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## “Let’s Get a Coffee!”: A Transformative International Honors Partnership

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CHAPTER SIX

“Let’s Get a Coffee!”:  
A Transformative International  
Honors Partnership

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**INTRODUCTION**

Advocates of study abroad have emphasized that semester- and year-long programs offer greater opportunities than short-term programs for students to enhance their personal, academic, and professional development (Dwyer). But can carefully constructed short-term study abroad experiences, which are increasingly popular choices for undergraduates, have similar effects? One study suggests they can achieve important outcomes, such as encouraging

tolerance for ambiguity, appreciation for diversity, and openness to experience (Shadowen et al.). Another study shows that even short-term exposure to other cultures can enhance creativity (Leung et al.), and a third demonstrates that creative problem solving was improved by cultural study in a process independent of the experience of living abroad, suggesting that studying a culture in addition to visiting it can have a similar effect (Cho and Morris). One mechanism that seems to cause this change is the ability to notice cultural collisions and examine the logic of multiple cultures simultaneously (Leung et al.). Honors programs and colleges, which traditionally have featured interdisciplinary teaching and reflective pedagogies, are particularly well-positioned to offer programs that utilize these insights. In this chapter we describe the evolution of a partnership between the honors programs at the University of North Florida (UNF) and Deree—The American College of Greece (Deree)—that employs this research in its design. What began as a small summer study abroad program for American students in Greece has become a thriving cross-cultural experience that has positively impacted both student populations and both campuses.

### **“THE HONORS DIFFERENTIAL”**

Neil H. Donahue, former associate dean of the Hofstra University Honors College, refers to the emphasis in honors pedagogy on critical and reflexive thinking as “the honors differential” (47). Its existence suggests that honors is predisposed to be the learning laboratory in which these insights can be integrated into study abroad programs (Braid and Schrynmaker 26). Honors pedagogy has long included not only a focus on how we see and think about unfamiliar cultures but also a recognition that our own culture should be thrown into relief and made visible for equal scrutiny. Honors scholar Bernice Braid offers a starting point to challenge students to think differently about home and self as well as away and other. Applying ideas from anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s *Local Knowledge*, she promotes an experiential and ethnographic lens to stimulate students to “see with new eyes,” emphasizing both

seeing difference and recognizing the “new eyes” that are able to see differently (“Promoting” 157). Offering specific suggestions for incorporating this ethnographic viewpoint into classes, Braid promotes a reflexive gaze, helping students recognize how they “look and see, how they interact and with whom, and how they make maps of their uncharted wanderings” (“Promoting” 161). Her thinking on this topic is embodied in the important City as Text™ pedagogy that she developed in the 1970s (Long ix). City as Text is designed to illuminate multiple perspectives from which students can observe and interpret their experience while also helping students to recognize their own cultural perspectives, which they unconsciously use as the norm against which they measure everything new.

Braid’s City as Text methodology relies on a mix of ideas from several theorists: ideas about experiential learning as defined by David A. Kolb, the postmodern definition of a “text” that invites students to “read” places as they might read books offered by Geertz, the emphasis on the value of collaborative learning endorsed by Kenneth Bruffee, and the recognition that learning is a dialogic process as promoted by Mikhail Bakhtin (Mulvaney, “Short-Term International City as Text™” 50–55). Braid’s model of four strategies (mapping, observing, listening, and reflecting) implements those theories about experiential learning; places as “text”; and collaborative, dialogic learning into a systematized method (Long xi–xii). The central feature is the “walkabout”: a four-to-five hour, unstructured expedition into a new space in which the group observes the neighborhood and listens to people living there in an analytical way, collaboratively mapping and reflecting on their experience as they go (Braid, “City as Text™” 51). The activity not only gives participants a deep understanding of a specific place in a specific time, but it also serves to “hone observational skills” (Braid, “City as Text™” 52) by teaching students to be “attentive to detail, to search for connections, and to reflect upon observations in writing, and then to compare observations and synthesize reactions” (Mulvaney, “Short-Term International City as Text™” 49). We devised a program in Athens, Greece, for students from UNF and Deree, using

the research on study abroad with the City as Text model as the central pedagogy.

