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## Outcomes of International Service Learning (ISL): Alumni Perspectives

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## Outcomes of International Service Learning (ISL): Alumni Perspectives

### Abstract

Service learning is an active method that combines academic knowledge and hands-on experience while serving a community. Service learning is well established within occupational therapy (OT) and allied health education, as many institutions have organized both domestic and international service learning experiences. Literature supports student benefits of participation in international service learning (ISL), but limited literature exists on the long-term impact of participation in ISL throughout allied health education. Many OT students participate in ISL during their education, but there is limited literature on the impact of an ISL experience on participants' careers in OT. In this qualitative study, an online survey was distributed to past participants of an ISL trip of an OT program in the Midwest. Of the 100 subjects, 30 completed the survey. Researchers used conventional content analysis to extract themes from the data. Two themes were identified: (1) *evolving professional self* and (2) *transformative personal experience*. Subthemes of the *evolving professional self* theme included: (1) *desire to work with vulnerable populations*, (2) *professional soft skill development*, and (3) *acquisition of knowledge and skills*. Results indicate that benefits are maintained after graduation signifying that participation in ISL may have a sustained, lasting influence on OT practitioners. ISL supports the values of OT education by shaping professional identity through active, diverse learning and self-reflection to promote lifelong learning. Results broaden the profession's understanding of the outcomes of ISL post-graduation and inform ISL best practice standards within OT education.

### Keywords

Service learning, occupational therapy, practice, career

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## Outcomes of International Service Learning (ISL): Alumni Perspectives

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### ABSTRACT

Service learning is an active method that combines academic knowledge and hands-on experience while serving a community. Service learning is well established within occupational therapy (OT) and allied health education, as many institutions have organized both domestic and international service learning experiences. Literature supports student benefits of participation in international service learning (ISL), but limited literature exists on the long-term impact of participation in ISL throughout allied health education. Many OT students participate in ISL during their education, but there is limited literature on the impact of an ISL experience on participants' careers in OT. In this qualitative study, an online survey was distributed to past participants of an ISL trip of an OT program in the Midwest. Of the 100 subjects, 30 completed the survey. Researchers used conventional content analysis to extract themes from the data. Two themes were identified: (1) *evolving professional self* and (2) *transformative personal experience*. Subthemes of the *evolving professional self* theme included: (1) *desire to work with vulnerable populations*, (2) *professional soft skill development*, and (3) *acquisition of knowledge and skills*. Results indicate that benefits are maintained after graduation signifying that participation in ISL may have a sustained, lasting influence on OT practitioners. ISL supports the values of OT education by shaping professional identity through active, diverse learning and self-reflection to promote lifelong learning. Results broaden the profession's understanding of the outcomes of ISL post-graduation and inform ISL best practice standards within OT education.

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## **Introduction**

Projections indicate that by the year 2055, the United States (US) will not have a single racial or ethnic majority, making culture and diversity a topic that affects everyone (Cohn & Caumont, 2016). As the population of the US continues to grow increasingly more diverse, it is critical that healthcare professionals recognize the impact of culture in practice to ensure client-centered care and positive health outcomes (Housman et al., 2012). The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) asserted the importance of examining the effect of culture on one's occupations and rituals, indicating that occupational therapy (OT) practitioners must be equipped to handle the increasing emphasis of diversity in health care (Cherry et al., 2009; Howard et al., 2018). Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE, 2019) standards require that students must understand and be able to practice culturally relevant OT. One approach to increasing students' cultural awareness while facilitating student advancement to higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy is through engagement in service learning.

## **Service Learning**

According to the Corporation for National and Community Service (2009), service learning is defined as "a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities" (p. 1). While Horowitz (2012) and Housman et al. (2012) described service learning in the context of domestic engagement designed to increase exposure to cultures different from one's own through community-focused active learning that links academic knowledge, hands on experience, and research (Horowitz, 2012; Housman et al., 2012), service learning can occur internationally as well. Bringle et al. (2011) describes international service learning (ISL) as:

A structured academic experience in another country in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that addresses identified community needs; (b) learn from direct interaction and cross-cultural dialogue with others; and (c) reflect on the experience in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a deeper appreciation of the host country and the discipline, and an enhanced sense of their own responsibilities as citizens, locally and globally (p. 19).

