable with. He suggested that, for example, it is very typical for Italian faculty to give lectures, but US students do not respond well to this, so he encourages his faculty to use other methods.



There are a number of possible explanations for the differences in how Costa Rican and Italian faculty responded to questions regarding educative engagement. One explanation, again, goes back to the difference in institutional type. In the Costa Rican case, most faculty taught both US and local students, some even taught both groups of students in the same classroom. This mixing of students may incentivize US students to adapt to their surroundings, looking for context clues from local students as to how to engage in the classroom. Also, because in most cases Costa Rican faculty were affiliated with only one local institution, their work looked more similar to that of a tenure-track faculty member in the US, and therefore they may have the stability to be able to connect with students in different ways, like the Costa Rican faculty member who has co-authored with a number of visiting US students. Many of the faculty members interviewed in Florence, teach for multiple study abroad organizations at once, which may lead to burnout as suggested by the focus on challenges to educative engagement as opposed to methods.

Beyond methods of educative engagement, local hosts and US students are engaging with each other in less formal and more organic ways. The sections on *Instances of Harmony* and *Instances of Dissonance* in each case study provide examples of such engagement. Something common shared across all instances of harmony described by hosts in San Jose and Florence was the centrality of care. Host mothers in particular shared many stories both of how they care for students and how students have cared for them and their families. In Italy, a host mom recounted helping one of her host daughters through a challenging time with a boyfriend back at home, and in Costa Rica a host mom told the story of how one of her host daughters extended her stay in Costa Rica, beyond her program, so that she could help the host mom recover from an injury.

These instances of care lead to personal connections that span generations, as host moms in both cases shared how they have had students come back to visit them year after year, or their own children who are now living abroad keep in close contact with former host students. Something

particularly poignant here is that host families are the primary site of instances of harmony within these two cases. And, unfortunately, particularly in the Italian case but across study abroad programs spanning the globe, staying with a host family is an increasingly rare experience for US students.

Likewise, I spoke with staff, in both cases, who facilitate formalized community engagement, either through service learning, volunteering, or internships, and while there were some instances of personal connection that were shared between these hosts and US students, many lamented that very few students take advantage of these opportunities, particularly in Florence. In Costa Rica, a volunteer coordinator I spoke to talked about how the language barrier between US students and local communities severely limits the potential for personal connection and that in some cases it leads to further stereotype reinforcement. So, while instances of harmony and personal connection, the kind that international educators likely envision when we think of cross-cultural exchange and mutual understanding, were shared by hosts, it is important to note that these instances took place primarily within host family and community settings.

Instances of dissonance and points where hosts found engagement to be challenging were also shared, albeit with the caveat from most hosts that instances of harmony outweigh instances of dissonance. In both San Jose and Florence, study abroad administrators, faculty, and host families struggled the most with US students isolating themselves with one another. Even in San Jose, where at one of the institutions US students are integrated into mostly mixed (local and international) classrooms, there were issues of integration. One administrator in Costa Rica explained that she thinks Costa Rican students are not interested in making US friends, while another said that she thinks that they are, but are unsure how to approach them. In Florence, study abroad administrators, faculty, and host families alike overwhelmingly agreed that they do not see US students and local

students engaging with each other. They explained that US students maintain, what they called an “American bubble” which includes their classrooms, spaces, and travel groups in particular.

The intersection of nightlife, drinking, and relationships as points of dissonance and frustration were shared across both cases. One major difference being the perceived isolation of US student bars and clubs in Florence – many people I interviewed quickly identified three or four bars that they believe to serve US students almost exclusively, whereas similar types of bars were not identified in San Jose. Students overdrinking was a major cause for concern, especially by study abroad administrators and host families – both of whom shared a number of stories that centered around a student getting drunk and causing harm or damage to people or property. Discussed in more detail in the “making sense” section to follow, hosts identified US women students perceived “inappropriate dress” as a point of dissonance or cause for concern. Typically framed in the context of their personal safety, more than half of the hosts I interviewed talked about female students wearing short shorts or skirts or low-cut shirts, and how this is interpreted as culturally inappropriate. Hosts discussed how in both Costa Rica and Italy, if a woman dresses this way she is trying to communicate “something” and that they think that often US women students do not fully understand how they are being perceived.

This may be one of the most complex themes that came up across interviews, because there are a number of factors at play. Particularly within interviews where topics such as sexual assault were brought up, there was more comfort in blaming the victim (woman student) than there would be in today’s Title IX climate on most US campuses. Some hosts walked me through a logic that went: US female students choose to dress provocatively, they attract negative attention, and then they get taken advantage of, therefore – US women students should dress in a culturally appropriate manner and they could avoid these negative situations. While, one host mother, in Italy, did explain

that she is trying to raise her sons to understand that how a woman dresses is “never an invitation” the vast majority of hosts I interviewed framed this as a problem of choice – US women students making poor choices, when it comes to their dress, that gives them a poor reputation in the community.

While knowing how hosts feel about these types of situations is helpful, as more often than not they are the ones triaging these situations abroad. However, the policing of US women’s dress or sexuality is problematic for a number of reasons. While cultural sensitivity is important and shows cultural humility, it takes a different form when it comes at the expense of agency, particularly for women students. Disproportionally across both cases, local hosts were critical of US women’s dress and social behavior while very little, if anything, was said about US men students. Local hosts can and should shift the onus on instances of sexual harassment and assaults away from US women students and towards local men and should take responsibility for the toxic masculinity that exists in both cultures (as well as in the US).

Research Question #3 – Making Sense

**How do intentional hosts make sense of their engagement with US students?**

This research question is addressed in two ways within the case study data chapters – the first is *Making Sense of Self* through local hosts’ reflections on how their engagement with US students makes them feel differently (or not) about themselves, their culture, and communities. The second is through *Making Sense of US Students* by better understanding how local hosts make meaning of US students’ actions and behaviors and also what they have learned through this engagement. Starting with the former, hosts’ reflections on themselves typically presented as an exercise on realizations they have made about their culture and community through contrasting it to what they perceive to be US culture.

In Costa Rica, hosts talked about things like staying geographically close to family as being important culturally in a way that they do not perceive among Americans. Two study abroad administrators talked about how, unless you are married, you typically live with your family and so a Costa Rican would be embarrassed to exhibit poor behavior because of these close familial ties. Several hosts talked about being very indirect in their verbal communication, which is something that they see as contrasting to US student's more direct nature. Likewise, they see US students as typically much more punctual than Costa Ricans. Further, they talked about Costa Ricans being typically risk averse, whereas they see US students as being risk takers or even risk seekers. In many cases, hosts framed their difference from US culture as a deficit. For example, in terms of being direct and punctual, several hosts talked about how working with US students has made them realize that these things are a "problem" and have tried to "correct them".

In Italy, hosts talked about how they perceive US style of dress and self-maintenance to be quite different, in that US students tend to dress very casually and not take their appearance very seriously. Several hosts talked about Italians as being more reserved in public in comparison to people from the United States, a number of hosts citing examples of being able to pick out a group of US students from a crowd by volume alone. Likewise, they talked about there being a very different culture around drinking alcohol in Italy, which is highlighted in contrast to the problem of US students overdrinking. While the Italian study participants did not frame any of their cultural attributes as deficits in the way that some Costa Ricans did, some were quite critical of the city of Florence and its treatment of US students. There was a surprising theme of the city "underutilizing US students" and related suggestion that the city should be doing more to "give back" to students.

I think this may be related to an important difference in how Costa Rican and Italian hosts described how their countries see themselves. Costa Rican hosts talked about Costa Rica as being

very “outward facing”, always looking to the outside for ideas, inspiration, and innovation – so much so that one faculty member said he thought that Costa Rica could actually benefit from some “US-style patriotism”. On the other hand, Florentines have such a strong connection to their city’s history and tend to look inward, or more aptly, backward in history. So, some Italian hosts suggested that instead of seeing US students as just another group that is making their way through the city, that the community should be doing more to welcome them. This was a particularly interesting tension, when taken side-by-side with the major concerns that some local hosts had regarding how much the city is changing to accommodate US students and mass tourism.

How local hosts are making sense of US students was perhaps the most enlightening part of the data across both cases in that it took the instances of harmony and dissonance and addressed the question of *why – why do you think US students act the way they do, why do you think US students are the way they are*, and really centered hosts’ interpretations of US study abroad student phenomena. Very surprising, again, given the contextual differences in the Costa Rican and Italian cases are how similar some of their reflections and interpretations of US students are across a range of issues.

Firstly, hosts in both San Jose and Florence had similar feelings on the lack of preparation that US students have to study abroad, and how this leads to some of the points of dissonance and frustration cited above. A number of faculty and study abroad administrators in Costa Rica and Italy talked about how there should be more work done by sending institutions pre-departure that focuses on the challenges of living in a different culture so that students are better prepared. One study abroad administrator in Costa Rican pointed to study abroad marketing materials and how they illustrate Costa Rica as “always sun and always smiles” and how students show up wholly unprepared for any challenges they may face. Likewise, a study abroad administrator in Florence

thought that pre-departure orientations in the US are simply an exercise in risk and liability management and that students actually have no idea what they are getting themselves into.

Host families in particular, in both cases, noted having developed a much more nuanced understanding of US geography – many of them saying that they have come to understand that the US is not just New York and California, through hosting students from lots of different places. In Costa Rica specifically, several host mothers noted that they have come to better understand that not all US students have money and that increasingly families are making great sacrifices to send their students abroad. Host mothers in both San Jose and Florence tended to interpret students who travel often on the weekends as having money and those who do less traveling and not having very much money. Many indicated that it is these students, those who they interpret as not having as much money, who they tend to get to know better and have more positive relationship with, as they are not constantly on the go.

In terms of money – a few hosts in both San Jose and Florence talked about their interpretation of students as consumers and how this impacts their engagement both inside and outside of the classroom. Tony, a study abroad administrator in Florence, said that he thinks many US students have an “I pay, I deserve” attitude that is generated at home where the cost of attending college is astronomical. He explained that when they are forced to pay so much money for any education it makes them think that a diploma is a consumer good, like a car, or a refrigerator. He, and others, see this in US students’ approach to many different types of experiences abroad – that instead of allowing for flexibility, students approach their housing, their travel, their learning, as something that has been bought and paid for and therefore they are, or should be, in complete control.

In contrast to this, however, is how local hosts are interpreting US students drinking as a desire to lose control. Surprisingly, in both cases, many Costa Rican and Italian hosts attributed student's overdrinking to them being depressed and looking for an escape. This may be a typical cultural explanation for overdrinking in both contexts, or not, but what is so fascinating about this interpretation is how different it likely is from how a student would explain why they drink in excess while studying abroad. In Italy, some hosts think that the issue is exacerbated by the fact that US students tend to drink together in bars frequented primarily by US students, where they "wear their drunkenness as a badge of honor" as one local host put it. In contrast however, a minority of hosts in both cases, shared that they think the US student drinking problem is overstated, that students who drink in excess are in the minority and that, "we were all young once" and should be more understanding.

Disturbing, but perhaps not all that surprising, was the frankness with which hosts in both Costa Rica and Italy discussed issues that they related specifically to US women students. Many host mothers in Costa Rica talked about Costa Rican men going to bars specifically looking to pick up a US woman "because they are easy". When I asked what makes people think that, host mothers responded that it is because of how they dress. Likewise, in Florence, there was a great deal of criticism by many hosts regarding the way that US women students dress and a common interpretation that they are "asking for it", or trying to draw attention to themselves, or "trying to be seen and heard". Natalie, a study abroad administrator in San Jose, went further to say that she thinks US women students come to Costa Rica to "get laid" and that she hears them bragging to each other about "how many people they've slept with" – she finds this difficult to understand. A number of hosts explained that they get frustrated because, as they see it, US women put themselves in risky situations and when something bad happens it reflects poorly on the city.