## **PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

After a personal connection among the authors revealed a common interest in a study abroad partnership, the program was initiated in summer 2011 as a traditional study abroad experience in Greece for American students. Honors students from UNF traveled to Deree for a six-week summer session. Students enrolled in two classes: a class on modern Greek culture taught by a UNF faculty member (Dr. Leslie Kaplan) and a second class selected from the Deree curriculum. The classes were supplemented by a series of non-credit workshops in “survival Greek” with a Deree faculty member (Dr. Sophia Zevgoli). In the first year, students chose a random selection of Deree classes; they took courses that would fulfill their general education requirements, but they were not necessarily considering classes that would enhance their study abroad experience. One student took a math class and spent ten hours a week in a classroom in Greece studying college algebra. Another took an Italian language class and spent the summer confused about which language she was learning. Other students, however, reported having engaging and fascinating experiences in humanities or social science classes that were aimed at Greek students but were taught using American textbooks. The natural contrast between the two perspectives inspired lively discussions focused on cultural comparisons. As we processed our own observations as well as student feedback from the initial summer programs, the experience evolved. It became a true partnership between the two honors programs as we designed and incorporated experiential and collaborative encounters that benefitted both American and Greek students.

By the third year, we had developed two Deree honors classes specifically for the partnership (a photography class and a humanities class) and enrolled equal numbers of American and Greek honors students in each class. We also altered the weekly class schedule to expand opportunities for collaborative field experiences:

instead of holding classes for two hours a day, five days a week, we rearranged classroom time to two hours a day, three times a week. This schedule revision allowed us to add a four-hour, field-trip day, which provided more time for the American students to explore Greek culture alongside Greek students. By observing the American students' culture shock and engaging in discussion with them, the Greek students gained significant cross-cultural experience as well. In the fourth year, we redesigned all the courses to incorporate City as Text pedagogy as a central feature that binds the different parts of the experience together. The purpose of using the City as Text pedagogy in all classes is to equip students with skills to look at cities as both readers and writers. We want them to learn to read the city, which means analytically breaking their experience down into smaller categories and then reconstructing it into larger categories that reflect patterns in what they experience. They are also writers, creating and sharing their own idiosyncratic texts of Athens through blog posts and group discussion. Furthermore, City as Text pedagogy's emphasis on reflexivity helps the students to recognize their own cultural lens, and its emphasis on synthesizing observations promotes integration.

The Deree courses—Documentary Photography (an honors course), Strolling Incognito (an honors sociology class), and City as Myth (a literature/culture class)—are now taught as City as Text classes with equal numbers of Greek and American students. (For a copy of a course syllabus, please contact the authors.) Two of the three courses are offered each year, and students choose one of them. The Deree honors courses include weekly structured walks around Athens with reflective discussion. One of them also includes a City as Text exercise set in an archive. At the same time, we redesigned the required UNF class on modern Greek culture taken by all American students. It became a team-taught class incorporating survival Greek workshops that engaged American students in authentic interactions with the host community to augment their immersion into everyday Greek culture. It also employs modified City as Text assignments for several archaeological sites, museums, and neighborhood explorations. The UNF professor teaches and

grades eighty percent of the reflective work in the UNF class. The Deree professor teaches Greek language and culture workshops, which account for the remaining twenty percent of the course grade for the American students. The field trips are conducted with the help of Greek honors student facilitators, called International Honors Program (IHP) peers. The IHP peers are selected based on their expressed interest in cross-cultural activities. They are familiar with Greek culture but also possess English language skills, allowing them to bridge the two cultures. Before the beginning of the program, the director of the Deree IHP conducts a training workshop for the IHP peers. Participants are prepared to support the American students' authentic interactions with locals during the experiential classes that take place in the city, and they are also trained to participate meaningfully in cross-cultural discussions and activities. The structured discussions consist of cross-cultural dialogue about issues relevant to students, such as the notion of politeness and appropriacy, the nature of friendship, the understanding of time, the role of alcohol, gender relations, family dynamics, and individuality vs. group relations. They therefore foster peer collaborative learning, enabling both American and Greek students to gain a better understanding of their own and each other's culture. Even more interestingly, the dialogue creates authentic opportunities for both groups to not merely discuss but also experience, through their intellect, senses, and feelings, the values of the target culture so that they can critically assess and reconsider their beliefs, biases, and attitudes through their interactions. This process aims to be potentially transformational for students, both those at home and those abroad.