Service learning, whether domestic (DSL) or international (ISL), is a reciprocal learning opportunity as both students and the community benefit from the experience (Elliot, 2015; Schmidt & Brown, 2016). For example, the community can benefit because the service provided is filling some type of unmet need, such as access to OT services (Voss et al., 2015). Students can benefit from progression to advanced levels of Bloom's Taxonomy by simultaneously addressing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor learning, which is often difficult to implement in traditional classroom settings (Anderson & Bloom, 2001). Domestic and ISL contribute to cognitive learning as students are challenged to evaluate a client's unique needs and create an intervention plan that is culturally relevant and client-centered. Students demonstrate affective learning growth

as they organize and internalize values of diversity by displaying a personal and professional commitment to ethical practice (Krathwohl et al., 1973). Communicating through a language barrier promotes psychomotor learning by providing students with the opportunity to develop non-discursive communication skills. Students may interpret a client's posture, gestures, and facial expressions to communicate nonverbally despite a language barrier (Harrow, 1972). This is an essential skill for OTs when working with clients who do not speak English as their first language or who are nonverbal.

### **Service Learning for Healthcare Students**

Participation in DSL and ISL results in numerous benefits for healthcare students. Both DSL and ISL experiences provide an opportunity for professional development while practicing clinical skills (Horowitz, 2012; Gan, 2018). Smallfield and Milton (2019) asserted service learning promotes clinical reasoning, competence in technical and soft skills, and development of personal traits, which are necessary to be effective in clinical practice. Professional development occurs throughout DSL and ISL experiences by fostering leadership skills and promoting civic responsibility (Gan, 2018; Horowitz, 2012; Housman et al., 2012). Students learn to assess the needs and available resources of a community while planning and implementing how to contribute their own skills to create a positive outcome (Gan, 2018). Studies on ISL showed an increase in students' critical thinking and innovation in practice, developing their ability to overcome barriers of care such as limited resources and communication challenges (Green et al., 2011; Schmidt & Brown, 2016). Practicing in an environment with limited resources increases one's creativity and flexibility in practice, and participation in DSL or ISL helps students make career choices and create interdisciplinary networks (Horowitz, 2012; Gan, 2018). Similar to benefits of DSL, ISL also contributes to professional development by enhancing students' flexibility and communication skills (Green et al., 2011). Haines et al. (2017) identified student personal and professional growth as an outcome of ISL, evident by an increased quality of life, personal empowerment, and increased openness to others and new experiences.

In nursing education, Green et al. (2011) reported increased sensitivity to cultural differences two years after an ISL experience. Participation in service learning was found to be a potential motivator for medical students in their decision to pursue a career in general practice, rather than a specialty (Khwaja et al., 2015). An altruistic desire to give back to the community in which one was trained is one factor that was found to influence medical doctors to practice in underserved areas, such as rural Ghana (Amalba et al., 2018). Sawatsky et al. (2010) found that medical residents who completed a one-month ISL elective rotation had increased ability to practice with limited resources, clinical skill development, and personal growth. In allied health fields, literature exists supporting learner benefits of ISL, but literature on the long-term outcomes of ISL on healthcare professionals is limited. Available literature revealed an expressed need for future research on the long-term impact of this experience to determine how this experience affects careers post-graduation (Beagan, 2015; Green et al., 2011; Mu et al., 2016).