This is a particularly sensitive theme and a number of times in interviews I cringed hearing primarily women talk about how young US women are “asking for it” by how they dress in public. On the one hand, in the age of Title IX at US colleges and universities, it is becoming increasingly common for educators and students to reject the idea that sexual harassment and assault is ever *caused* by the victim. On the other hand, international educators emphasize the importance of cultural humility and respecting local ways of life, and not assuming that social engagement in one’s host country will take the same shape as that of the United States. Therefore, I think it is important for international educators, and students, to understand how local hosts are interpreting US women’s dress and take this as a starting point for further discussion around this important topic. Again, as mentioned above, local hosts can and should be shifting their focus to the perpetrators of these incidents and not simply blaming US women’s choice of clothing.

Research Question #4 - Outcomes

**What do intentional hosts see as outcomes of their engagement with US students?**

Both in San Jose as well as in Florence, hosts expressed outcomes of engagement with US study abroad students as well as those of increased tourism more broadly, of which they widely consider US students a part. The study abroad specific outcomes shared by hosts in San Jose and Florence differed quite significantly. In Costa Rica, hosts emphasized that engagement with US students through study abroad was opening the minds of locals and increasingly the desire amongst young Costa Ricans to study abroad. Host mothers and study abroad administrators both emphasized how having US students living with families in the neighborhoods surrounding the universities is increasing security for everyone, albeit it is precipitated by the presence of US students. The universities want to be able to guarantee the security of visiting students and so they invest money in security guards and patrols in the neighborhoods, and local families, even those who do not host US students benefit. Study abroad students living with local families is also increasing

access to English language learning opportunities for families that may not otherwise have the means to expose themselves and their children to immersive English-language spaces.

On the downside, some hosts reported that they have noticed young Costa Ricans taking on some of the drinking habits of the US students that they befriend. Also, hosts perceive many US students as having an attitude of superiority as illustrated by the way they talk about the conditions of their host's home, their host university or the city of San Jose. Rafaela, a Costa Rican student who grew up hosting US students in her home, said that she often felt that the US students looked down on Latin America, which caused her to do the same. It was not until she traveled outside Costa Rica that she grew an appreciation for her home country that she said she never really had growing up because of the influence of the US students who lived with her. Culturally, study abroad administrators talked about celebrating US holidays like Halloween and Black Friday as well as, in the case of one host institution, adopted a "US style" school mascot, which carries little meaning in the Costa Rican context.

These examples embody both the personal and the systemic symptoms of the intersection of US cultural imperialism and study abroad. On an individual level, people like Rafaela, who grow up with US students in their home who exhibit feeling of national or cultural superiority inevitably effect the ways that host children see themselves and their home country. While Rafaela came to change her attitude towards home in a positive way, we can assume that does not happen for all host children, and that the impact of US students' attitudes towards their host country could be long lasting. We see that larger cultural orientations, some of which have little or no meaning in the local context are finding their way into local institutions, the cultural impact of which may not be felt for years to come.

Meanwhile, the Florentine hosts focused much more heavily on the economic benefits of the study abroad industry, emphasizing that study abroad organizations in the city employ a great number of people. Likewise, apartment owners can charge high rents to study abroad students who will pay a premium to live within the city center, and because study abroad students typically stay much longer than tourists this provides an enormous source of income to people. Similarly, companies that serve primarily study abroad students, like tour companies that organize trips for students on the weekends, tour groups and bus companies that cater to this specific demographic all stand to benefit economically from engagement with study abroad students. However, hosts also mentioned how in some cases the exposure to US students has reinforced negative stereotypes they already had about US students.

Hosts in both cases emphasized how working closely with visiting US students causes them to see their own culture through different eyes – an outcome that is not based on economics. And likewise, host mother talked about how their family life has changed due to their engagement with US students. Host mothers in both Italy and Costa Rica talked about a loss of privacy in their home due to the constant presence of US students, and in Costa Rica, host moms also talked about changing their diet to include less carbs in order to adapt to US students tastes. Likewise, many have bought clothes dryers and other home appliances that they may not have if it were not for hosting US students in their home. In Italy, two host moms talked about how living with US students and learning about “how the US embraces diversity” have given them ideas for how they and their families can be more open to diversity within their city and county.

In both cases hosts described broader cultural changes that they see happening in their city and county, that they attributed to a rise in tourism, globalization, and in the Costa Rican case an increase in economic and cultural relations with the United States. In San Jose, most hosts talked

about the huge impact of US call centers on the local economy and how this has not only impacted how people make money but also how Costa Ricans think about work. Because so many people are working for US based companies, they are expected to adapt to the expectations of US workplaces including punctuality, dress, and the use of English. So, as one study abroad administrator explained, there is a tension that develops especially amongst young Costa Ricans, who go to Starbucks and order a coffee in English because it feels “glamorous” but then also complain to friends and family about the presence of Starbucks in a country that grows some of the best coffee in the world.

Similarly, in Florence, many hosts lamented the cultural losses they are experiencing particularly in the city center. Hosts spoke passionately about this loss calling it “an assault” or in one case “colonization”, and in yet another case a host claimed that “the center of Florence has become a Disneyworld version of itself”. This change is marked by the disappearance of many small locally owned shops that have made way for large international chain stores and restaurants, which many hosts see as meeting the needs and desires of US students and tourists.

In San Jose, there are many, mostly US chain stores and restaurants including, Walmart, Pizza Hut, KFC, McDonald’s and others – but local hosts there seem to embrace these as Costa Rican, or as part of the American culture that those of us who inhabit the American continent share. There are still a number of local shops and restaurants in San Jose, near the two university sites, however, people did lament that those places often raise their prices because US students and tourists will pay them, which in turn raises the prices for everyone.

Research Questions #5 – Overarching Discursive Factors

**What, if any, overarching factors or discourses influence the engagement between intentional hosts and US study abroad students?**

All of these outcomes were influenced in some way by overarching discursive factors, or discourses that hosts saw as pervading their engagement with US students. The most pervasive

overarching discursive factor identified by hosts in both Italy and Costa was the politics of language and how, by hosts accounts in both sites, students are resistant to learning or using a language other than English. In Costa Rica, hosts explained that US students expect that English will be spoken everywhere and so they do not need to learn any Spanish to live in Costa Rica – many see this attitude as arrogant. Likewise, in Florence, one professor said that US students do not want to give up “the power of being perfect” and when you are speaking a second language there are always errors. US students are so fearful of making a mistake in speaking Italian that they use English almost exclusively, which is interpreted by many hosts as arrogant. Further, a number of local professors and study abroad administrators said that they do not think that US universities care about language learning and in many cases, students are disincentivized from learning languages abroad because they are not required for their degree programs.

Many Costa Rican hosts explained that they see this arrogance in the way that US students are “obsessed” with referring to themselves as Americans. This was a particularly interesting theme for me, as someone who before going to Costa Rica regularly used the word *American* to describe US nationality. Olga, a study abroad administrator, and one of my primary onsite research partners described in detail how Costa Ricans and many other Central Americans feel ownership, or at least co-ownership of the term “American” because “we all live on the American continent” and when people from the US claim this term for themselves it feels exclusive of Central Americans. The Spanish word, *estadounidense*, which means *US*, as opposed to *americano*, meaning *American*, is almost always used when referring to people from the US.

This is a prime example of one instance where US student intent and local host effect may be quite different. I think there may be an assumption on behalf of some hosts that US students *know* how their use of the word “American” is perceived and that out of a sense of power or entitlement, they choose to use it anyway. More likely, US students do not know that using the term

American, or *americano*, instead of US or *estadounidense*, is perceived as being arrogant and exclusionary. In terms of this research projects, because my Costa Rica fieldwork proceeded my Italy field work, I arrived in Italy having tried to remove American from my project vocabulary – however, in Italian there is not an equivalent word to *estadounidense* and in fact it would be confusing to use any word but *americano* to describe people from the United States. So, within the broad international education landscape this issue is complex.

Something that was similar in both the Italian and Costa Rican cases, in terms of the politics of language was general host disappointment at how quick locals are to switch from Italian and Spanish respectively, to English. There seems to be some tension between locals having an opportunity to use and practice English, while at the same time not insisting that visitors use and appreciate the local language. Given the differences in context between these two sites, the saturation of study abroad students, and other factors, it is significant that the politics of language is such a pervasive overarching discursive factor in student/host engagement and that “blame” in some ways is placed, by hosts, both on students for their arrogance and/or lack of interest as well as on hosts who too quickly accommodate monolingual students.

One overarching discursive factor that really differed between the two sites was the pervasiveness of US economic and cultural influence in Costa Rica, which did not present in the same way in Italy. Hosts explained that many lower and middle class people in Costa Rica work for US owned companies and that the culture that is built up around this interdependence leads to a glorification of the United States. I would go further to suggest that it creates a power dynamic that positions Costa Ricans as producers and US students and tourists as consumers – and this atmosphere contributes to the ways that US students and Costa Rican hosts engage with each other.

There is a similar producer/consumer dynamic at play in Florence, but local hosts do not attribute it to local connection to US businesses or the US economy.

Finally, a set of overarching discursive factors that were front-and-center in Italy, but barely discussed in Costa Rica, were that of study abroad program design choices. Certainly, in both contexts hosts talked about the length of programs – that students who stay longer are able to make more meaningful connections with the local community. And likewise, pre-departure orientation and preparation were discussed in both contexts. However, in Italy study abroad administrators talked about students' resistance to living with host families and study abroad provider organization acceptance of this trend as something that inevitably influences interactions. Several local hosts described Florence as being fully saturated with study abroad students and suggested that US institutions should be more selective about who they send to Florence. However, this presents a tension as sending fewer students to Florence would likely mean cuts to local staff, which would have a negative impact on local jobs.

In terms of saturation, Italian hosts described that because of the density of US students and tourists in Florence, “everything is for them”. Seemingly if you live or work in the center of Florence you are doing something to ‘serve’ international tourists. On the other hand, in Costa Rica, while the theme of service was strong, and hosts talked about being socialized to serve foreign tourists, they spoke of many other industries where people are working in San Jose. Albeit, one industry that was brought up several times was call centers, most of which do serve US and foreign customers, but from afar. Yet, the differences in Florence and San Jose as a saturated and semi-saturated US study abroad destination respectively was felt in other ways.

The saturation of the city of Florence, specifically with US study abroad students, causes a great amount of competition for short-term housing. So much so, that prices are driven very high

and locals have been pushed out of the city center. Luckily, San Jose, as a semi-saturated site, does not seem to be experiencing this phenomenon, at least in the areas near the research study sites. Moreover, because students in San Jose are, by and large, living with host families, local people are making money off of US students need for short term housing during their stay, but not at the expense of their own access to housing. Further, my findings suggest that many of the positive outcomes of the study abroad encounter take place within homestays, something that US students and hosts in Florence are largely missing out on.

Of course, San Jose, Costa Rica and Florence, Italy are very different geographically, historically, culturally, linguistically, and economically. So, the extent to which their US study abroad student saturation is the *cause* of some of the differences that hosts experiences should not be overstated. However, I do think that for San Jose and other semi-saturated study abroad destinations, an awareness of some of the saturation related issues currently described by hosts in Florence can serve as a cautionary tale. As US study abroad presence in San Jose continues to grow and there is still some flexibility as local institutions figure out how to adjust to an increase in US student demand, learning from the challenges of a study abroad destination like Florence could prove helpful.

