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Mind Change as Related to Study Abroad:  
Students' Perceptions about Changes in Their Religious Faith at the Latin American  
Studies Program

by

Trevor Poag

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of

Lehigh University

in Candidacy for the Degree of

Doctor of Education in

Educational Leadership

Lehigh University

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2014

Approved and recommended for acceptance as a dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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## **Abstract**

As the field of study abroad grows and diversifies, scholars call for more research on how the components of such programming impact students. In response to such calls, this study explored how alumni of the Latin American Studies Program (LASP) perceived specific study abroad components to influence changes in their religious faith. LASP alumni completed an anonymous, qualitative survey that invited them to indicate whether studying abroad influenced a change in their religious faith, describe this change and its consequent actions, and identify LASP components that most influenced this change. The survey generated 430 responses, which represent 24% of LASP's alumni population. Results indicated that 89% of respondents perceived that studying abroad influenced a change in their religious faith. Respondents' descriptions of this change revealed six themes—increased awareness of culture's influence on religious faith, new embrace of doubt, more inclusive religious faith, greater emphasis on social justice, left Christianity, and solidified existing Christian faith. Respondents' descriptions of the actions that emerged from these changes illustrated five themes—justice-centered vocation, creating sustainable economies, transforming communities, family decisions, and personal development. Respondents identified a blend of components that drove this change, which was characterized by formal learning experiences (lectures, readings, assignments) that were brought to life by reflective engagement of the Latin American context (relationships with host families, study trips, discussion groups). The results contribute to a growing body of research that identifies intercultural experience as a driver of religious change. Furthermore, the findings encourage educational leaders to prioritize study abroad programs that achieve integration between formal learning experiences and direct engagement of the host context.



# **Chapter I**

## **Introduction**

### **Background and Significance**

Educational leaders are increasingly committed to learning experiences that expose students to cultural diversity and prepare them to become competent professionals in an interconnected world. Study abroad represents one such learning experience for university students. Study abroad programs, although varied in structure and curriculum, share the common characteristic of connecting students to new cultural and educational experiences. Such learning experiences present students with unique opportunities to critically examine and possibly change their perspectives on important issues.

Universities increasingly include an international dimension in their mission statements (Egroun-Polak, 2012; Hans de Witt, 2009). Study abroad is a growing component of such efforts to internationalize the higher education experience. The participation of U.S. students in study abroad more than tripled between 1991 and 2011, with 273,996 U.S. students studying abroad during the 2010/11 academic year (Open Doors Report, 2012). Such growth reflects students' perceptions that studying abroad will improve their success in a competitive global economy. These perceptions are supported by the value employers place on international experience as they select from a talented pool of candidates interested in joining their institutions (Fischer, 2010). Thus, it makes sense that universities prioritize study abroad.

The growing popularity of study abroad has encouraged a diversification in program structures and curricula (McMurtrie, 2009). Regarding program structures, short-term programs (eight weeks or less) have increased in popularity, while a smaller percentage of

students are participating in semester and year-long programs (Open Doors Report, 2012). This is a departure from the traditional model of long-term, immersion-based study abroad, which requires greater commitment of students' time and money (Hoffa & DePaul, 2010). Current trends in student lodging while abroad represent another structural change. While earlier study abroad models relied mostly on the host family for student housing, the prevalence of short-term programming has influenced an increase in dormitory and hotel lodging. Such living conditions limit the amount of contact students have with host cultures. Changes in study abroad curricula reflect similar developments. While some programs prioritize instruction in students' second language, many programs now choose to provide instruction in English by faculty from U.S. campuses (Open Doors Report, 2012). Thus, *study abroad* describes a diversity of learning experiences that contain significant differences in structure and curriculum.

The recent growth and diversification of study abroad requires scholars and practitioners to engage new questions as they assess the quality of such programs. Which study abroad models successfully facilitate student learning? Which program components most powerfully relate to specific study abroad outcomes? Answering such questions necessitates a careful evaluation and classification of study abroad experiences. In this spirit, Engle and Engle (2003) created a level-based, hierarchical classification of study abroad program types. Engle and Engle proposed that certain study abroad models are better than others at engaging the host context. Furthermore, they identified specific program components, such as home stays and instruction in a second language, that facilitate a deeper interaction with the host culture. Engle and Engle's classification system highlights the growing diversity in study abroad as well as the program components that

comprise different study abroad models. I further describe Engle and Engle's system in Chapter II.