While the partnership is focused on the joint summer program, it also encompasses an exchange agreement between the two campuses, so it includes traditional semester study abroad students in both directions. The longevity of the relationship has allowed for close collaboration and repeated experimentation to explore the pedagogical strategies that will best benefit both campuses and all students, both hosts and guests.

## CONCERNS ABOUT STUDY ABROAD

One common criticism of study abroad is that it can easily devolve into a glorified sightseeing tour or a voyeuristic venture where students observe but do not meaningfully interact with individuals of the host culture, much less allow the experience to penetrate into their own understanding of the world. They return with a camera full of photos and stories about their adventures but without fundamentally changing the way they see themselves or other cultures. The National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) has devoted two previous publications to exploring the contributions of honors pedagogy to international education: a themed journal (*Forum on Honors Study Abroad, JNCHC*, vol. 12, no. 1) in 2011 and a monograph in 2013 (Mulvaney and Klein). Several of the journal articles and monograph chapters articulate these concerns. The opening essay in the themed journal is a troubling review of ways in which some study abroad programs fail to live up to the hype about their benefits, including programs that do not emphasize intercultural understanding, that allow students to remain in an American bubble, or, worse yet, that become mere social exercises (Haynes 17–20). The first chapter in the monograph argues:

If study abroad students return home from Oxford knowing only that home is different from Oxford, then their program leaders have not given them a transformative experience. Rather, they have provided a temporary experience of another place, one which is contingent on being in that place, and they have not equipped students to think differently about home or to challenge the simple binary of home and away. (Baigent 5)

Another journal article describes the problem of “lost opportunity” in study abroad experiences, by which they mean that students gain in self-esteem, but not the “perspectival flexibility,” and “global understanding” that represent more consequential change (Braid and Schrynemakers 25, 26). Significant challenges to creating meaningful study abroad experiences exist; however, the psychological research described at the beginning of this chapter identifies



how study abroad programs can address these concerns and impact student thinking about themselves and other cultures.

## **HOLISTIC STUDY ABROAD**

“Holistic study abroad” might be a good term to describe programs that focus on the broad cultural exposure that has traditionally been the main goal of semester and year-long programs, as opposed to programs that are in a particular discipline or have a particular focus on art, engineering, medical systems, or business practices. Holistic study abroad has the potential to be “an intentional way of engaging with difference, a different way of learning. [. . .] A meaningful study abroad experience requires students to modify the way they perceive and engage the world” (Frost et al. 240). Our students’ understanding of the host culture should be changed and so should their understanding of themselves. Adaptation to the local culture is the key to this transformation, and therefore programs ought to be structured to maximize the likelihood that students adapt (Nguyen 35).

The specific aspects of study abroad that confer these benefits have to do with the concept of “integration”: incorporating an understanding of a new worldview into an existing worldview as the focus of critical reflection that includes attention on both the self and other, and the degree of integrative complexity was an important mediating factor (Tadmor et al.). The marker of a successful study abroad experience, then, is a shift in the student from gazing at the culture as an object and instead interacting enough with people to begin to embrace the culture from the inside. The next step is to turn the gaze back on oneself and one’s own culture, integrating the two into a new, broader, more nuanced worldview. The process of reflexive gazing (at the self as well as at the other) alters worldviews. It is an activity that is both dialogic and potentially transformational, depending on the degree of depth.

Psychologists suggest several mechanisms through which integration is achieved. One is depth; living abroad (as opposed to traveling abroad) improved the likelihood of adaptation to the customs and culture of the host country (Maddux and Galinsky).

Depth has long been held to be the gold standard for holistic study abroad: a long-term, stationary, independent sojourn of a semester, or, even better, a year, especially if it includes homestays and use of the local language (Camarena and Collins 85). The weakness of the traditional depth model is that it lacks the structure that emphasizes deliberate study of the culture and requires students to have the maturity and discipline to engage in significant reflexive and critical reflection on their own.