### **Service Learning in Occupational Therapy Education**

Service learning is a well-established, evidence-based pedagogy in OT education (Horowitz, 2012), as many institutions have organized both DSL and ISL trips (Grajo & Aldrich, 2015). In addition to enhancing professional and clinical skills, service learning was found to increase students' cultural awareness, cultural competence, and respect for diversity, which is essential for OTs to provide client-centered care (Grajo & Gutman, 2019; Housman et al., 2012; Mu et al., 2016). A study by Short et al. (2020) found a statistically significant increase in the metacognition domain of cultural intelligence of OT doctoral students at one year and three years after participation in an ISL experience, which may indicate greater self-awareness and translation to practice. In a survey of entry-level OT students, a majority rated themselves as having limited cultural awareness or being cultural unaware, identifying the importance of immersion in other cultures through service learning (Cherry et al., 2009). AOTA identified this as problematic, stating that every OT has an obligation to advocate for and provide fair, equitable, and culturally appropriate treatment for every client (AOTA, 2015). AOTA's (2017) Vision 2025 notes several guideposts, including *Accessible*, meaning that OT practitioners provide "culturally responsive and customized services" (p. 71). Participation in ISL is one solution to this issue, as ISL experiences have been found to increase cultural awareness and cultural humility (Mu et al., 2016).

Various terms with minor differences in meaning are used in the literature when describing culture. Cultural awareness is recognition of the differences of one's own culture compared to other cultures (Beagan, 2015). Cultural competence is mastery of the ability to utilize skills and experiences to increase one's appreciation and understanding of cultural similarities and differences (Beagan, 2015; Cherry et al., 2009). Cultural humility is defined as a continuous process of self-reflection and discovery to first understand oneself and then others to build honest, trusting relationships (Yeager & Bauer-Wu, 2013). Cultural humility differs from cultural competence because it promotes the development of respect toward cultural differences as it does not require an individual to obtain mastery (Beagan, 2015; Howard et al., 2018; Yeager & Bauer-Wu, 2013). Although DSL opportunities are plentiful and can benefit students, ISL can provide a more powerful cross-cultural learning experience (Grajo & Aldrich, 2015).

### **Description of the ISL Trip**

Since 2010, an OT program at a large research university in the Midwest has supported an annual week-long service learning trip to Guatemala. Occupational therapy student attendees must apply to the ISL program through an application process. Applications are blind-rated, and each year twelve students are selected for the ISL team. In addition, the OT program supports two supervising licensed OTs to attend the trip. Prior to the ISL experience, OT student attendees complete nine months of preparation. Horowitz (2012) stated that preparation is vital prior to an ISL experience because it influences participants throughout the entire experience, as well as impacts quality of the trip and participants' cultural humility. Currently, there is no best practice standard for preparation prior to an ISL experience.

The preparatory curriculum for the ISL trip was initiated in 2012 and has grown annually based on the experiences and feedback from the previous year's group. Consistent preparatory content includes information on cultural values, languages, health care system, and other relevant information and skills pertinent to Guatemala. Two student leaders facilitate a two-hour face-to-face group meeting each week of the curriculum. Student leaders are OT students who attended the ISL trip the year prior. Meetings provide a bonding opportunity for the group and include participant presentations, Spanish language practice, planning for fundraisers, and discussion. Each OT student attendee is expected to complete readings prior to group meetings, contribute to discussions on readings, and give a presentation each semester. Fall semester preparatory content focuses on culture, while the spring semester content is comprised of common conditions in Guatemala. Participants are also expected to contribute to group fundraising by planning and executing a fundraising event and assisting with other fundraising opportunities.

During the ISL trip to Guatemala, the OT program partners with a local host organization in Guatemala that allows students to gain experience with clients of all ages at various clinics, schools, and orphanages (Taff & Hoyt, 2012). This ISL opportunity is not only a learning opportunity for participants, but for the therapists, teachers, and residents in Guatemala who often do not get a chance to observe or learn from an experienced therapist (Taff & Hoyt, 2012). Currently, OT in Guatemala is most prevalent in the hospitals, specifically in acute and rehabilitation settings (Taff & Hoyt, 2012). Therefore, the ISL trip to Guatemala addresses the gap in services by educating local therapists and providing OT services in underserved areas like outpatient clinics and schools. During the ISL trip, OT student attendees are expected to complete written self-reflections and participate in group discussions each day. Many participants journal independently in addition to the required written reflection.