Accompanying the need to carefully evaluate study abroad programs are calls for more and better research on how these experiences impact students (Ingraham & Peterson, 2004; McLeod & Wainwright, 2009). In my analysis of study abroad research, I identified the tendency of studies to address the immediate impact of study abroad on participants as opposed to the lasting effect this experience has on them (Dwyer & Peters, 2004; Paige, Fry, Stallman, Josic & Jon, 2009). My analysis also revealed few studies that identified the program components that relate to student learning (Kehl, 2006). Although much research explores the relationship between study abroad and students' second language development (Freed, 1995; Kinginger, 2004), intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006; Williams, 2005), and personal growth (Black & Duhon, 2006; Dwyer & Peters, 2004), no research examines study abroad's impact on students through a framework of mind change. Thus, future research that identifies the program components that contribute to lasting mind change in students will strengthen this body of research and serve educational leaders as they structure, implement, and evaluate programs. Informed by these findings, I implemented a study to explore students' perceptions about the lasting impact of study abroad on their changes of mind about important issues and identify which study abroad components students perceived to have influenced these changes of mind.

### **Conceptual Framework**

One approach to focusing research on student learning during study abroad is the adoption of a theoretical framework. Gardner's (2006) framework of mind change represents an example of this approach. Gardner proposed that mind change occurs when individuals or groups "abandon the way in which they have customarily thought about an

issue of importance and henceforth conceive of it in a new way” (p. 2). Gardner illustrated his framework of mind change by referencing groups and individuals who experienced or influenced mind change about important issues like politics, religion, or the use of violence.

In articulating his framework of mind change, Gardner (2006) identified seven *levers of change* that influence change processes. Gardner proposed that shifts of mind are likely to occur when the seven levers of change work together to move a group or individual in a particular direction. Gardner’s seven levers of change are: (a) reason, (b) research, (c) resonance, (d) representational redescriptions, (e) resources and rewards, (f) real world events, and (g) resistances.

Gardner’s (2006) levers of change correspond to the program components in many study abroad models. For example, study abroad students employ the lever of reason when they engage assigned readings (the lever of research) about the contemporary reality of a given host region. Furthermore, when students leave class and engage daily life (lever of real world events) through conversations with their host family and others in the community, they encounter diverse illustrations (representational redescriptions) of the content they explored in class. Such correspondence between the levers of change and study abroad program components makes Gardner’s framework a relevant lens through which to explore the outcomes of study abroad. If a study abroad program influences students’ changes of mind about an important issue, Gardner’s framework provides a means to isolate the specific components (levers of change) that influenced this change. Such change would suggest the profound impact that a given program has on participants. I will now describe the context of the study.

### **Context: The Latin American Studies Program**

I chose to focus my research on how study abroad influences mind change by exploring students' changes in religious faith at the Latin American Studies Program (LASP). The religious character of LASP represents a unique opportunity to explore mind change in the case of religious faith. Operating through its headquarters in San José, Costa Rica, LASP extends study abroad programming to member institutions of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU). The CCCU is a consortium of 119 Christian institutions of higher education from throughout North America. Founded in 1976, the CCCU's mission is "to advance the cause of Christ-centered higher education and to help our institutions transform lives by faithfully relating scholarship and service to biblical truth" (<http://www.cccu.org/>, 2013). Member institutions of the CCCU enjoy access to its diverse services, which include political advocacy, professional development, and study abroad programming.

CCCU's study abroad programs provide a relevant context for the exploration of how education abroad relates to students' changes in religious faith. CCCU member institutions provide Christian higher education and represent a diversity of Protestant church denominations. As such, CCCU campuses attract Christian students who seek a higher education experience that is grounded in Christian tradition and practice (Patterson, 2001; Railsback, 2006). The CCCU's study abroad programs provide uniquely Christian study abroad opportunities to students of member institutions.