For the sixty-two percent of study abroad programs, according to the Institute of International Education, that are less than a semester in length, utilizing the research about the value of deliberate cultural study and reflexive discussion offers the promise of achieving integration without requiring long stays (“Fast Facts 2016”). This is because the deliberate and detailed study of a worldview and culture also seems to lead to integration (Cho and Morris 945). The presence of a thoughtful faculty member on a carefully constructed short-term experience abroad can offer important benefits that may be lacking in more independent longer experiences (Otero 41–45). Faculty can facilitate integrated learning in many ways: they can structure students’ background reading and reflection to emphasize worldview and culture, motivate students to step outside their comfort zone, require interaction with the host country, create opportunities to deliberately adapt to the culture, and require students to reflect on the meaning of the changes to their worldview that this necessitates. Other researchers have described a structured process that begins with noticing differences and recognizing the functions of those differences in each culture and then grappling with both the home and foreign culture in order to make sense of them together, thus integrating rather than foregrounding one or the other or rejecting both (Maddux et al. 733; Tadmor et al. 521). These findings are interesting because they suggest that experiences beyond the traditional semester or year abroad can also have a powerful effect. The outcomes of holistic study abroad experiences and the strategies that can achieve those outcomes are suddenly much clearer and more evidence-based, and existing honors pedagogy seems to align with this research.

## **THEORETICAL INSIGHTS APPLIED IN THE PROGRAM**

We applied these theoretical insights when developing our courses, including the language and culture workshops, to achieve synergies in our faculty collaboration and student interaction. We have reversed the focus that is often used, where language is taught with some attention to culture. Instead, we are teaching culture using language as a way for the learners to gain insight into an emic point of view and develop intercultural competence. To this end, we use intertwined pedagogical strategies to apply the aforementioned insights into our collaborative venture. We implemented the following strategies:

1. collaborative, structured cross-cultural learning with peers; and
2. experiential learning, entailing:
  - a. observation,
  - b. structured interactions, including City as Text methodology, and
  - c. intentional reflection with a focus on transferability.

All experiential learning taking place in this synergy includes observation, interaction, and reflection. To address the theoretical insights, we have selected particular interactive strategies including language learning emphasizing intercultural competence and City as Text methodology. Furthermore, our reflective practice includes a focus on transferability, the deliberate pointing out of methods that could be used in other contexts. Of course, the notion of the transfer of knowledge or skills, which underly instructional design in a broad array of contexts, draws upon several psychological theories of learning. As professors of learning design and technology, Peggy Ertmer and Timothy Newby succinctly state: “Transfer refers to the application of learned knowledge in new ways or situations, as well as to how prior learning affects new learning” (49). From the perspective of social constructivists, “transfer can be facilitated by involvement in authentic tasks anchored in meaningful contexts”

(Ertmer and Newby 57)—a concept undoubtedly informing the City as Text methodology. Enabling re-entry students to seriously reflect upon what they learned from studying abroad extends the value of the experience significantly beyond the early-return rapture stage that many students report.

### **Collaborative Learning with Peers**

The heart of the experience is collaborative learning with peers. Many study abroad programs feature a group of American students learning about a foreign culture with guides or a faculty member as cultural broker. There may be guest speakers or site visits with local experts. Since our program is a true partnership between two honors programs, much of the learning is collaborative, occurring in structured reflective discussions in a setting that includes both Greek and American students so that both groups of students are learning about themselves and each other together. The reflective structure that the courses use, which asks students to think about their own culture and the other culture, emphasizes this process. The discussions we describe are both collaborative and structured so that we make it comfortable to ask questions about the other culture and share candid observations. In fact, in our experience what begins as a structured discussion between the two groups of students often turns into an open, frank conversation in which students talk about cultural differences and even personal feelings with curiosity and understanding. The learning environment we create extends beyond the classroom environment, leading to organic conversations and friendships that often produce lasting international relationships.

### **Experiential Learning**

Experiential learning is easily adaptable to a wide variety of educational settings, especially to classrooms where project-based and task-based learning form the core of the curriculum (Knutson 53). Experiential learning involves senses, feelings, and personalities—in other words, the whole person and not just the intellect

(Andresen et al. 227). It “is synonymous with ‘meaningful-discovery’ learning . . . which involves the learner in sorting things out for himself by restructuring his perceptions of what it is happening” (Boydell 19–20).

Tapping into this synergy, immersive experiences may take several forms: in our example, students come into contact with Greek writing formally in street signs and informally in graffiti on buildings anytime they walk out their door. Students live in Deree-owned apartments in the neighborhood, which are equipped with kitchens. Because they do not have a meal plan, students have to shop in the produce market, butcher shops, and grocery stores or frequent restaurants to eat, and these daily activities intensify their immersion experience. With our encouragement and instruction, they interact with Greek people every day as they feed themselves, journey to class, explore the city, and go about daily tasks as residents of the city rather than tourists.