This study contributes to research on outcomes of OT practitioners who participated in ISL during their education. Although service learning is a common practice within health career fields, as well as others, there is limited literature on the effects of this experience on professional practice. Within OT specifically, literature is limited as the impact of ISL post-graduation on an individual's cultural intelligence has only been explored up to three years after graduation (Short et al., 2020). It is unknown how this experience may impact other aspects of participants' careers in OT. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the impact of an ISL experience on participants' careers. For the purpose of this research study, alumni of the ISL trip to Guatemala were surveyed to identify their perspectives on the impact of an ISL experience post-graduation.

## Methods

### Participants

Participants included a convenience sample of 105 individuals who attended the ISL trip to Guatemala while a student. To be included in the study, participants had to be a graduate of the OT program, a past attendee of the ISL trip, and be English-speaking. Participants were excluded from the study if they did not participate in the ISL trip to Guatemala, did not yet graduate from the OT program, or were not willing to complete a survey. Four content experts who were past trip attendees and reviewed the survey were excluded from participation. Of the past 105 participants on the ISL trip to Guatemala, 100 were eligible to participate in the study. Of the 100 eligible participants, 30 participated (a 30% response rate), by completing the survey.

### Materials

The survey included open-ended questions to assist in the discovery of all possible outcomes through the lens of past trip participants. This original survey was developed for this project based on relevant literature and feedback from content experts. A sampling of survey questions can be found in Table 1 and the entire survey can be found in Appendix A. Four content experts reviewed and provided feedback on the survey before it was finalized.

### Table 1

#### *Sample Questions from the Survey*

Q1 - In your opinion, how does culture impact occupational therapy?

Q2 - Why did you want to go on an international service learning trip?

Q2 - What are some highlights of the international service learning trip that have had an impact on:

a. You?

b. Your career?

c. Your professional goals and skills?

### Research Design

This study used a cross-sectional survey design. To determine the alumni perspectives of the impact of ISL post-graduation, researchers sought to answer the research questions:

- What are the perspectives of OT alumni in regards to ISL?
- How does student participation in ISL influence OT alumni post-graduation?



Descriptive statistics were used to summarize and describe the sample population. Following data collection, researchers extracted themes from the data itself using a conventional content analysis design. A conventional content analysis design is appropriate when the existing research is limited and the aim is to describe the phenomenon (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

### **Procedure**

Following the comprehensive review of the literature, a survey was developed and sent to select content experts prior to distribution. The two current student leaders, one select past student leader, and one past licensed OT leader served as content experts. All content experts were selected because of their thorough knowledge of ISL, the institution's preparatory curriculum, and the ISL trip itself. These content experts were asked to utilize their knowledge to review the survey and provide subjective input to ensure it encompassed the entire ISL experience.

Following the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, the survey was distributed electronically using Qualtrics, an online survey software tool. Participants were recruited via email and online posts on existing online networking, the closed group of the university's ISL trip to Guatemala Alumni Facebook page. Consent to participate was obtained through response to a question at the beginning of the survey. Only participants who gave consent were able to continue with the survey. The survey remained open for three months with email reminders and online posts sent bi-weekly and a final reminder 24 hours prior to the survey closing.

Upon conclusion of data collection via a secure online survey platform, data was exported, organized, and secured on the password-protected university online system. Any identifying information was removed. Due to the open-ended nature of the survey questions, qualitative analysis was conducted by two independent members of the research team. Because a conventional content analysis approach was utilized, codes were derived from the content itself during data analysis, rather than from theory or literature (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Survey responses were initially coded and quantified independently by two members of the research team to explore the alumni perspective of the ISL experience. Researchers then collaborated three times to determine categories and themes.