Founded in 1986, LASP is 1 of 12 study abroad programs provided by the CCCU. In service of the broader objectives of the CCCU, LASP's mission is "to create a community of critically thinking learner-scholars from multiple disciplines that seeks to promote global awareness and integrate Kingdom values via experiential learning in the Latin American context, challenging students to respectfully engage our host cultures and

strive for academic excellence” (A. Chamberlain, personal communication, November 15, 2013). To achieve this mission, LASP implements a semester-long learning experience that prioritizes the perspectives of its Latin American hosts in the program’s curriculum and structure.

While enrolled at LASP, all students complete coursework in Spanish language and Latin American studies, while selecting electives from more concentrated courses in literature, environmental science, and international business. In addition to coursework, students live with host families for the duration of the semester, complete an internship experience in a rural community of Costa Rica, and complete study trips to neighboring Latin American countries.

LASP courses are facilitated by program faculty, who are from both North America and Latin America. Different from typical courses on a U.S. campus, however, invited speakers from the host community comprise a majority of the lecturers. Such speakers connect students to diverse Latin American perspectives on course material. The primary role of LASP faculty during coursework is to facilitate meaningful reflection among students on the lectures, assignments, and reading material. Regarding reading material, LASP faculty are also purposeful in their selection of literature that presents students with Latin American perspectives on the course material. Course assignments also direct students to Latin American voices by incorporating interview components and community-based research. In short, LASP coursework foregrounds Latin American perspectives.

Additional program components include regular discussion groups and study trips to neighboring Latin American countries. Discussion groups (called process groups at LASP) are small group interactions during which a member of the LASP faculty facilitates integrative reflection on course material and students’ experiences in Latin America.

Discussion groups occur at least once a week throughout the semester. In addition, LASP implements at least one study trip (often two) to a neighboring Latin American country each semester. Such trips have included two-week learning experiences in Nicaragua, Guatemala, Cuba, and Panama. Study trips include a home stay component, several lectures from local experts, and minimal reading material and assignments. The purpose of study trips is to expose LASP students to the diversity and contrasts that characterize Latin America. Visiting Nicaragua, for example, illustrates the economic diversity between Costa Rica (strong middle class, etc.) and the rest of the region, where impoverishment is more common. Guatemala presents students with the opportunity to consider the experiences of indigenous communities in Latin America, while Cuba represents a political and economic reality that most U.S. citizens have not explored first-hand.

Through their work to implement these components, LASP faculty consistently observe that numerous students each semester articulate changes in their religious faith. When invited to explain such changes, students often identify their study abroad experience with LASP as an important factor in this change. In addition to such informal conversations with students, LASP faculty observe students' changes in religious faith in written assignments and course evaluations.

LASP students complete diverse written assignments that require them to integrate their Christian faith with their study of Latin America. For example, Mandy articulated the following change of mind about the exclusivity of her religious faith in an essay she wrote during a study trip to Nicaragua.

This morning I went to two Catholic churches. I've never stepped in a Catholic church before today. It was very strange. I have something against Catholic churches that I need to deal with. All my life I've had something against Catholics.

But now I am realizing that they are Christians, too. Laura and I had a great conversation about how each church represents a different piece of God's character that transcends denominations. I cried on the steps of a Catholic church today because I saw God differently. Who knew? (M. Doe, personal communication, March 4, 2009)

Students' evaluations of LASP coursework also indicated their changes in religious faith. The following statements are from three different student evaluations during the Spring 2011 semester.

The way LASP gave credibility to all speakers and people changed my life. Now I realize there are more ways to view the world than my way, than the American way, than the American Christian way. (Anonymous, personal communication, April 26, 2011)

I learned the most about what it means to be a Christian in this world. I learned that not everyone sees in the exact same way and that pertains to religion as well. (Anonymous, personal communication, April 26, 2011)

Being exposed to revolution opened paths of understanding Jesus in a way I couldn't have before. (Anonymous, personal communication, April 26, 2011)

As Gardner (2006) highlighted in his framework of mind change, such changes of mind about religious faith are of "enormous moment" (p. 187). As such, I chose to explore the unique changes in religious faith that faculty often observe among LASP students. Gardner's work on mind change provided a relevant framework through which to examine these changes.

## **Research Questions**



Three research questions guided my exploration of LASP students' changes in religious faith:

1. Do LASP alumni perceive their study abroad experience to have influenced a lasting change of mind about their religious faith?
2. When LASP alumni perceive such a change in their religious faith, how do they describe this change and its consequent actions in their communities and the world?
3. When LASP alumni perceive such a change in their religious faith, to which LASP components do they ascribe this change?