The success of our experiential teaching depends not only on exposing the students to new customs and ways of thinking but also on having each student reflect on these new experiences and restructure their perception. To encourage this outcome, we have designed experiential assignments combined with reflection. All of the sightseeing activities center on themes: we visit Delphi and combine it with a monastery on a trip we call “sacred spaces.” We visit the Athenian Agora on the same day that we visit the central produce, meat, and spice market and discuss public space and commercial space. These themed excursions are aimed at placing reflection into the structure of the experience as well as into the classroom discussions and blog posts students are assigned to write. On many of the trips, we use a modified City as Text approach, asking groups of students to explore a site using a particular viewpoint or lens: looking at the chronological layers of a site or focusing on multiple functions for which a site has been used. When examining the city of Athens, students first explore the central core, the ancient center, which is also the main tourist area. They must choose a particular museum; their assignment is to create a video convincing others to visit. Then we push small groups of students

out in concentric circles into the living neighborhoods contiguous to the central core. They ask City as Text-style questions on their visits, then research the neighborhood's history and current identity. We encourage reflection by having students write a brief essay on each excursion and post it on their blog. The faculty members read the posts, and they urge students to read each other's posts: the themes gleaned from those reflections are raised in the weekly class discussions.

### *Observation*

Students are constantly encouraged to observe, and they document their observations with photographs and daily blog posts for the required UNF class. The blog posts document activities and help students remember the chronology of the experience, but they also describe moments of cultural collision and reflect on both cultures' logic to help them integrate their experience. Students are also encouraged to make observations in the two City as Text honors courses. In Documentary Photography, students are asked to take photographs when traversing the city, and in Strolling Incognito, they are asked to become "flâneurs" by observing their environs deliberately and methodically without being obvious about their intentions.

### *Interaction*

The most genuine interaction between American and Greek students occurs in the language and culture workshop. Although these interactions may seem superficial given the learners' limited ability in Greek, they are authentic and effective since they are taking place within the cultural milieu of the host country in the native language. In this workshop, language teaching entails a great deal of culture teaching (Byram and Grundy 1; Jiang 328; Tseng 11), which aims to develop speakers who are both linguistically and culturally competent (Berwick and Whalley 326). What is meant by "culture" here is the things that are shared by members of a community, such as social habits and conventions, rules of etiquette (i.e., polite

behavior), daily life, and cultural connotations of words and phrases (Damar 753; Stern 213). The purpose is learning the culture of the target community or country. The pedagogy proceeds by using the target country's language (Shi 233), which reinforces and supports the learning of that language. Learning the target culture plays a central role in developing communicative competence in the target language: the learners are supported in developing appropriate behaviors and attitudes and in using the language appropriately by interacting in different social settings. They develop intercultural competence because the learners are immersed into the everyday culture of the target country and come into direct contact with people and places. In this workshop, "culture learning entails a subtle balance among observation, interaction and various degrees of reflection on experience" (Berwick and Whalley 328).

Although culture teaching is often implicit in language programs, in this workshop it is made explicit. This synergy draws the students' attention to the particular values or worldviews associated with specific ways of using the language. For example, we explicitly explain to the students that in Greek the request for exchanging a larger bill for smaller bills can be formulated as something equivalent to "Can we break this [bill]?" We explicitly draw attention to how the language and culture intertwine: the inclusive "we" reflects the collaborative and participatory orientation of this culture.

The students in the workshop are learning survival Greek, which is calibrated to the most common experiences they will have: exchanging pleasantries, understanding numbers, buying produce at the weekly outdoor produce markets, going to a coffee shop, and eating at restaurants. Each on-campus class is followed by an experiential off-campus class, where they apply their knowledge in a real-life situation with the faculty present and with the help of the Greek students who have volunteered to be IHP peers; this structure allows learners to acquire cultural expertise through experience (Berwick and Whalley 326). The first experiential class takes place at the produce market, where students practice vocabulary and numbers for making purchases. The next two allow students the chance to order food, first in a coffee shop and then in a taverna.

In these activities, students are accompanied by IHP peers because peer learning can powerfully support and promote language learning and help them transfer their learning to real contexts (Sharif et al. 445).