In summary, themes that emerged across these two diverse contexts suggest certain commonalities in the host experience. Prior international experiences serve as a strong motivating factor for engaging with US study abroad students. Likewise host mothers and study abroad administrators employ similar methods of educative engagement across contexts, despite a shared perception that US students are disinterested in locals and often create American (US) bubbles. Along a similar vein, hosts in both places also perceive a lack of interest among US students in using the local language and they see this as a major barrier to engagement. Similarly, many Italian and



Costa Rican hosts share the perception that US women students dress inappropriately, which isolates them from local women peers (at best) or incites sexual harassment or assault. The overarching discursive factors of foreign (US) economic and cultural imperialism as well as the politics of language were present in both cases as well.

Having sought to describe the experiences of intentional hosts in San Jose and Florence and Chapters 4 and 5 respectively, and then tracing across cases in Chapter 6, the final chapter, to follow, will apply these findings to the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 1 and will suggest other theories that help to explain the findings. It will also reengage the literature from Chapter 2 showing how these findings relate to other current research in the field as well as how it fills an important gap in that research. It will then describe implications for policy and practice, before finally identifying directions for further research in the area of host community perspectives on the study abroad encounter.

## CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

### Summary

This dissertation has sought to draw attention to and explore the lived experiences of intentional host community members in two popular study abroad destinations – San Jose, Costa Rica and Florence, Italy. The impetus for which is born out of an assumption that study abroad programs that send US students abroad increase mutual understanding and cross-cultural exchange. This project argues that such an assumption is premature and that international educators could not begin to test the extent to which mutuality is an outcome of study abroad programming without first better understanding the nature of the study abroad encounter from the perspectives of host community members.

Returning briefly to the broader political and higher education context within which US study abroad programs currently exist as outlined in Chapter 1, we see a trend towards competition, corporatization, and privatization. An increased interest in revenue generation has shifted study abroad program models over time from primarily cost-neutral exchanges between universities, to profit-maximizing designs such as branch campuses and study abroad centers which often engage private for-profit, study abroad companies. The commodification of study abroad experiences has helped to further reinforce a sense of student consumerism (Zemach-Bersin, 2008).

In some ways, the competition for resource within universities has helped to foster a stronger evaluation culture as programs and units seek to prove their worth and relevance to the higher education endeavor. We have seen an increase in study abroad related evaluation research over the last 10 years. However, as explicated in Chapter 2 much of this research is focused on students' motivation to study abroad – effectively answering the question 'how do we get more students to study abroad'. Other research focuses on student learning outcomes or growth in their intercultural competence, which is often connected to future competitiveness in the global job market.

Slowly we see some international education research focusing on the impact of study abroad on host communities, however there are large methodological gaps in this work – principally that researchers are asking their US students and faculty leaders how *they think* they are impacting local communities as opposed to asking host community members directly. In the area of global/international service learning we see studies like O’Sullivan and Small (2016) and MacDonald and Vorstermans’ (2016) engaging directly with host community members to better understand their lived experiences. However, these studies focus specifically on global service learning in the Global South, which still makes up a rather small proportion of US study abroad engagement.

In order to address the gap in literature, this project focused both on traditional study abroad, as opposed to global service learning, as well as study abroad in the (more popular) Global North. Through a comparative case study, I took a constructivist grounded theory approach to understanding how intentional hosts perceive the study abroad encounter. As outlined in Chapter 3, I started from IIE’s list of the ten most popular study abroad destination countries, city-level data being unavailable, and selected two sites that represented two distinct ‘moments’ in US study abroad saturation. San Jose, Costa Rica being a study abroad destination in the Global South which is popular but, on the rise, and Florence, Italy being a study abroad destination that many would say has reached a saturation point. Establishing partners in both sites aided tremendously in access and logistics arrangements for conducting interviews with 57 local professors, study abroad administrators, university/study center staff, and host mothers across the two sites.

A conceptual framework built around my research questions helped to organize the reporting of data in Chapters 4 and 5 which provide the findings from the Costa Rican case and Italian case respectively, centering host community voices through direct quotations and hosts’ interpretations of their lived realities. In Chapter 6 these themes are juxtaposed to each other in a comparative case analysis, organized by the original research questions themselves. The sections to

follow will take these findings and put them in conversation with my original theoretical framework, new theories that may help to explain some findings, as well as the current study abroad literature.

#### New Theoretical Insights: Key Take-Away

While internationalization rhetoric at colleges and universities across the United States largely assume that the sending of US students abroad is increasing mutually understanding and cross-cultural exchange, this study would suggest that from host perspectives this may not always be the case. When hosts are asked about *their* perspectives on the study abroad encounter, their stories complicate an often uncritical take on the de-facto outcomes of study abroad expressed in US higher education policy rhetoric.

Hosts in both San Jose and Florence talked about how they feel that they are “serving” US students. Local hosts, including faculty and administrators, but especially host mothers are doing an incredible amount of labor to produce the global classroom. Because students see what hosts are doing not as the emotional and intellectual labor that it is but rather as a ‘service’ that they are paying for, there is a lack of respect that is communicated to hosts. This disrespect is communicated through students’ failure to speak the local language and integrate culturally with locals, both in the classroom and outside in the community. When hosts see their job as “serving” US students there is an inherent power differential that would make truly transformative relationships *between* US students and hosts very difficult, if not impossible. From hosts’ perspectives, what seems to be *mutually understood* is that US students expect to have ‘authentic’ experiences abroad that are created for and tailored to their linguistic, cultural, social, and academic needs – and hosts are expected to oblige.

Cross-cultural exchange is only possible when local hosts feel respected and that students are “walking in their direction” as one host put it. Likewise, intercultural competence, another purported goal of study abroad, is only possible when students open themselves enough to truly engage with the host culture – not the Florence or San Jose “lite” that are created for them, so that they *feel* like

they are studying abroad, but really are only scratching the surface of the realities of living in their host city.

Yet, the tension in all of this is the enormous economic impact that US students are having on these host communities. US students are providing jobs for faculty in Florence who find it difficult to get teaching work elsewhere, host moms in Costa Rica are making extra income, business owners in both sites benefit from the increase in US student presence. So, local hosts in some ways, are yielding to students' economic power. This begs the question: Is mutual, altruistic, cross-cultural exchange possible given the transactional nature of the study abroad encounter? If so, under what conditions?

#### Implications Related to Theory

Focusing specifically on the perspectives of study abroad hosts helps to uncover the variety of ways in which the current state of study abroad programming is an effect of neoliberalism and the corporatization of the US university (Chapter 1) as well as global citizenship, subjectivity, and postcolonialism (Chapter 2). Firstly, host voices revealed some surprising manifestations of neoliberalism and the corporate university. Hosts were hyper-aware of the student consumer and explained how they see US students' tendency towards thinking of study abroad, and their education more broadly, as a commodity. Faculty and staff in both Costa Rica and Italy identified how some students "pay" and therefore think they "deserve" a certain experience. They see this play out in students' attitudes towards their work and attendance in class – because they have paid for an academic program, they own it, and therefore decide when and how to engage. This dynamic provides empirical support for Zemach-Bersin's (2008) theoretical perspective on the how student consumerism plays out within study abroad programs

In some ways this attitude is reinforced by the extent to which study abroad centers, particularly in Florence, are catering to the needs and desires of US students – so much so that study

abroad administrator, Tony, described how some of his faculty see themselves as “guests” in the US academic system, even though they are teaching in Italy. By design, study abroad centers are prone to postcolonial manifestations as they are, in essence, US institutions operating in a foreign country and benefiting financially from primarily local labor. The dynamic that Tony describes as well as the attitudes of many Italian and Costa Rican hosts that center on how they adapt to US students (as opposed to the other way around) in their engagement provides empirical support for Chan-Tiberghien’s (2004) suggestion that Western institutions are not well suited to perform the work of critical global citizenship and to the contrary may serve to further strengthen preexisting, unequal, relations of power.

Because their “guest” status leaves Italian faculty in the precarious position of using teaching methods and content that make US students feel comfortable, this may decrease their ability, or willingness, to expose US students to the types of non-dominant epistemologies that Chan-Tiberghien (2004) suggests is important for creating more responsible, critical, global citizens. In her work, the onus falls on the students and their sending institutions for a failure in exposure to these ideas. However, an exploration of the educative methods of hosts would seem to suggest that they inherently have the agency to push students in this regard, but are constrained by the current, neoliberal state of the study abroad apparatus.

A further manifestation of neoliberalism is the ways in which local hosts see many US students as unprepared to study abroad. Faculty and study abroad administrators in San Jose tended to focus on students social-emotionally ill-preparedness for living in a different country. They described how some students act like they are going on vacation or lack the flexibility required to be in a new and different environment. Again, when a study abroad experience is seen as something that can be bought, much like a vacation package, it is not surprising that students might feel or act

this way. What is, perhaps, surprising is that local hosts are noticing these tendencies in students and cite them as impacting the ways they engage with one another.

Faculty in Florence spoke more pointedly about what they see as the lack of academic preparation that students have for study abroad, and how this causes some of them to adjust the content of their lessons to accommodate. Given the positive reputation of US universities globally, it was surprising to hear local hosts talk so candidly about how they perceived US students to be behind academically, one faculty member likening their academic level to that of Italian high school students. Other faculty commented on how this has gotten worse over time, how years ago they were covering more content in their syllabus and how they have had to keep cutting back each year. One explanation for this is the corporatization of the US university, which over the last twenty years has shifted resources away from traditional academic costs – like tenure-track faculty lines and research fellowships (Lieberwitz, 2007) and towards things that help colleges compete against one another for student enrollment.

Along a different vein, if we think of neoliberalism broadly as an ideology that “refutes the existence of structural injustices in favor of placing the culpability for widespread social problems upon individuals” (Gahman & Hjalmarson, 2018) this presents a possible explanation for hosts attitudes towards the connection between US women’s dress and their vulnerability for sexual harassment and assault. Instead of attributing this social problem to a system of toxic masculinity in their communities, individual women’s choice of dress and behavior is blamed. While this may be cultural or due in part to other factors, neoliberalism is one explanation for these attitudes amongst hosts.

While there are many examples drawn from the data that help to illustrate the ways in which the current state of study abroad programming is an effect of neoliberalism and the corporatization

of the US university, focusing specifically on the experiences of host community members complicates Doerr (2015) and Conran's (2011) application of critical pedagogy theory. As described in Chapter 2, Doerr suggests that by embracing critical pedagogy, *students* would be encouraged to "examine the subject positions from which they make sense of the world, clarify their values and learn about and question the structural and ideological forces that shape their daily lives" (Doerr, 2015, p. 379). However we see that in many ways *hosts* are embracing critical pedagogy through an examination of their own subject positions by way of the cultural comparison that takes place in many of their encounters with US students and the meaning making process that follows.

On the other hand, Conran's (2011) work suggested that Western volunteer's care and intimacy towards/with their hosts often obfuscated the structural differences upon which the volunteer encounter relied. The data from this study suggests that care is one of the primary modes by which host mothers in particular engage with visiting students. Much like Conran's Western volunteer participants, the care and intimacy that shapes the host mother/visiting student relationship may also make it difficult for them to see beyond those feelings. Further research could focus on the extent to which the personal may help to obfuscate the systemic in host mother/visiting student relationships in the same way it does in the volunteer/host community relationship.