## **Results**

### **Demographics**

Of the 30 participants, 28 were employed as occupational therapists: 21 full time, 5 part time, 2 pro re nata (PRN), or as needed. Participants reported working in a wide variety of settings and patient populations. The age range of participants was 26 – 43 years old. A majority of participants (93.33%; n=28) did not identify as a minority. Participants were working in widespread geographic areas including 15 states and 2 international locations. Since the ISL trip to Guatemala, 23.04% of participants (n=6) traveled for OT or ISL purposes. When asked if they worked with a vulnerable or under resourced population, 83.33% (n=25) reported working with individuals of low socioeconomic

status, 60% (n=18) reported working with individuals who were uninsured or underinsured, 13.33% (n=4) reported working with a refugee population and American Indians, and 3.33% (n=1) reported working with incarcerated individuals. Additionally, 13.33% (n=4) also reported working with other vulnerable populations, including children with incarcerated parents, non-English speaking individuals, and the Maori in New Zealand. When asked their ability to speak another language, 46.67% (n=14) reported being able to speak a little bit of another language, 16.67% (n=5) reported conversational ability, 13.33% (n=4) reported fluency in another language, and 23.33% (n=7) reported they were unable to speak another language.

### Themes

Two themes were identified: (1) *Evolving professional self* and (2) *Transformative personal experience*. Three subthemes of the *Evolving professional self* theme included: (1) *Desire to work with vulnerable populations*, (2) *Professional soft skills development*, and (3) *Acquisition of technical skills and knowledge*. Table 2 summarizes these themes and highlights statements of support.

**Table 2**

#### *Themes, Subthemes, and Supporting Statements*

Themes & Subthemes	Participant Statements to Support Themes
<b>Evolving Professional Self</b>	
<u>Subthemes:</u>	
Desire to work with vulnerable populations	<p>“Helped develop a deeper respect and interest in working with communities of need...”</p> <p>“The entire trip has provided meaning to my career and an understanding of all OT can be.”</p>
Professional soft skills development	“...learned to collaborate with individuals despite language barriers using other means to solve problems...”
Acquisition of technical skills and knowledge	<p>“...expand my clinical skills as a generalist, maintaining the ability to think about function and participation in context...”</p> <p>“... great opportunity to challenge my creative thinking, problem solving, and OT skills.”</p>

Themes & Subthemes	Participant Statements to Support Themes
<b>Transformative Personal Experience</b>	<p data-bbox="829 247 1422 390">“...helped me grow so much as a human and challenged my own beliefs and privileges. It made me see new perspectives.”</p> <p data-bbox="829 432 1422 533">“It was eye opening and challenged me in ways I never could’ve imagined. I grew so much as a human from this trip.”</p> <p data-bbox="829 575 1349 646">“...one of the best, most enlightening experiences of my life...”</p>

### ***Theme 1: Evolving Professional Self***

A prevalent participant response was that engagement in an ISL experience during OT school influenced their career by changing the meaning and understanding of the profession.

**Sub-theme: Desire to Work with Vulnerable Populations.** Participants described an interest in international OT through an explanation of their current work or by stating a desire to participate in the future. This ISL experience inspired career goals for some participants, while others reported this interest as a motivating factor for participation as demonstrated by this response, “One of my long term goals was to gain this experience so I could continue international work.” In addition to interest in international OT, participants expressed a desire to work with an underprivileged population. Participants stated intentions to “...gain an understanding/exposure of OT in under-resourced areas...” When reflecting on this experience, one participant stated, “It provided me with a new perspective for international work, but has also helped me in my current practice in the States working with immigrant populations within our healthcare system.”

**Sub-theme: Professional Soft Skills Development.** Participants commonly stated that participation in ISL led to the development of the following professional soft skills: Communication despite a language barrier, collaboration, resourcefulness, creativity, innovation, and problem solving. Development of professional soft skills during an ISL experience was described by a participant as, “...a good way to fine tune your skills rather than relying on the ‘newest’ supplies.”

**Sub-theme: Acquisition of Technical Skills and Knowledge.** Clinical skill development was prevalent throughout participant responses. One participant reported that this experience, “...helped me grow as a practitioner.” International service learning promoted acquisition of technical skills and knowledge by providing an opportunity for participants to put their OT education into practice in a setting outside the classroom. Many participants appreciated the ability to observe and practice in a variety of settings. Responses revealed participants positively remembered

experiences at wheelchair clinics, orphanages, a special needs school, and a state hospital. Participants gained experience in all aspects of the OT process, including assessment, treatment, education of client and family, and interprofessional collaboration. Additionally, many students indicated that ISL was beneficial because it was an opportunity to observe and treat conditions that are rarely seen in the United States. Several responses demonstrated appreciation for this opportunity, such as "...you'll see things you will likely never see again...get to try things you wouldn't get to try otherwise..."