The three activities are scaffolded, and they are combined with collaborative learning and reflection. The workshop develops learners' intercultural communicative competence as well as empathy for and tolerance toward different assumptions, values, and beliefs (Damar 755). The workshops include a cultural discussion where the American students and IHP peers discuss cultural differences. The American students venture into the conversation primed to think about "coffee shop culture" because before they left the United States, they completed an observational activity in a local coffee shop. In the discussion with Greek students, we start with questions about coffee shop culture (How long do you spend in a coffee shop? What do you do there?) and then move to more personal questions about appropriacy and intimacy (How do you treat your close friends and family differently from how you treat acquaintances?) and then to friendship (How often do you visit, call, text, use social media with friends? What do you call them? What do you do with them when you get together? How long do you stay with friends? What do you talk about? How do you get enough to eat and make sure that food moves around the table in a communal meal?). One of the ideas often discussed during the coffee shop experiential class is the emphasis that Greek culture places on in-group relations and involvement with them (Sifianou 41). An in-group includes one's family, relatives, friends, and friends of friends (Triandis and Vassiliou 141). Being very formal to a member of an in-group by using "thank you" and "please" frequently is actually not polite in Greek culture because these phrases become a distancing device that actually shifts a person into the out-group. Another frequently identified cultural difference in Greece is that maintaining a bond among friends is important, which explains why they spend so much time drinking coffee with each other. We explain to the students that if they are invited for a coffee as in "Pame gia kafe" (meaning "Let's go for a coffee"), they may end



up spending an afternoon in a taverna or a bar or even catching a movie. “Pame gia kafe” becomes a code phrase meaning “Let’s spend time together.” Some serious conversations take place over coffee in Greece, which is why this setting is chosen for this particular experiential class.

Having this collaborative reflection among peers is powerful. Experiential learning “means that learning that occurs when changes in judgment, feelings or skills result for a particular person from living through an event or events” (Chickering 63). The experience should cause changes—transformation—in the students. In our experience the students report being startled by seeing their culture from an outside point of view, causing changes in their understanding of their own culture. When we engaged in this discussion in 2018, about half the group stayed late, some as much as two-and-one-half hours late, continuing the discussion on their own because they found it so eye-opening.

At the taverna, students order food in Greek with the help of the peers, and then we hold a discussion about social lives and the role of alcohol, the role of family, and nonverbal communication in multiple situations. These conversations are equally engaging to both sets of students since they are welcome to ask questions of the other group and are often startled to see their own culture through the eyes of outsiders. American students in particular are surprised to learn that access to alcohol is no big deal and that getting drunk is never the point of a social engagement for Greek students. They begin to see what American attitudes toward alcohol look like from a perspective outside their culture, which is revelatory because attitudes toward alcohol are so homogenous in the culture on American campuses that it seems like they must be universal.

### *Reflection*

In the weekly class meetings that include only the American students, these individual insights are raised and developed. Structured discussions about cultural differences contribute to constructing meaning and interpreting phenomena. The students connect the large cultural trends they read about before arriving in

Greece with their experience abroad, in particular what they find strange or frustrating. This formal practice occurs in addition to the informal experiences and discussions that we are aware of but do not monitor. The American students are also required to write two essays, one about American culture before they leave the U.S. and one reflective essay after they return to the U.S., and they also complete pre- and post-surveys of their experience. The surveys are discussed below in the Data section.

Finally, the reflection always includes an emphasis on transferability. We have tried to include sufficient meta-cognitive discussion to help students recognize the strategies we were using to facilitate their deep learning so that they could import them into other situations involving cultural contact. We talked about using readings and research to create a generalized framework for the culture based on more than one's own experience. We discussed the structured reflective process. We mentioned that part of the reason for the experiential assignments was to push students continually out of their comfort zone and deeper into the foreign culture. We talked about creating a collaborative research community where it was acceptable to address cultural differences directly.

## **DATA**

In an effort to identify our program's student learning outcomes, we administered surveys at the beginning and end of the program in 2018. (For a copy of the surveys, contact the authors.) The pre- and post-surveys attempt to measure previous multicultural experience, intercultural competence, global-mindedness, and the impact of transformational learning activities (Hersey; King; Leung and Chiu; Scally; Ward and Rana-Deuba). We also gave the post-test to students who participated in the program from 2011 to 2015 to measure differences with participants from previous years. We examined the differences between the pre- and post-test for each group (American students and Greek students separately), and then we compared them both before and after. We also compared the post-test of the American students with the previous students who went abroad to see if we could generalize

from the data we collected in 2018 to determine if there was a long-term impact on students. Sixteen of the twenty American students who participated in 2018 took both surveys (80%), and four of the fourteen Greek students took both surveys (29%). Fourteen of the seventy-one students who participated in the program from 2011 to 2015 responded (20%).