While the section above explicated insights gleaned from the data through the lens of my original theoretical framework, there are other theories that may help to deepen the analysis of some findings. Firstly, power and how it operates through the study abroad encounter from host perspectives was evident throughout the data. In some instances, hosts specifically talked about how they *give* US students power by deferring to their cultural, academic, and linguistic preferences. However, I think that a Foucauldian understanding of power (1980), whereby power is diffused across a "dispositif" or a discursive apparatus is more in line with how power is functioning within



the global classroom across these two sites. Of course, individual hosts are interacting with individual students and power impacts those encounters, but US study abroad students as a group are exerting power over hosts through the study abroad apparatus by institutional design. All of the factors identified by local hosts, especially the politics of language and US cultural imperialism are embedded within a discourse of power that seems to be embedded within the current design of study abroad programs across sites.

Another theory that bears relevance for the data is Fanon's colonization of the mind (1966), particularly in reference to the ways that many hosts in Costa Rica described themselves and their understanding of their culture and country in relation to that of the US. While not colonized by the US in the traditional sense, Costa Rican hosts' orientation towards "serving" US students and tourists and thinking disparagingly about their own cultural orientations seems to reflect Fanon's ideas around how the colonized develop ways of thinking about themselves through the process of colonization that must be undone through decolonization. Some Costa Rican hosts' explanation of US culture as glamorous, and the use of English even though they see it as 'giving power' to US students are examples of the colonization of the mind. This provides further support for the application of theories of colonialism or neocolonialism to the understanding of US study abroad, at least in some destinations.

#### Implications Related to the Research Literature

The body of literature that addresses issues of host community impact, specifically in a traditional study abroad context is very small if not non-existent. However, the finding of this study can contribute to ongoing conversations within the broader study abroad literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Again, because evaluative study abroad research is currently so US student/ participant focused, the perspectives of the intentional host community members who participated in my study,

while not representative of all intentional hosts, can provide some insight when juxtaposed to what US students are saying about their own experiences.

For example, hosts have their own ideas about what motivates US students to study abroad and this is not currently captured in the literature. While it makes sense to ask US students themselves what motivates them to study abroad, if and when hosts perceive their motivations differently it can impact their engagement. The 2015 British Council study of US student's motivation to study abroad suggested that 58% of US students were motivated to "have fun traveling and experiencing different cultures." International hosts in both San Jose and Florence identified this as what they perceive to be many students' motivation to study abroad but hosts in both sites expressed disappointment in this motivation. In San Jose, a study abroad administrator, lamented that she expected "students to be students" that is, interested in studying when they come to Costa Rica. Likewise, in Italy host mothers described students who are "gone from Thursday to Monday" traveling around Europe which makes it difficult for them to make personal connections.

The British Council study also identified language learning as a primary motivating factor for US students. The hosts in my study across both sites identified how they perceive US students to be particularly resistant to learning or using the local language. So, it may be worth exploring the difference between student identified motivation for language learning, and the reality of their efforts to learn or use the local language while in-country, as perceived by local faculty, staff, and host families. By building host community perspectives into the design of study abroad motivation studies we can begin to see how student-identified motivations to study abroad relate to their actual behaviors abroad.

The Anderson et al. (2015) study across 19 AIFS study abroad sites identified correlations between student-identified motivation to study abroad, the destination they choose, and program

element choices like housing. They found that students who were more interested in having fun than experiencing personal growth tending to choose a study abroad destination that they perceived to be less challenging, and live in an apartment, as opposed to a home stay. The data from my study supports these findings from host perspectives, primarily in the ways that hosts spoke about visiting students. In Italy, hosts specifically said that they think that students do not chose to live with host families because they think it will get in the way of their freedom, or they are more interested in living with their friends than getting to know an Italian family. Likewise, in Costa Rica, which may be considered a more challenging destination, there were many more examples given by local faculty in regard to students' interest in growing personally and academically than there were in Italy.

Of the literature that focuses specifically on gauging host community impact, an important methodological shortcoming is asking US students and faculty how they are impacting local communities instead of asking host community members themselves. The Schroeder et al. (2009) study of faculty and students from Appalachian State University is an example of this – yet, one negative impact that students self-identified was their overdrinking. Drinking and drunkenness was a primary negative impact identified by hosts in San Jose and Florence, which aligns with what students in the Schroder et. al study identified. Where this studied goes further is to address what hosts perceive as the reason why students are overdrinking while abroad – which, interestingly, across both sites, hosts attributed to students being depressed and needing alcohol to escape.

The results of this study closely align with those of the O'Sullivan and Small (2016) and MacDonald & Vorsteman (2016) studies of host community impact on service learning programs in Nicaragua and Ghana. These studies engaged hosts directly, as mine did, albeit in different ways – the former through a hired Nicaraguan sociologist and the later through a survey instrument. In both studies hosts identified intercultural exchange and personal connection as outcomes of their

engagement and in the Nicaraguan study hosts specifically stated that they wish there was more space made for those connections, i.e. they suggested that students spend less time on “service” and more time getting to know people in more organic ways. Likewise, in my study host moms in both Costa Rica and Italy identified the potential for strong bonds to form between them, their families, and visiting students, but said that students who spend a lot of time traveling miss out on this experience to everyone’s detriment.

In MacDonald & Vorsteman’s (2016) Ghana case, hosts said that while money was a motivation, they end up barely covering student costs with the stipend they receive. Likewise, in both Costa Rica and Italy, hosts shared that the extra income is a motivating factor but, in the end, there are either easier ways to make extra money, or that the extra money ends up going to increased household expenses. Hosts in Ghana suggested that students’ knowledge of hosts’ expectations is important, and that more attention should be paid to preparing students to “live difference” as opposed to overcome difference or tolerate difference. This aligns with hosts in Italy and Costa Rica calling for more rigorous pre-departure orientation for US students.

Also closely aligning with the results of my study, are the conclusions drawn from Engle’s (2011) dissertation focused on Spanish families who host US study abroad students. Engle found that as a result of hosting US students Spanish families identified as being more Americanized, more open to discussing politics and religion, and having a broader world view. While neither Costa Rican or Italian host mothers identified themselves as more “Americanized” they did identify as being more worldly, more aware of the diversity of the United States, and in the Italian case, more open to discussing differences in perspectives with their host students.

Lastly, the work of Conran (2011) and Mostafanezhad (2014) emphasize how personal relationships developed abroad can obfuscate structural inequality and how sentimentality can serve

to depoliticize the expansion of western politics, economics, and culture. Particularly in Costa Rica, where there is such a tension between embracing US culture as their own and an interest in maintaining a *pura vida* approach to life, I can see how the care and personal connection that develops between intentional hosts and visiting US students could obfuscate larger structural and economic inequality that brings about the ubiquity of US call centers and restaurant chains in the country. Yet, I do think that local hosts are aware that US students fit into the larger US consumer apparatus and that in some ways US students are, as Zemach-Bersin (2007) suggests, consuming people, places and culture as a commodity.

While this study is in conversation with the literature cited above, the hope is that this project begins to carve out a new space in the literature for work focused on the experiences of host community members who engage with traditional study abroad students in more saturated study abroad destinations *in addition* to the pre-existing literature focused on international/global service learning host communities in the Global South. Given the growth of host community impact studies within the international/global service learning literature and dearth of such studies in the traditional study abroad literature it seems there may be a false paradigm developing that supposes that host communities are only impacted by students who *intend* to impact them through service. Indeed, as this study suggests intentional host community members within traditional study abroad settings are also greatly affected by their engagement with US students.

### Implications for Policy and Practice

As discussed in Chapter 3, I see my primary responsibility as a critical scholar-practitioner to be translating the stories and lived experiences shared with me by host participants into consumable policy suggestions for administrators, faculty, and students. There are some programmatic changes

or intervention that hosts identified overtly – those will be outlined below followed by further implications for practice that come from the analysis of participant data.

*i. Pre-Departure Orientation & Program Marketing*

A concern that was shared across research sites was the that US students are ill-prepared to live in a different country and cultural context upon arriving in Costa Rica and/or Italy. In San Jose, both administrators and professors shared that they think students have unrealistic expectations of what studying abroad in Costa Rican will be like. One administrator said that US students expect life in Costa Rican to be “always happy, always fun” but that the country and city has issues just like any other place and the reality of that hits students particularly hard. A Costa Rican professor who helps to run the in-country orientation at one of the research sites in San Jose shared that he thinks that in the US students go online and apply for the program, and maybe there is some material they are supposed to read to help prepare them, but maybe this is not well enforced.

Likewise, in Italy, the administrative director of a study center in Florence shared with me that he thinks that pre-departure orientations on US campuses have become an exercise in risk management and that “orientation now is an administrative process that consists of a lot of waivers, it’s all about liability, schools don’t want to be sued”. He aptly asked, “where is the real orientation, the one that prepare students to live in another culture?” Professors also shared concerns that students are not prepared for the academic experience of studying abroad and that often times they end up “watering down” lessons to meet US students where they are academically. This may be an effect of US students taking courses in subjects, like Italian Renaissance Art, for example for which they have no background.

The need for more comprehensive approaches to pre-departure orientation that go beyond preparing students on how and what to pack, and how to use their health insurance if they need it is

well established in the field of international education. Challenges that often arise include; time – most predeparture orientations that I have helped manage have been 3-4 hours long, lecture-style, PowerPoint driven programs, and as the Italian administrator suggested, have lacked participant oversight. If a student does not attend, we might suggest that they come in for a one-on-one meeting, or send the pre-departure materials to them via email, but, certainly there are many, many, students who go abroad from a range of US institutions who never attend a pre-departure orientation.

We already knew this was a problem, but perhaps learning that on-site partners and local hosts *also* see the implications of poor or incomplete pre-departure orientation and *they* are often the people who are left to deal with the ramifications, might inspire US-based international educators to seriously re-think the structure, length, content, and mandatory nature of pre-departure orientations for out-going students. Certainly, study abroad offices have the power to compel students to take part in a pre-departure orientation or not allow them to take part in their chosen program – however, I think few colleges and universities take this hard-line approach. Likewise, as some universities have already started doing – using a “flipped classroom” approach to orientation, whereby anything that can be delivered online (packing lists, health insurance instructions, etc.) is and in-person orientation sessions are saved exclusively for discussion and preparation for living in another culture.

Even before pre-departure orientation, some of these issues could be addressed with more honest and ethical marketing practices that do not paint programs in Costa Rica, for example, as an “always happy, always fun” tropical beach vacation but rather highlight the academic experience of studying at a Costa Rican institution. There were plenty of examples shared by local faculty of the amazing research connections they are making with students, one faculty member even publishing

with a US student who worked in his lab for one semester, another going on to oversee a student's Masters thesis in the US. If these are the types of opportunities we want students to get excited about, that is what we should be promoting in our marketing materials.

*ii. Program Selectivity*

Particularly in Florence, there were a number of local hosts, albeit a minority, who suggested that sending institutions are not selective enough when determining who is prepared to study abroad. More so than in Costa Rica, many local hosts in Italy suggested that study abroad is not for everyone and that when students are struggling academically or personally at home, their challenges are often amplified in the confusion of a new cultural setting. Further, local faculty expressed frustration that many students come to Florence to party, or travel around Europe, and do not take their studies seriously. One local faculty member said that many of these students think of their studies as something that gets in the way of their drinking, partying, and travelling and that this attitude makes it very difficult to teach.

The age-old conflict that arises around the program selectivity issue is that, on the US sending side, the goal of most colleges and universities is to significantly increase study abroad access and participation. This is done, in part, by keeping minimum eligibility requirements low and encouraging students to choose a location of interest to them, as opposed perhaps to a destination that makes the most sense for them academically. On the receiving end, particularly for study abroad centers, large numbers of US students studying in Florence means increased revenues and by extension the ability to employ more local administrations and faculty. While reducing the number of US students sent to Florence every year would have negative implications on both the sending and receiving sides – it is important to note that several local hosts called for this.