### **Theme II: Transformative Personal Experience**

International service learning impacted participants not only on a professional level, but on a personal level as well. Responses revealed that the ISL experience had a unique impact on participants by describing the experience as "life changing," "enlightening," "eye opening," "such an important experience," and a "once in a lifetime experience." Many participants expressed appreciation for interactions with local citizens, which may have contributed to this personal transformation. International service learning resulted in personal growth through self-reflection during the experience. Participants reported feeling challenged, which resulted in development of a new perspective. Additionally, participants expressed increased cultural awareness and respect. Participants reported a greater understanding of the impact of culture on occupations, as well as international healthcare needs and delivery. International service learning allowed participants to experience the influence of culture on occupation as demonstrated by this response, "...great intro into understanding how to assess daily activities in the context of culture for my patients from other cultures." This resulted in an increased ability to practice culturally relevant OT.

### **Discussion**

Results indicated that ISL had a sustained, lasting influence on these OT practitioners that extended beyond graduation in a variety of ways. Results of the ISL experiences aligned with the effects of DSL trips as both experiences led to professional growth through development of soft skills and increased technical knowledge and skills (Housman et al., 2012; Smallfield & Milton, 2019; Voss et al., 2015). Themes describing personal and professional growth replicate the findings of Haines et al. (2017) who identified personal and professional growth in physical therapy assistant students two years after a one-month ISL experience. This is consistent with the findings of Evanston and Zust (2006), that two years after an ISL experience, nurses had incorporated benefits into their professional practice.

Survey responses revealed that engagement in ISL may contribute to the professional evolution from OT student to OT practitioner. This is consistent with results of the benefits of ISL experiences for OT students and nursing ISL experiences, which enhanced professional development (Green et al., 2011; Mu et al., 2016). Participants described an increase in understanding of international health care needs and delivery, which has also been found as a benefit of medical students completing ISL experiences (Parsi & List, 2008). Results of the current study also identified motivating factors for participating in ISL as a desire to work with an underprivileged population, to experience

another culture, and to increase knowledge and clinical skills. These factors are consistent with the factors influencing medical doctors to pursue practice in rural Ghana (Amalba et al., 2018).

Overall, participants believed engagement in ISL contributed to their professional soft skills development. Soft skills are critical for OTs to acquire to be successful in clinical practice (Smallfield & Milton, 2019). The acquisition of technical skills and knowledge may be the result of components of service learning, which according to Housman et al. (2012), “offers a learning environment that promotes critical thinking and problem solving, requires students to be actively engaged, and to practice ethical decision making.” Participants also reported seeing a wide variety of conditions they would likely never see in the US. This was consistent with medical doctors who reported benefits from seeing a wide variety of pathology and experience with new conditions (Sawatsky et al., 2010). This hands on experience resulted in clinical skill development, similar to that of medical residents after an international elective (Sawatsky et al., 2010).

Personal growth through affective learning is an important component of progressing to higher levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy. Affective learning occurs as a result of ISL participation, which is in line with personal growth in OT students, medical residents, and nursing students following ISL experiences (Green et al., 2011; Mu et al., 2016; Sawatsky et al., 2010). These expressions mimic the adjectives used by medical residents following an international elective (Sawatsky et al., 2010). Nightly reflections with a small group may contribute to this personal transformation. Personal growth may aid in a participant’s ability to live and work in an environment that is different from their own, gain a better understanding of themselves and others, and increase respect and tolerance of other cultures (Mu et al., 2016).