The most important question was whether we could find any evidence that the students' worldview about themselves or about Greece had changed, and we did see some statistically significant differences as we compared pre- and post-survey data. Table 1 identifies these changes. We hoped to see a shift in the perception that students had about either their own or Greek culture to show whether and in what ways the experience had affected them. Both anecdotally and according to this evidence, the 2018 American cohort left feeling less American (but not more Greek) in their attitudes than when they arrived in seven of thirteen areas measured, and most of these were broad conceptions of culture: worldview, customs, standard of living, communication, friendship styles, perceptions of Americans in general, and perceptions of Greeks in general. In contrast, they felt more like other Americans at the beginning and end of the experience in some specific areas. The specific topics about which they continued to recognize differences were topics that came up in class discussion (political ideology and employment) or they had direct experience of (food, pace of life, and sense of time) or both (gender expectations). The results demonstrate that while the students' perceptions of their own identity shifted in many areas, they continued to see some cultural differences that made them aware of how American they were, countering the overgeneralization sometimes made in class discussion that people are "just the same everywhere." In sum, the data suggest some shifts in identity and a simultaneous development of a more nuanced view of the cultural differences between the two countries.

Qualitative data in the form of short answers to a question about American identity also offered evidence that students' sense of what constitutes American identity had shifted. On the pre-test more students referred to freedom as the essential characteristic of

American identity, while on the post-test, more students invoked individualism, which seems like a softening of nationalist sentiment. In the context of class conversations, that shift suggests a recognition that our strong preference for choice focuses on the individual rather than the family or group; choice entails freedom, an obvious good, but it also encourages individualism, which has trade-offs (weaker family or group identity). We will need to collect longitudinal data to confirm whether the students' idea of American identity and their attachment to it shift over the course of the experience.

Both American and Greek students' sense of similarity to their own group and difference from the other was strengthened in their perceptions of topics they discussed together: social customs, communication styles, and employment. Both groups' views of their similarity to their own culture also strengthened for political ideology. These examples suggest that through cross-cultural discussion,

**TABLE 1. PRE- AND POST-SURVEY RESULTS: AMERICAN STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF SIMILARITY TO AMERICAN AND GREEK ATTITUDES AND VALUES**

American students' perception that they are most similar to other Americans decreases (a statistical significance at pre-test disappears)	American students' perception that they are most similar to other Americans stays the same or increases (a statistically significant difference remains or increases at post-test)	No statistical significance: students did not expect or experience a difference between the two cultures (there is no significance before or after travel)
Standard of living	Pace of life (stays the same)	Family life
Worldview	Food (stays the same)	Values
Social customs	Political ideology (stays the same)	Role of alcohol
Communication styles* (+ more similar to Greeks)	Employment (stays the same)	
Friendship	Sense of time (stays the same)	
Perception of co-nationals	Gender (increases)	
Perception of host-nationals		

students began to recognize the edges of their own identities, which is part of the process of acculturation.

We were surprised to see how many of our findings suggested that students saw the two cultures as being more similar than they anticipated. Before they went to Greece, the American students expected that they would be different from the Greek students in terms of standard of living, employment, communication styles, gender roles, and social customs (in that order). At the end of the program, their sense of difference had lessened. This shift was reflected in many of our class discussions as well as in the data; when we highlighted areas that we expected to be different, such as cultural differences about obligations of friendships, the students resisted the idea that the cultural mores were different. This attitude might be because the culture has changed dramatically for this generation with the impact of Greece's inclusion in the European Union and the economic crisis or the flattening effect of a global media culture that relies on images rather than languages. Another possibility is that they were unconsciously looking for similarities in order to help themselves maintain cognitive closure or simply that our expectations were incorrect (Leung and Chui 738). Again, more research might clarify this point.

We also wanted to know if the students' degree of change had increased as we developed the program during the past eight years. For the most part, the students in 2018 seemed representative of all student participants. Most of the differences between the groups can be explained by contingencies of a particular year, including the deliberate changes we made. For instance, we gradually increased required contact between the Greek and American students through the years, adding joint classes in 2013 and facilitated conversations between Greek and American students in 2014. The 2018 group had contact with more Greek people on the whole: fifty-seven percent reported at least ten significant contacts with Greeks compared to forty-six percent of those who traveled from 2011 to 2015. This increase reflected our greater emphasis on interaction between Greeks and Americans.