*iii. Language Learning and Respect for Hosts*

There is a general impression across both research sites that US students are not interested in learning the local language while in Costa Rica or Italy. While there are certainly exceptions, and as language teachers in both sites explained, some students come to Costa Rica or Italy *specifically* to learn or practice the language, this is rare. Perhaps more interestingly, hosts perceive that the number of students with that interest has been significantly decreasing over the years. Many hosts identified US students' disinterest in learning or using the local language as a sign of superiority and disrespect. And host mothers often identified students' lack of language skills as a primary hurdle for developing meaningful relationships. Likewise, study abroad administrators lamented that opportunities to engage in the community either through service, internships, or volunteering is thwarted by students' lack of local language skills.

In Italy, many local hosts attributed students' disinterest in language learning to US universities not prioritizing language learning in the curriculum. One local faculty member expressed being shocked to learn that many students in his intercultural communications class, who came from a variety of US universities, did not have a foreign language requirement as part of their degree program. Even for those who come to Italy with a semester or two of background in the language often lack the confidence to actually use the language and quickly fall back on English which is widely spoken in the city.

While requiring a certain level of foreign language proficiency before going abroad is, again, something well within the power of study abroad offices and universities to require – they rarely do, as it would significantly decrease the number of students who study abroad in non-English speaking countries. However, this issue stems from curricular policy that is further reaching than study abroad – in that, as local hosts suggested, and as is well documented in the literature US colleges and

universities *are* deprioritizing language learning and often writing a significant language requirement out of undergraduate curriculum. It is extremely important to note that this curricular policy choice stands in direct opposition to the call for increased internationalization on US college and university campuses. Especially, if administrators take seriously the kind of internationalization that is so often written in to international education mission statements that claim to promote mutual understanding and cross-cultural exchange. Local hosts were unequivocally clear – students’ lack of language skills stymies opportunities for personal connection abroad.

Yet, short of major undergraduate curricular overhauls there are policy changes that could be made at the study abroad office level (US side) or at university partners or study center abroad to help overcome this challenge. If study abroad offices take seriously the desire to increase mutual understanding and cross-cultural exchange, they could institute their own language requirements for programs in non-English speaking countries. This seems particularly important for programs that include a large community immersion component, like a service-learning or internships program. But even for programs where students are taking courses in English, their ability to connect with local hosts, in a culturally humble way, is largely dependent on their willingness to try to speak the local language. Likewise, university partners or study centers could implement their own language requirements. However, like with the program selectivity issue – increasing language requirements would likely result in fewer students studying abroad in non-English speaking counties, which would be negative economically for on-site staff.

#### *iv. Importance of Home Stays*

Across the two sites, the data suggests that engagement within home stays between host families and US students serves as the primary venue for care, personal connection, and cross-cultural exchange. Yet, in Florence, one administrator guessed that less an 10% of US students in

Florence choose to stay with a family, preferring to live with friends in an apartment instead. Likewise, across all study abroad sites, home stays are likely the least popular accommodation option. However, some university partners and study centers require students to stay with a family. This comes with its own administrative challenges, as administrators in both San Jose and Florence recounted.

Nonetheless, study abroad administrators on the US-side could decide to prioritize partnering with study centers or on-site providers that at least provide homestays as an option, or even, better require them. As the data, particularly from San Jose suggested, US students staying with host families often provide personal benefits to host families as well – whether through the opportunity for their own children to learn and practice English, or for the company in the case of empty-nesters. If, in line with Engle’s (2011) work on Spanish host families, these two case studies also highlight the mutual benefits that can come from US students living with host families abroad, why would international educators not make this a strategic programmatic priority?

*v. Rhetoric of Mutual Understanding and Cross-Cultural Exchange*

While pre-departure orientation, program selectivity, language learning, and homestays were all concerns brought up directly by host participants there are other implications for policy and practice that I am introducing below as a result of analyzing host participant data. As explicated in Chapter 1, phrases like mutual understanding and cross-cultural exchange are ubiquitous both within university and international education mission and vision statements. And given the dearth of international education research that seeks to “test” whether or not mutuality or cross-cultural exchange are actual outcomes of contemporary study abroad programs, it seems as if the connection between sending students abroad and positive cross-cultural outcomes is taken as a given within higher education policy. I contend, especially in light of this study which has sought to show the

complexity of the study abroad encounter from the perspective of intentional hosts, that sending US students abroad does not, in and of itself, result in mutual understanding or cross-cultural exchange. There are many overarching discursive factors that impact the ways that US students engage with local hosts and vice versa.

So, if the promotion of mutual understanding and cross-cultural exchange are *real* priorities and not just “window dressing” as Morphey and Hartley (2006) suggest, university administrators and international educators have no choice but to start thinking differently about how programs and partnerships are designed and evaluated. Study abroad offices need the resources and support to create equitable programs that have a chance to engender mutual exchange, even if that means limiting access to study abroad or study abroad options by requiring more language preparation, course pre-requisites, or more comprehensive pre-departure orientation. These policy changes would likely be unpopular but would signal a broadening in university responsibility beyond students to include the people’s whose lives are impacted by our students’ presence in their communities.

*vi. American Bubbles & Town/Gown Relations*

Even in San Jose, where the two research sites were Costa Rican universities that host both local Costa Rican and international students, local administrators, staff, and faculty all discussed the challenges of getting US students to mix with local students. Even in one site that hosts a relatively small number of US students, administrators found that US students are much more likely to spend time with other international students than with local students. There were different explanations for this – some blaming US students for not trying to engage with local students, and others blaming local students for being disinterested in befriending US students. In Italy, the “American bubble” situation was even more pronounced as none of the research sites hosted local students, so US students did not have the opportunity to meet local students in class like in Costa Rica.

University partners and study abroad centers across sites are making efforts to create programming to try and help US students engage with local peers. At one Costa Rican site, the university sets up an international buddy program which matches a local student with an incoming international student. They organize different get-togethers and encourage students to travel together on the weekends. At one study center in Italy, administrators set up a program to bring local high school students to the center to intern – trying a reverse strategy of bringing Italian students into the institution as opposed to sending US students out. However, a challenge in both contexts tends to be that often students arrive in-country with people that they already know and the discomfort of being in a new environment leads them to fall back on the familiar.

This of course is an issue at US universities as well, where visiting international students tend to befriend each other and create the same type of “bubble” that local hosts describe US students forming in San Jose and Florence. What is particularly troubling, especially in Florence, is how American bubbles extend beyond the study center walls and into the city. Local hosts suggested that they are able to identify American bubbles by students’ behavior and dress and that there are entire streets in the city that many locals avoid because they are ‘overrun’ with drunken US students, especially at night. There is a difference between turning to a fellow US student for support when transitioning to another culture and using strength in numbers to legitimize acting in cultural inappropriate ways. This difference seems important to identify with out-going US students.

#### *vii. Women Students Abroad*

One of the more complex issues presented in the data was hosts’ perceptions of US female student dress, what is and is not appropriate or acceptable, and the extent to which US female student dress *causes* potentially negative situations. Firstly, I think that for better or worse, it is important for US female students to be aware of how certain styles of dressing are perceived in their

host country. In Costa Rica, a study abroad administrator spoke at length about wearing shorts and how this is something that a young Costa Rican woman would not do unless they were going to the beach. If US female students have this knowledge before departing for Costa Rica, they can choose for themselves whether adhering to local expectations for dress is something that is a priority for them. The question becomes the extent to which US-based study abroad administrators should intervene in this decision-making process. Providing students with information is reasonable and responsible but encouraging them to dress in accordance with local standards may seem intrusive.

Yet, the overwhelming attitude across sites and host types, was that sexual harassment and assaults in Florence and San Jose is ‘brought on’ by US female students dressing in a culturally inappropriate manner. Given the atmosphere around Title IX at US colleges and universities as well as broader social movement like “Me Too”, blaming US female student dress, instead of perpetrators actions, for sexual harassment and assault is not acceptable. However, the question becomes, especially given that local hosts are often the ones who triage incidents that take place abroad, how can we begin a dialogue with local partners, students, and US-based staff around culture, dress, freedom, agency, and sexual harassment and assault?

#### *viii. Positive International Education Experiences*

One of the more positive implications for policy and practice comes from the data focused on intentional hosts motivation to engage with US students. The vast majority of intentional hosts cited their own international experiences, whether it was studying, working, or volunteering abroad – or in some cases having friends or family who had had such an experience that inspired them to work with visiting US students. In some ways, this suggests that, across space and time, international education is “working” in that people who have had positive international experiences are interested in contributing to the field of international education in some way. This implies that perhaps some

of the outcomes of the study abroad encounter, are longitudinal or even intergenerational, and that the full scope of cross-cultural exchange cannot be captured within the time period that a person actually spends abroad. Therefore, evaluative efforts, even within study abroad office, could and should focus on the long-term impacts of the international experiences they administer.

#### Directions for Future Research

Given the increase in awareness of host community impact within the areas of global and international service learning, focused almost exclusively in the global south, there is room for much more research to be done on the experiences of host communities in the Global North, particularly in small cities that host a relatively large number of study abroad students. While engaging with host communities in the Global South is important and should certainly continue, global systems of power inevitably impact the research relationship in ways that may be less pervasive in the Global North.

The influence of language as an overarching discursive factor in the study abroad encounter deserves much more research attention. While in these two cases the vast majority of students with which local hosts engaged were mono-lingual English speakers, there may be study abroad contexts where hosts are engaging with US students primarily in the local language. Would linguistic ‘equality’ make a difference in the way local hosts perceive US students and the ways they engage with each other? One study abroad context that comes immediately to mind is the United States, that is, most if not all students who study abroad in the US speak English fluently. How do host communities in the US engage with visiting students differently than in Costa Rica and Italy because of this?

Another area for future research that was unfortunately outside the scope of this project is engaging with unintentional hosts, or those people who live in places that host study abroad students but do not overtly choose to engage with them. Intentional hosts, for better or worse, all

have a vested interest in the continuation of study abroad programs either out of personal or financial interest, or both. Whereas, unintentional hosts likely do not share these interests and instead simply share their community with visiting students, and therefore their encounters may look quite different.

A future study design might take a more mirrored approach and probe the engagement on both sides of the study abroad encounter at the same time – such that the students about whom intentional hosts are referring have the opportunity to share their perspectives on engagement. This might look like taking a cohort of students who are spending the semester in Florence, for example, and using a similar interview protocol with both US visiting students and their hosts, using interviews as a way to get each other's take on how each "side" is making meaning of their interactions with each other.

Lastly, given the richness and complexity of the host experience, as suggested by this research, a future study might use an intercultural competence instrument to measure the extent to which hosting international students (US or otherwise) leads to an increase in intercultural competence for the *host*. Like with many evaluative instruments focused on intercultural competence, they are most typically employed on the person doing the traveling and rarely on the people doing the hosting. The real possibility that engaging with international students as a host may have similar or even more positive outcomes in terms of intercultural competence could have major implications for international education policy and practice.

## Conclusion

If the internationalization of US higher education is going to be a vehicle for positive social change in the world, we must more critically interrogate the assumptions embedded within international education discourse. While research suggests that study abroad has a positive impact on the academic and personal development of student participants, we still know very little about those



who are responsible for engendering that growth in our students – that is, the communities that host them abroad. While it is natural within the student-centered context of higher education administration to focus our evaluative efforts on student participants, work that is necessary and important in its own right, we must make space for the voices and perspectives of host community members in the design and evaluation of our programs. Not doing so is not only unethical, it perpetuates the ethnocentric tendencies that international education is intended to help us overcome. We must resist the neoliberalism that would have us see US students as customers and their experiences abroad as commodities to be bought and sold. On the contrary, we must see intentional hosts as teachers and learners who have dynamic perspectives on the study abroad experience for which they are an integral part. In so doing, we may actually come to realize the hope for international education as a driver of cross-cultural exchange and mutual understanding.