Engagement in the ISL experience increased self-perceived ability of participants to provide client-centered care in their professional practice. Participant responses revealed that culture was at the forefront of their minds. Similar to the literature on students (Housman et al., 2012; Mu et al., 2016), this study identified that practitioners with increased cultural awareness were better prepared to practice culturally relevant OT. Culturally relevant OT is contextualized, fair, and empathetic and coincides with a client’s experiences and meanings (Talero et al., 2105). When interacting with clients of a different culture, therapists with greater cultural awareness and humility may ask more questions, leading to greater critical thinking and analysis (Beagan, 2015; Davis et al., 2018). This skill is necessary to meet the current and future needs of diverse clients (Cherry et al., 2009; Housman et al., 2012). Results are consistent with Short et al. (2020) who found that ISL participation may increase cultural intelligence post-graduation and the effects translate into practice. This also aligns with nursing outcomes, where ISL experience led to increased cultural sensitivity in practice (Green et al., 2011). Occupation is strongly influenced by culture, resources, and environment (Taff & Hoyt, 2012). Participants recognized this influence which provided a foundation for practicing with cultural awareness.

### **Limitations**

Results of this study are not generalizable as this study utilized a qualitative approach. In addition, this study utilized a convenience sample of alumni from one OT program in the Midwest who were recent graduates only at a maximum of ten years post-graduation. The researchers acknowledge that participation in a comprehensive preparatory curriculum and regular reflection and discussion during the ISL experience may have influenced the results. Finally, one research team member was a participant on the ISL trip to Guatemala. Although this research team member did not participate as a research subject in the study, this research team member's experience on the ISL trip may have influenced the results.

### **Future Studies**

Additional studies are required to continue to build upon this foundation of knowledge on the impact of ISL post-graduation. A mixed-methods approach in the future could strengthen the data to capture additional themes and broaden participation. Future studies could compare immersive educational activities with the effects of domestic versus ISL. For a greater understanding of this topic, a long-term mechanism for studying the implications of ISL participation on careers in OT is required. This research must be expanded outside of this large research institution in the Midwest to other accredited OT programs with ISL opportunities. This study should also be replicated in samples where alumni have graduated more than ten years ago in order to see if benefits last throughout participants' careers in OT. Replication of this study at other OT institutions may be a method to evaluate and enhance an institution's current training and preparatory methods prior to an ISL experience. Lastly, future studies could expand outside of OT to include ISL experiences in other allied health fields within this large research institution in the Midwest and other universities throughout the United States. This would allow a comprehensive understanding of the impact of ISL on health care professionals post-graduation.

### **Implications for Occupational Therapy Education**

International service learning is an effective educational pedagogy that supports AOTA's *Vision 2025* to provide accessible, culturally responsive, and customized services for all (AOTA, 2017). An ISL experience impacts participants post-graduation and supports the *Philosophy of Occupational Therapy Education* by shaping professional identity through active, diverse learning and self-reflection to promote lifelong learning (AOTA, 2018a). International service learning also supports the *Occupational Therapy Education Research Agenda – Revised* (AOTA, 2018b) by contributing to the research priority categories of *pedagogy*, *socialization to the profession*, and *promotion of diversity, inclusion, and equity* by evaluating the impact of an established pedagogy on participants' careers in OT.

Service learning fosters values of social responsibility, justice, and altruism by providing health care professionals with the opportunity to practice in a culture or environment that may be different from their own (Lattanzi & Pechak, 2011). As stated in the *Occupational Therapy Code of Ethics*, ethical principles are essential for any health care professional to provide the best care for their clients (AOTA, 2015). International

service learning provides opportunity to apply OT ethical principles (AOTA, 2015) in an experiential manner, specifically *beneficence*, *nonmaleficence*, and *fidelity*. Service learning aims to instill *beneficence* and *nonmaleficence* by teaching participants to act in a way that promotes the well-being of a community while paying special attention to do no harm (AOTA, 2015). Students that participate in any service learning experience are expected to treat all community members and peers with respect, fairness, and integrity, which teaches them to practice with *fidelity* (AOTA, 2015).