Some differences also seemed to reflect particular conversations that happened in a given year. For instance, in 2018, the conversations students had about politics and employment were more intense and focused than in previous years. Many students in 2018 learned about anarchists, communists, and neo-Nazis in Greece when they asked their Greek peers about the graffiti they saw in the city. The American students were shocked at the Greek students' acceptance of anarchists, and the Greek students were shocked by the American students' shock. This conversation had not occurred in previous years, and that seems to be reflected in the data.

Through our surveys, we also hoped to gather information about the long-term impact of the program. A recent study of honors alumni has examined differences between students who studied abroad and those who did not in the areas of educational and career trajectories, personal (non-business) international activities, alumni activity, and civic engagement. The study revealed that in terms of the first three areas, there are positive long-term impacts based on self-reports (Mulvaney, "Long-Term Impact"—also reprinted in this volume). The data in our study compared students who studied abroad between 2011 and 2015 to the students who studied abroad in 2018. When asked what it means to be American, most of the students who participated in 2018 gave answers that referenced common clichés, writing about freedom, individual choice, and hard work. The alumni who participated in the 2011–2015 programs used many fewer clichés and were more critical when describing their understanding of American identity, with seven of the twelve offering original answers, for instance, mentioning American optimism, inclusivity, possession of American "cultural fluency," or "using the privilege of democracy to strive for universal equality among all citizens." One mentioned being embarrassed to be recognized as American while traveling, and another described being American as "being too focused on work." Perhaps the process of understanding American identity evolved during the course of the six-week experience and continued to develop for years afterwards. That students were willing to take a survey about an experience that took place three to seven years ago itself speaks

to its importance to them. They were still thinking about it and still willing to think about it. Our conclusions, however, are limited because our sample size was small. As we continue our assessment efforts, we hope to gain a more precise understanding of the impact of our program.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study abroad experience was deliberately designed to create opportunities for students to observe and interact meaningfully with another culture. They reflected on “cultural collisions” using the following questions: When did you feel frustration or surprise—markers of a cultural collision? What expectations were colliding? How does each set of expectations make sense within the cultural logic of home or host culture? What other examples does it connect to? What can you learn about the function of that expectation or behavior from the contrast? How do you now see each cultural collision as a result of going through this process? We wanted the students to have an experience that demonstrated how examining a contrast in cultural logic can lead to novel insights. Some students integrated their insights into a deeper understanding of both cultures in an ongoing learning process. In addition to their interactions with people, they engaged in deep interaction with the place through multiple City as Text exercises. Our assessment revealed that the program impacted students’ sense of their own cultural identity, both lessening their sense of being typical Americans and refining their sense of what it means to be American, and that change seemed to continue as the students matured in the years after the program ended.

Success in this study abroad program requires a good deal from the students. They need to be willing to engage outside their comfort zones and be comfortable with some level of cultural discomfort (Leung and Chiu). These demands can be challenging for late adolescents. The quality of the students’ experience and how they navigated these challenges often depended upon guidance by faculty familiar with the local community. Having the questions put

to them by teachers who were also immersed in the culture created a safe space for discussions about both countries' youth cultures.

The goal of holistic study abroad is more than giving students a broader view of the world. It is about creating lasting change in their views of themselves as well. Bernice Braid argues: "Perhaps the most radical difference between site-specific learning and typical campus-based study is the expected outcome: finding out vs. being told" ("Promoting" 156). Honors faculty, with their focus on facilitating experiential learning rather than telling (Finkel), their expertise with critical reflection, and their intentional use of pedagogy, are particularly well equipped to build powerful study abroad experiences.

Combining a strong focus on integration and employing structured self-reflection allow faculty to address the dual objects of study—the host and home countries. Moreover, they help students learn to understand the foreign and to recognize the contingency of the familiar. These ideas can be put into practice to enhance any experience abroad regardless of length or purpose. The goals of holistic study abroad are to help students become open-minded, lifelong learners, because as students they have adapted their thinking to that of another culture while recognizing their own cultural preferences in order to become flexible, creative thinkers who can integrate complexity and ambiguity.

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