## APPENDICIES

Study Abroad Programs in San Jose, Costa Rica and Florence, Italy

### FLORENCE, ITALY

The following is a list of Association of College and University Programs in Italy (ACCUPI) member institutions with programs in Florence as well as independent study abroad centers operating in Florence. It is not an exhaustive list, but rather a list of programs that are relatively easily found via an online search.

#### *US College and University Programs*

Arizona State University  
 Associated Colleges of the Midwest  
 Beloit College  
 Bowling Green State University/Saci  
 California State University International Program in Florence  
 East Carolina University Italy Study Abroad (Certaldo)  
 Elon University  
 Fairfield University Florence Campus  
 Fashion Institute of Technology Florence Program  
 The Florence Academy of Art  
 Florida State University International Programs Italy (FSUIPI)  
 Georgetown University (Fiesole)  
 Gonzaga University in Florence  
 Harding University (Scandicci)  
 International Academy of Fine Art  
 James Madison University Florence Programs  
 The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies  
 Kent State University, Florence Program  
 Kenyon College – Kenyon in Rome and Florence  
 Marist College  
 Maryville University/Santa Reparata International School of Art (Srisa)  
 Middlebury College School in Italy  
 New York University in Florence  
 Northeastern University  
 Palm Beach Atlantic University  
 The Pennsylvania State University  
 Pepperdine University  
 Richmond – The Florence Program of Richmond, The American International University in London  
 Roger Williams University  
 Smith College  
 Stanford University  
 Syracuse University in Florence

University of Connecticut in Florence  
 University of Maryland  
 University of Minnesota Florence Program  
 University of New Haven in Florence  
 University of Pittsburgh  
 University of San Diego  
 University of South Florida  
 University of Wisconsin-Madison in Italy Program  
 Vanderbilt University  
 Washington University in St. Louis  
 Webster University

*Independent Programs*

CEA (<https://www.ceastudyabroad.com>)  
 IES (<https://www.iesabroad.org>)  
 AIFS (<https://www.aifsabroad.com>)  
 ISA (<https://studiesabroad.com>)  
 CIS (<https://www.cisabroad.com>)  
 CAPA (<https://www.capa.org>)  
 API (<https://apiabroad.com>)

*Local Institution Hosting US Students*

Florence University of the Arts  
 Accademia Europa di Firenze

**SAN JOSE, COSTA RICA**

The following is a list of independent study abroad centers operating in San Jose as well as local institutions that host visiting US students. It is not an exhaustive list, but rather a list of programs that are relatively easily found via an online search.

*Independent Programs*

ISA (<https://studiesabroad.com>)  
 API (<https://apiabroad.com>)  
 AIFS (<https://www.aifsabroad.com>)  
 CEA (<https://www.ceastudyabroad.com>)  
 CIS (<https://www.cisabroad.com>)  
 CIEE (<https://www.ciee.org/>)  
 SIT (<https://studyabroad.sit.edu/>)  
 USAC (<https://usac.edu/>)

*Local Institutions Hosting US Students*

Universidad Veritas  
 ULACIT  
 Universidad de Costa Rica

## Informed Consent Documents



SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

*Cultural Foundations of Education***CONSENT FORM:*****Producing the Global Classroom: Exploring the Impact of Study Abroad on Host Communities***

My name is **Julie Ficarra**, and I am a **Ph.D. Student** at **Syracuse University**. I am inviting you to participate in a research study. Involvement in the study is voluntary, so you may choose to participate or not. This sheet will explain the study to you and please feel free to ask questions about the research if you have any. I will be happy to explain anything in detail if you wish.

**I am interested in learning more about the experiences of those who interact with students from the United States while they are studying abroad. You will be asked to participate in a 60-minute interview.**

**Risks of Participation**

Given the nature of the study you will be asked questions in interviews regarding your cross-cultural experiences with students from the United States. This may cause anxiety or discomfort. You do not have to answer any question at any time if you would prefer not to.

**Confidentiality**

In any articles I write or any presentations that I make, I will use a made-up name for you, and I will not reveal details or I will change any identifying details about you.

**If you agree to have your interview audio recorded it will be used for the purposes of transcription and data analysis only. Only myself and my advisor, Gretchen Lopez, will have access to this recording. Once the study is complete these recordings will be deleted.**

If the interview is taking place via Skype, please be aware that whenever one communicates over the internet there is always the risk of compromising privacy, confidentiality and/or anonymity. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology being used. It is

important for you to understand that no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the internet by third parties.

The benefit of this research is that you will be helping me better understand your perspective, as a host community member, on the study abroad. This information should help American Universities to develop study abroad programs that take your opinions and experiences into account. By taking part in the research you may experience the following benefits: time to reflect on your experiences with students from the United States.

The risks to you of participating in this study are minimal, however you may feel uncomfortable answering questions. These risks will be minimized by your ability to opt out of answering any question at any time.

If you do not want to participate, you have the right to refuse, without penalty. If you decide to participate and later no longer wish to continue, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty.

Contact Information:

If you have any questions, concerns, complaints about the research, contact Julie Ficarra at [jmficarr@syr.edu](mailto:jmficarr@syr.edu) or her faculty advisor, Gretchen Lopez at [gelopez@syr.edu](mailto:gelopez@syr.edu) or 315-443-8344. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you have questions, concerns, or complaints that you wish to address to someone other than the investigator, or if you cannot reach the investigator contact the Syracuse University Institutional Review Board at 315-443-3013.

**All of my questions have been answered, I am 18 years of age or older, and I wish to participate in this research study. I have received a copy of this consent form.**

**Please circle one:**

1) I agree for this to be audio recorded. *Yes* | *No*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of researcher



SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

*Cultural Foundations of Education*

**Formulario de consentimiento:**

***Impacto de la presencia de Estudiantes de los Estados Unidos en la Comunidad de San José***

Mi nombre es Julie Ficarra, y soy un estudiante de doctorado en la Universidad de Syracuse (Syracuse University). Les invito a participar en un estudio de investigación. La participación en el estudio es voluntaria, por lo que puede optar por participar o no. Esta hoja le explicará el estudio y por favor haga preguntas sobre la investigación si tiene alguna. Estaré encantada de explicarle cualquier aspecto en detalle si lo desea.

**Estoy interesada en aprender más sobre las experiencias de aquellos que interactúan con estudiantes de los Estados Unidos mientras están estudiando en el extranjero. Se le pedirá que participe en una entrevista de 30 minutos.**

**Riesgos de participación**

Dada la naturaleza del estudio, se le harán preguntas en entrevistas sobre sus experiencias interculturales con estudiantes de los Estados Unidos. Esto puede causar ansiedad o molestias. Usted no tiene que contestar cualquier pregunta en cualquier momento si prefiere no hacerlo.

**Confidencialidad**

En cualquier artículo que escriba o en cualquier presentación que haga, usaré un nombre inventado para usted, y no revelaré detalles ni cambiaré ningún detalle identificativo sobre usted.

**Si usted está de acuerdo en que su entrevista sea grabada en audio, se utilizará únicamente para los propósitos de transcripción y análisis de datos. Sólo yo y mi asesor, Gretchen López, tendremos acceso a la grabación. Una vez completado el estudio, se eliminarán estas grabaciones.**

Si la entrevista está en Skype, tenga en cuenta que siempre que uno se comunica a través de Internet siempre existe el riesgo de comprometer la privacidad, la confidencialidad y / o el anonimato. Su confidencialidad se mantendrá hasta el grado permitido por la tecnología utilizada. Es importante que entienda que no se puede garantizar la interceptación de datos enviados a través de Internet por terceros.

El beneficio de esta investigación es que usted me ayudará a entender mejor su perspectiva, como miembro de la comunidad anfitriona. Esta información debe ayudar a las universidades americanas a desarrollar programas de estudio en el extranjero que tengan en cuenta sus opiniones y experiencias. Al participar en la investigación puede experimentar los siguientes beneficios: tiempo para reflexionar sobre sus experiencias con estudiantes de los Estados Unidos.

Los riesgos para usted de participar en este estudio son mínimos, sin embargo, puede sentirse incómodo al responder algunas preguntas. Estos riesgos serán minimizados por su capacidad de elegir no contestar cualquier pregunta en cualquier momento.

Si no desea participar, tiene derecho a rechazar, sin penalización. Si decide participar y ya no desea continuar, tiene derecho a retirarse del estudio en cualquier momento, sin penalización.

**Información del contacto:**

Si tiene preguntas, inquietudes o quejas sobre la investigación, comuníquese con Julie Ficarra a [jmficarr@syr.edu](mailto:jmficarr@syr.edu) o con la asesora de la facultad Gretchen Lopez a [gelopez@syr.edu](mailto:gelopez@syr.edu) o al 315-443-8344. Si tiene preguntas sobre sus derechos como participante en la investigación, tiene preguntas, preocupaciones o quejas que desea dirigir a alguien que no sea el investigador o si no puede comunicarse con el investigador, comuníquese con la Junta de Revisión Institucional de la Universidad de Syracuse al 315-443- 3013.

**Todas mis preguntas han sido contestadas, tengo 18 años de edad o más, y deseo participar en este estudio de investigación. He recibido una copia de este formulario de consentimiento.**

**Por favor circule uno:**

1) Estoy de acuerdo en que este audio se graba. Sí No

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma del participante

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

\_\_\_\_\_  
Nombre impreso del participante

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma del investigador

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

\_\_\_\_\_  
Nombre impreso del investigador



SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

*Cultural Foundations of Education*

**Modulo di consenso:**

***La produzione dell'aula globale:***

***Esplorando l'impatto degli studenti americani sulla comunità ospitante***

Mi chiamo Julie Ficarra, e sono una studentessa di dottorato presso la Syracuse University. Siete invitati a partecipare ad uno studio di ricerca. Il coinvolgimento nello studio è volontario, così si può scegliere di partecipare o no. Questo testo vi spiegherà lo studio. Si prega di fare domande sulla ricerca, se ne avete. Sarò felice di spiegare qualsiasi cosa in dettaglio, se lo si desidera.

Sono interessato a conoscere di più sulle esperienze delle persone che interagiscono con gli studenti americani mentre stanno studiando all'estero. Vi verrà chiesto di partecipare ad un colloquio di 60 minuti.

### **Rischi di partecipazione**

Data la natura dello studio vi verrà chiesto domande nelle interviste riguardanti le tue esperienze interculturali con studenti americani. Ciò può causare ansia o disagio. Non è necessario rispondere a qualsiasi domanda in qualsiasi momento, se si preferisce è possibile non rispondere.

### **Riservatezza**

In tutti gli articoli che scrivo o qualsiasi presentazione che faccio, io utilizzo un nome inventato per voi, e non voglio rivelare dettagli o cambierò i dettagli per l'identificazione dell'utente.

**Se si accetta di avere l'audio intervista registrata sarà utilizzato ai fini della trascrizione e solo i dati di analisi. Solo io e il mio consulente, Gretchen Lopez, potranno accedere alla registrazione audio. Una volta che lo studio è completo queste registrazioni verranno eliminati.**

Se l'intervista è su Skype, si prega di essere consapevoli del fatto che ogni volta che si comunica su internet c'è sempre il rischio di compromettere la privacy, la riservatezza e / o di anonimato. La vostra riservatezza sarà mantenuto nella misura consentita dalla tecnologia utilizzata. E 'importante per voi capire che non ci sono garanzie possono essere fatte per quanto riguarda l'intercettazione di



dati inviati via internet da parte di terzi.