The results of this study have the following implications for OT Education:

- OT programs should consider week-long service learning experiences, both domestic and international formats, to satisfy Level I fieldwork requirements.
- OT programs should maximize student opportunities and emphasize participation in service learning, both domestic and international formats, to support students in achieving the highest levels of Bloom's Taxonomy.
- Service learning experiences embedded in curriculum meet the following 2018 ACOTE OTD standards: B.1.2, B.1.3., B.4.21, B.4.25, B.5.1, B.7.4 (ACOTE, 2019)
- Institutions with service learning programming should study the experiences short term and long term to better understand the impact of ISL on students and alumni.

### Conclusion

This study contributes to the foundation of research in the field of OT and beyond on the impact of participating in ISL post-graduation. While additional research is required to inform best practice standards for ISL in OT education, overall the benefits of ISL post-graduation are consistent with literature on the benefits of ISL for students and the limited evidence on impact on health care professionals. Results indicate that study participants perceived the benefits of ISL to be long-lasting. The results of this project broaden the professions' understanding of the outcomes of ISL, as well as inform ISL best practice standards within OT education.

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## Appendix A

### Survey

#### Demographic Information

1. Current work status
  - a. Full time (40 or more hours per week)
  - b. Part time (less than 40 hours per week)
  - c. PRN
  - d. Not currently working
  - e. Employed, but not as an occupational therapist
2. If your primary role is not as an OT, please provide your job title here: \_\_\_\_\_
3. City and State that you are currently working in: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
5. How many years have you practiced as an OT? \_\_\_\_\_
6. If you currently work as an OT, please select your practice area(s); Select all that apply:
  - a. Acute care
  - b. Inpatient rehabilitation
  - c. Outpatient rehabilitation
  - d. Skilled nursing/subacute facility
  - e. Home health
  - f. Community practice
  - g. Mental Health
  - h. Private practice
  - i. School
  - j. Early intervention
  - k. Research
  - l. Academia
  - m. Other \_\_\_\_\_

7. Current client population (Select all that apply):
  - a. Pediatrics (0-18)
  - b. Adult (18-65)
  - c. Geriatric (65+)
8. Do you work with any of the following vulnerable and/or under-resourced populations? Select all that apply.
  - a. Low socioeconomic status
  - b. Incarcerated
  - c. Refugee
  - d. American Indians
  - e. Uninsured/Underinsured
  - f. Other \_\_\_\_\_
9. Prior to the ISL trip to Guatemala, had you previously traveled abroad?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
10. Do you identify as a minority?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Prefer not to answer
11. I identify my ethnicity as (Select all that apply):
  - a. American Indian or Alaskan Native
  - b. Asian
  - c. Black or African American
  - d. Hispanic or Latino
  - e. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - f. White
12. Are you able to speak another language?
  - a. No
  - b. Yes, a little bit
  - c. Yes, I can converse in at least one other language
  - d. Yes, I am fluent in at least another language

### Open-ended Questions

Culture is defined as, “The integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions of a racial, ethnic, religious, or social group (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services [DHHS], 2001).

13. In your opinion, how does culture impact occupational therapy?

14. Why did you want to go on this OT international service learning trip to Guatemala?

15. Having gone on this OT international service learning trip to Guatemala, would you recommend it to a current student? If yes, why?

16. What are some highlights of this OT international service learning trip to Guatemala that have had an impact on:

a. You?

b. Your career?

c. Your professional goals and skills?

17. Based on your responses above, what are some aspects of the trip that led to that response?

18. What would you keep the same or change for future trips?

19. Have you traveled for OT or international service learning since the trip? If yes, describe.

20. How connected do you feel to this institution's OT Community?

Not at all

Extremely

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

21. Do you donate to this institution's Program in Occupational Therapy?

- a. Yes, I have donated and plan to continue donating
- b. Yes, I have donated, but am not sure if I will continue to donate
- c. No, but I will in the future
- d. No, I never plan to donate

22. Do you remain involved in any of the following ways? Select all that apply.

- a. Social Media
- b. Read updates via the website or magazine
- c. Communicate/connect with other alumni
- d. Communicate/connect with the OT program
- e. Other \_\_\_\_\_

23. Any additional information you would like to share about your experience on this OT ISL trip to Guatemala or your view of culture that has not already been asked?