Il vantaggio di questa ricerca è che ci aiuterete a capire meglio il vostro punto di vista, come un membro della comunità di accoglienza. Queste informazioni dovrebbero aiutare le università americane a sviluppare programmi di studio all'estero che prendono le vostre opinioni ed esperienze in considerazione. Prendendo parte alla ricerca è possibile riscontrare i seguenti vantaggi: il tempo per riflettere sulle vostre esperienze di studenti americani.

I rischi per voi di partecipare a questo studio sono minimi, ma si può scegliere di non rispondere alle domande scomode. Questi rischi saranno ridotti al minimo dalla vostra capacità di scegliere di rispondere a qualsiasi domanda in qualsiasi momento.

Se non si desidera partecipare, si ha il diritto di rifiutare, senza penalità. Se si decide di partecipare e poi non si vuole più continuare, avete il diritto di recedere dallo studio in qualsiasi momento, senza alcuna penalità.

### **Informazioni sui contatti:**

Se avete domande, dubbi, lamenti circa la ricerca, contattare Julie Ficarra a [jmficarr@syr.edu](mailto:jmficarr@syr.edu) o il suo consulente di facoltà, Gretchen Lopez al [gelopez@syr.edu](mailto:gelopez@syr.edu) o +001-315-443-8344. Se avete domande sui tuoi diritti in quanto partecipante alla ricerca, hai domande, dubbi o lamenti che si desidera affrontare da una persona diversa dal ricercatore, o se non è possibile raggiungere il contatto investigatore della Syracuse University Institutional Review Board a +001-315- 443-3013. Tutte le mie domande hanno avuto risposta, ho 18 anni di età o più, e vorrei partecipare a questo studio di ricerca. Ho ricevuto una copia di questo modulo di consenso.

Si prega di cerchiare uno:

1) Sono d'accordo per questo sia l'audio registrato. Sì No

\_\_\_\_\_

Firma del partecipante

\_\_\_\_\_

Data

\_\_\_\_\_

Nome stampato del partecipante

\_\_\_\_\_

Firma del ricercatore

\_\_\_\_\_

Data

\_\_\_\_\_

Nome stampato del ricercatore

## Interview Protocol

### INTENTIONAL HOSTS

A local person (defined as having lived in either San Jose or Florence, respectively for 10 or more years) who is 18 years of age or older and has done one of the following:

- 1) Hosted a US student in their home
- 2) Has taught US students in a classroom setting
- 3) Has worked with US students as an administrator in a study abroad capacity

#### I. BACKGROUND QUESTIONS – LIFE IN THE CITY

- a. How long have you been living in San Jose/Florence?
  - i. If your whole life, what has kept you here?
  - ii. If not your whole life, what brought you to (or back to) the city?
- b. What does it mean to be Tico/Florentine?
- c. How would you describe the city of San Jose/Florence to someone who has never been here before?

#### II. ENGAGING WITH AMERICAN STUDENTS

- a. How long have you been a (host mother, study abroad advisor, instructor)?
- b. What motivated you to begin doing that?
- c. What (if anything) had you heard about that role before you started?
- d. How have these perceptions changed since you have been (hosting, teaching, etc.)?
  - i. Can you tell more about a time/situation influenced your change in perspective?
- e. Can you tell me about the first time you worked with (or taught, hosted etc.) an American student? What was it like? Can you offer a specific example?

#### III. CONSTRUCTING THE GLOBAL CLASSROOM

- a. How do you prepare for the arrival of American students in your office (or classroom, home etc.)?
  - i. Why do you make those specific preparations?
- b. What kind of training do you have for administering programs (or teaching, hosting etc.) American students?
- c. What are your responsibilities in your role as an on-site administrator (or instructor, internship coordinator, host mother etc.)
- d. What (if anything) do you think American students learn from you and their time in Costa Rica/Italy?
  - i. Do you have any indication that American students are learning those things?  
How do you know?
- e. Do you think that the American students that you have worked with (taught, hosted, etc.) leave Costa Rica/Italy with a better understanding of your language, culture, and history?
  - i. Why or why not?

#### IV. PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

- a. How would you describe American culture?
- b. How would you describe Costa Rican/Italian culture?
- c. What are some issues facing the world right now that you think are important?
- d. How (if at all) has working with (teaching, hosting, etc.) American students changed your attitudes towards:
  - i. America/American culture
  - ii. Costa Rica/Costa Rican Culture or Italy/Italian Culture (site specific)
  - iii. The World

- e. In what ways (if at all) do you think the presence of American students in San Jose/Florence has changed life in the city? If so, how?
- f. Do you benefit from working with American students? If so, how?
- g. Does the city benefit from hosting American students? If so, how?

What (if any) are the disadvantages of hosting American students – for you personally? And for the city?

## Recruitment Documents

- a) Recruitment Email 1 (English – Costa Rica)
- b) Recruitment Email 2 (English – Italy)
- c) Recruitment Email 3 (Spanish- Costa Rica)
- d) Recruitment Email 4 (Italian - Italy)

### **RECRUITMENT EMAIL 1**

Subject: Research Participation Invitation: Impact of U.S. Student Presence on Costa Rican Host Community

If you are 18 years of age or older, and someone who has hosted students from the United States (U.S.) in your home, taught U.S. students, or worked in study abroad administration for U.S. students you are eligible to participate in a research study focused on the impact of U.S. study abroad students on our community.

The purpose of this research is to better understand the impact of U.S. student presence on the San Jose Host Community. The research will be conducted in San Jose, Costa Rica.

The research project will be conducted by Julie Ficarra, a Ph.D. Student at Syracuse University in the United States. Involvement in the study is voluntary, so you may choose to participate or not – your decision will have no bearing on your status as a partner of VERITAS University.

You will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview that will take approximately 60 minutes of your time. The interview can be conducted in English, if you are fluent, or with the assistance of a Spanish/English translator. All information will be kept confidential. Any papers or reports that are produced from this research will never include your name or any other identifying information.

If you are interested in taking part in this study please email Julie Ficarra (in English or Spanish at [jmficarr@syr.edu](mailto:jmficarr@syr.edu)).

## **RECRUITMENT EMAIL 2**

Subject: Research Participation Invitation: Impact of American Student Presence on Florentine Host Community

If you are 18 years of age or older, and someone who has hosted American students in your home, taught American students, or worked in study abroad administration for American students you are eligible to participate in a research study focused on the impact of American study abroad students on our community.

The purpose of this research is to better understand the impact of American student presence on the Florence Host Community. The research will be conducted in Florence, Italy.

The research project will be conducted by Julie Ficarra, a Ph.D. Student at Syracuse University in the United States. Involvement in the study is voluntary, so you may choose to participate or not – your decision will have no bearing on your status as a partner of SU Abroad Florence.

You will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview that will take approximately 60 minutes of your time. The interview can be conducted in English, if you are fluent, or with the assistance of an Italian/English translator. All information will be kept confidential. Any papers or reports that are produced from this research will never include your name or any other identifying information.

If you are interested in taking part in this study please email Julie Ficarra (in English or Italian at [jmficarr@syr.edu](mailto:jmficarr@syr.edu)).

## **RECRUITMENT EMAIL 3**

Subject: Invitación a la Participación en la Investigación: Impacto de la presencia de Estudiantes de los Estados Unidos en la Comunidad de San José

Si usted tiene 18 años de edad or más, e alguien que ha recibido a estudiantes de los Estados Unidos en su casa, ha enseñado a estudiantes de los Estados Unidos o ha trabajado en administración de estudios en el extranjero para estudiantes de los Estados Unidos, usted es elegible para participar en un estudio de investigación sobre el impacto de estudiantes estadounidenses en nuestra comunidad.

El propósito de la investigación es comprender mejor el impacto de estudiantes de los Estados Unidos en la comunidad de San José. La investigación ocurrirá en San José, Costa Rica.

El proyecto de investigación será conducido por Julie Ficarra, una estudiante de doctorado en la Universidad de Syracuse en los Estados Unidos.

La participación en el estudio es voluntaria, por lo que puede optar por participar o no - su decisión no afectará su estatus con VERITAS.

Se le pedirá que participe en una entrevista individual de 60 minutos. La entrevista se puede realizar en inglés, si usted es fluido, o con la ayuda de un traductor español / inglés. Toda la información

será mantenida confidencial. Cualquier documento o informe que se produzca a partir de esta investigación nunca incluirá su nombre o cualquier otra información de identificación.

Si está interesado en participar en este estudio, por favor envíe un correo electrónico a Julie Ficarra (en inglés o español) a [jmficarr@syr.edu](mailto:jmficarr@syr.edu).

#### **RECRUITMENT EMAIL 4**

Subject: Invito a partecipare ad uno studio di ricerca: L'impatto della presenza degli studenti americani sulle comunità ospitante di Firenze.

Se hai 18 anni di età o più, e ha ospitato gli studenti americani in casa, insegnato agli studenti americani, o lavorato in studio di amministrazione all'estero per gli studenti americani ha diritto a partecipare ad uno studio di ricerca sull'impatto di studenti americani sulla nostra comunità.

Lo scopo della ricerca è quello di capire meglio l'impatto della presenza degli studenti americani sulle comunità ospitante di Firenze. La ricerca sarà condotta in Firenze, Italia.

Il progetto di ricerca sarà condotto da Julie Ficarra, uno studente di dottorato presso la Syracuse University negli Stati Uniti. Il coinvolgimento nello studio è volontario, per cui si può scegliere di partecipare o meno - la vostra decisione non avrà alcuna incidenza sul proprio status con la Syracuse University Firenze.

Vi verrà chiesto di partecipare ad un colloquio individuale di 60 minuti. L'intervista può essere condotta in inglese, se si è fluenti in quella lingua, o con l'assistenza di un traduttore italiano / inglese. Tutte le informazioni rimarranno confidenziali. Eventuali documenti o rapporti che sono prodotti da questa ricerca non potranno mai riportare il nome o qualsiasi altra informazione di identificazione.

Se siete interessati a partecipare a questo studio potete scrivere a Julie Ficarra (in inglese o italiano) a [jmficarr@syr.edu](mailto:jmficarr@syr.edu).

## REFERENCES

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## VITA

**NAME OF AUTHOR:** Julie M. Ficarra

**PLACE OF BIRTH:** Syracuse, NY

**DATE OF BIRTH:** January 4, 1988

## EDUCATION

- Expected 2019      Ph.D. **Syracuse University**  
 Cultural Foundations of Education  
 Emphasis: Comparative International Social Justice Education  
 Dissertation: *“Producing the Global Classroom: Exploring the Impact of US Study Abroad on Host Communities in San Jose, Costa Rica and Florence, Italy”*  
 Committee: Dr. Gretchen E. Lopez (Chair), Dr. Barbara Applebaum, Dr. Jeffrey Mangram
- 2011              Ed.M. **Harvard University**  
 International Education Policy  
 Capstone: *“The Internationalization of US Higher Education in Historical Perspective”*
- 2010              B.A. **University at Buffalo**  
 Double Major: International Studies and Cultural Anthropology  
 Honors Thesis: *“Comparative Educational Outcomes of Somali Bantu and Burmese Karen Refugees in Buffalo, NY”*  
  
*Coursework Completed Abroad:*  
 Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic  
 Oxford University, Oxford, UK  
 SUNY Stony Brook Field School, Tanzania

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

### University

**Critical Reflection: International Internship**  
 (Summer 2018, Fall 2018, Winter 2019, Spring 2019)  
 Instructor of Record, International Programs  
 SUNY Cortland

**International Education for Transformation**  
 (Spring 2016, Spring 2017)  
 Instructor of Record, Cultural Foundations of Education Department  
 Syracuse University

**Critical Reflection in Study Abroad**

(Fall 2015, Spring 2016, Spring 2017)  
 Instructor of Record, School of Education  
 Syracuse University

**Education for Transformation** (Fall 2015, Fall 2016)

Instructor of Record, Cultural Foundations of Education Department  
 Syracuse University

**The University Experience** (Fall 2012)

Instructor of Record, College of Arts & Sciences  
 University of South Florida, Tampa

**Introduction to American Pluralism** (Spring 2010)

Teaching Assistant, Department of African American Studies  
 University at Buffalo

**Global Perspectives Seminar** (Spring 2010)

Teaching Assistant, Department of Political Science  
 University at Buffalo

**Community****Beginner English for Adult Refugees** (2014 – 2015, 2017)

Lead Teacher and Curriculum Designer  
 Northside Learning Center, Syracuse, NY

**African Development Youth Leadership Program** (2011)

Lead Instructor and Course Designer  
 Harvard University and Boston Public Schools, Cambridge, MA

**Intermediate English for Teens** (2009)

Teaching Assistant and Curriculum Developer  
 Keplerova Gymnasium, Prague, Czech Republic

**K- 12****Secondary Social Studies, Health, English, & Religion** (2014 – Present)

Substitute Teacher  
 Bishop Ludden Jr./Sr. High School, Syracuse, NY

**College Prep (2014 – 2016)**

Guest Lecturer, West Genesee High School, Syracuse, NY

**ACADEMIC PUBLICATIONS****Peer Reviewed Book Chapter**

Ficarra, J. (forthcoming, 2018). Local partners as teachers and learners in education abroad: Introducing a local partner engagement process model. In A. Ogden & E. Brewer (Eds.), *Critical Perspectives on Education Abroad: Leveraging the Educational Continuum* (pp. TBD). New York: Routledge.

### Peer Reviewed Journal Articles

- Ficarra, J. (2017). Curating Cartographies of Knowledge: Reading Institutional Study Abroad Portfolios as Text. *Frontiers: The Journal of Study Abroad*
- Ficarra, J. (2017). Comparative International Approaches to Better Understanding Refugee Learners. *Issues in Teacher Education*, 16 (2): 15-31.
- Ficarra, J. (2016). Graduate Student Research Spotlight: “Producing the Global Classroom: Exploring the Impact of Study Abroad on Host Communities”. *Comparative International Higher Education*, 8:5.
- Ficarra, J., Cottrell, K., Burton S. & Miller, K. (2016). Mapping the Curriculum of the ‘Global’ City: From Bogotá to Berlin. *The SoJo Journal: Educational Foundations and Social Justice Education*, 1(2):45-61.

### Manuscripts in Preparation

- Ficarra, J. “Pre-Service Teachers Navigating Difference on a Short-Term Service Learning Experience in Costa Rica”.

### FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

- 2017 Syracuse University School of Education Research and Creative Activity Fund | \$1000
- 2017 Syracuse University Moynihan Institute Summer Research Grant | \$3000
- 2017 Syracuse University Graduate Student Association Travel Grant | \$450
- 2017 AERA Division G Travel Award | \$500
- 2015 Himan Brown Trust Scholarship for Pre-Dissertation Research Abroad | Award \$2,100
- 2014 Syracuse University PhD Fellowship | Award \$26,000 stipend for 2 years
- 2014 Syracuse University PhD Scholarship | Award Full Tuition and Fees for 4 years
- 2013 NAFSA: Association of International Educators, Region X Rising Professional Award | \$250
- 2011 Comparative International Education Society Conference Travel Award | \$250
- 2010 Una Chapman Cox Foundation Foreign Service Fellowship | Award \$16,000 stipend over 2 years

## CONFERENCE PAPERS AND PRESENTATIONS

- Ficarra, J.** (2019). "Extending Colonial Critiques Beyond International Service-Learning in the Global South: The Case of Florence, Italy". CAPA Ninth Annual Symposium: Empires of the Mind? (Post)colonialism and Decolonizing Education Abroad. Boston, MA.
- Ficarra, J.** (2018). "Critical Institutional Study Abroad Portfolio Analysis". NAFSA: Association of International Educators National Conference and Expo. Philadelphia, PA.
- Ficarra, J.** (2018). "Study Abroad and Host Communities: Local Partner Engagement Process Model". NAFSA: Association of International Educators National Conference and Expo. Philadelphia, PA.
- Brewer, B., **Ficarra, J.**, and Adkins, R. (2018). "We're So Vain, We Probably Think This Program's About Us: Decolonizing Study Abroad". Forum on Education Abroad Conference. Boston, MA.
- Ficarra, J.** (2018). "Frontiers Journal Featured Research: Curating Cartographies of Knowledge: Reading Institutional Study Abroad Portfolio as Text" Forum on Education Abroad Conference. Boston, MA.
- Ficarra, J.** and Avery, S. (2017). "Northside!: The Politics of Community Inclusion". International Association of Research on Service Learning and Community Engagement. Galway, Ireland.
- Ficarra, J.** (2017). "Dangerous Discourses: 'Benevolent Power' in Domestic Service Learning and International Development". International Association of Research on Service Learning and Community Engagement. Galway, Ireland.
- Ficarra, J.** (2017). "Tracing the Evolution of Education Abroad Program Models into the Age of the Corporate University: Perils and Possibilities". Panel Presentation: *Historical Perspectives on Critical Internationalization*, with Bryan McAllister-Grande (Harvard University) and Eduardo Contreras (University of Portland). American Educational Research Association Annual Conference. San Antonio, TX.
- Ficarra, J.** (2017). "Comparative International Approaches to Understanding and Supporting Refugee Learners". New York State Foundations of Education Conference. Ithaca, NY.
- Ficarra, J.** (2016). "Race, Development, and 'Benevolent Power' at Home and Abroad". New York State Foundations of Education Conference. Cortland, NY.
- Ficarra, J.** and Avery, S. (2015). "The Education of Belonging: Exploring the Politics of Space and Memory Using Documentary Film". American Educational Studies Association Conference. San Antonio, TX.
- Ficarra, J.** and Avery, S. (2014). "14 Days in Africa: Community Collaborative Filmmaking on the Continent". New York African Studies Association Meeting. Cortland, NY.

- Ficarra, J.** and Cichello, F. (2013). “The Affordances of Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) at Various Stages of the Study Abroad Cycle”. NAFSA: Association of International Educators Region X Conference. Atlantic City, NJ.
- Ficarra, J.**, Gomis, J. and Acacio, E. (2012). “First Do No Harm: The Effects of Short-Term Study Abroad Programs on Host Communities”. NAFSA: Association of International Educators National Conference and Expo. St. Louis, MO.
- Zimmerman, A., **Ficarra, J.**, and Bryant, A. (2012). “Ready, Willing, and Able to Serve: Supporting Students with Disabilities on Internships Abroad”. NAFSA: Association of International Educators National Conference and Exp. St. Louis, MO.
- Ficarra, J.**, Gomis, J. and Acacio, E. (2012). “First Do No Harm: The Effects of Short-Term Study Abroad Programs on Host Communities”. NAFSA: Association of International Educators Regional Conference and Expo. San Juan, Puerto Rico.
- Ficarra, J.** (2012). “The Affordances of Online Learning in the Context of Education Abroad. Florida International Education Consortium (FCIE) Conference, Valencia College. Orlando, FL.
- Ficarra, J.** (2011). “Internationalization of Higher Education – Student Success and Experiential Education”. Harvard Graduate School of Education Student Practitioner Conference. Cambridge MA.
- Ficarra, J.** (2010). “Attitudes toward Race in the White, Black, Asian and Latino Student Communities”. University at Buffalo Celebration of Academic Excellence. Buffalo, NY.

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

### Education Administration

SUNY Cortland, Office of International Programs (2017 – Present)  
**Associate Director of Study Abroad** | Cortland, NY

Digital Media Summer Academy at Harvard (Summers 2014, 2015)  
**Assistant Director** | Cambridge, MA

SUNY Center for Collaborative Online International Learning (2013 – 2014)  
**Program Manager for International Collaborations** | Manhattan, NY

Office of International Programs, University of South Florida (2011 – 2013)  
**Education Abroad Advisor** | Tampa, FL

Office of International Programs, Harvard College (2010 – 2011)  
**Education Abroad Program Assistant** | Cambridge, MA

University of Northern Virginia, Prague Campus (2009)

**Academic Affairs Intern** | Prague, Czech Republic

Office of International Programs, University at Buffalo (2007 – 2010)  
**Study Abroad Student Assistant** | Buffalo, NY

### State and Federal Government

U.S. Department of State, U.S. Embassy Swaziland (2011)  
**Una Chapman Cox Fellow of Public Diplomacy** | Mbabane, Swaziland

U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs (2010)  
**Intern** | Washington, D.C.

Office of Assemblyman Magnarelli, 129th Assembly District (2004 – 2007)  
**Clerk and Education Policy Intern** | Syracuse, NY

### Consulting

University of Massachusetts Global Citizenship Initiative (2011 – 2012)  
**International Student Recruitment Consultant** | Amherst, MA

Ivy App Advisors (2011 – 2012)  
**U.S. Ivy League Application Consultant** | Oxford, UK

Harvard University Committee on African Studies (Spring 2011)  
**Partnership Development Consultant** | Cambridge, MA

The Digital Media Academy (Spring 2011)  
**Partnership Development Consultant** | Los Gatos, CA

College of Holy Cross, Office of International Programs (Spring 2011)  
**Online Course Development Consultant** | Worcester, MA

### UNIVERSITY SERVICE

#### Professional Service

2015 – Present	<b>Journal Reviewer</b> <i>Issues in Teacher Education</i>
2015 – Present	<b>Journal Reviewer</b> <i>SoJo Journal: Social Justice Education</i>
2015 – Present	<b>Mentor for Connecting with the World Program</b> , Myanmar, Institute of International Education
2013 – 2014	<b>Co-Chair</b> , NAFSA Technology Member Interest Group (MIG)
2012	<b>Education Abroad Session Selection Committee</b> , NAFSA Bi-Regional Conference (Regions VII & III) Puerto Rico

## Institutional Service

2018	<b>Search Committee Chair</b> International Programs Coordinator, SUNY Cortland
2017 - Present	<b>Assistant Director</b> , Blackbird Film Festival, SUNY Cortland
2017 – Present	<b>Clark Council on International Education</b> , SUNY Cortland
2016	<b>Search Committee</b> Tenure Track Assistant Professor in Cultural Foundations of Education Department, Syracuse University
2015 – 2016	<b>Internationalization Working Group</b> , Fast Forward Strategic Planning University Wide Committee, Syracuse University
2014-2015	<b>Doctoral Education and Research Working Group</b> , Fast Forward Strategic Planning University Wide Committee, Syracuse University
2012 – 2013	<b>Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life, Standards of Fraternal Excellence Review Board</b> , University of South Florida
2012 – 2013	<b>International Living and Learning Community Steering Committee</b> , University of South Florida
2012 - 2013	<b>International Festival Planning Committee</b> , University of South Florida
2012 – 2013	<b>Education Abroad Scholarship Selection Committee</b> , University of South Florida
2012 – 2013	<b>Marshal Student Center Advisory Council</b> , University of South Florida
2010-2011	<b>Chair</b> , International Education Policy Ed.M. Program Student Advisory Council, Harvard University
2010-2011	<b>Co-Director</b> , Harvard African Education Initiative, Harvard University
2010 – 2011	<b>Ambassador</b> , Office of Admission, Harvard Graduate School of Education