I will now summarize the methods for this study.

### **Summary of Method**

I implemented a qualitative study (with some descriptive statistics) to collect data related to the research questions. I invited LASP's 1,793 alumni to complete an open-ended, anonymous, and qualitative survey to discern if they identified their study abroad experience with LASP as a contributor to changes in their religious faith (see Appendix A). The survey also invited LASP alumni to describe their perceived change in religious faith and its consequent actions. In addition, the survey asked respondents to identify which LASP components had the most impact on their changes in religious faith. As LASP alumni are geographically dispersed, I conducted the survey online through the Qualtrics program. Qualtrics provides online survey tools for researchers (<http://www.qualtrics.com>, 2013).

I analyzed the qualitative survey data by organizing respondents' answers to each question by theme, carefully examining each individual survey as well as conducting cross-survey comparisons to confirm my identification of themes. Expert checks served to

minimize the influence of researcher bias during data analysis. To achieve triangulation of the survey data, I document mined five years of anonymous LASP final course evaluations, searching for qualitative student comments (which are invited on each evaluation) that confirmed or disconfirmed the relationship between students' changes in religious faith and their experience abroad.

### **Significance of the Study to Educational Leaders**

This study provided evidence of how specific study abroad components influenced students' changes of mind about an important issue—religious faith. Study abroad leaders who want their programs to facilitate a critical examination of students' perspectives on important issues can use this study in their efforts to improve their programs' structure, curriculum, and implementation. Furthermore, campus-based educational leaders can use this study's findings to inform decisions about which study abroad experiences will be appropriate for their students. In addition to improving the practice of educational leaders, this study was consistent with the recommendations that scholars of study abroad made for future research. I will now define the central variables in this study.

### **Definitions**

*Changes of mind about important issues*—Gardner (2006) proposed that mind change describes “the situation where individuals or groups abandon the way in which they have customarily thought about an issue of importance and henceforth conceive of it in a new way” (p. 2). Gardner articulated his understanding of what constitutes important changes of mind in the following example:

So if I decide to read the sections of the newspaper in a different order, or to lunch at noon rather than at one o'clock, these do not qualify as significant changes of mind. If, on the other hand, I have always voted the straight democratic ticket and

decide that from now on I will actively campaign for the Libertarian Party: or if I decide to drop out of law school in order to become a pianist at a bar, I would consider these to be significant changes of mind. (p. 2)

*Changes of mind about religious faith*—Fowler (1981) defined religious faith as an attempt to make sense of our experiences in the light of some accounting for the ultimate conditions of our existence. Fowler further described religious faith as an act that involves patterned knowing (belief), patterned valuing (commitment or devotion), and patterned constructions of meaning (often in the form of narratives). Therefore, a change of mind about religious faith is an event characterized by a shift in the way one knows, values, and constructs meaning in the world. I describe my decision to use this definition in Chapter III.

*Latin American Studies Program (LASP)*—Operating through its headquarters in San José, Costa Rica, LASP extends study abroad programming to member institutions of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU). While enrolled at LASP, students complete a semester of coursework in Spanish language and Latin American studies, while selecting elective courses in environmental science, literature, and international business. In addition to completing coursework, students live with host families, engage an internship experience in a rural community of Costa Rica, and complete study trips to neighboring Latin American countries. I use Engle and Engle’s (2003) Study Abroad Classification System to thoroughly define LASP in Chapter II.

*LASP Students*—LASP students attend colleges and universities that comprise the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU). These CCCU member institutions provide Christian higher education and represent a diversity of Protestant church denominations. CCCU campuses attract Christian students who seek a higher education experience that is grounded in Christian tradition and practice (Patterson, 2001;

Railsback, 2006). As such, most CCCU students are what Smith and Snell (2009) describe as *committed traditionalists*. Committed traditionalists clearly articulate a strong religious faith, actively practice their faith through regular involvement in a mainstream tradition, and identify faith as a central part of their identity and moral reasoning.

Although largely homogenous in relation to religiosity, LASP student groups are heterogeneous in other areas. LASP students major in a diversity of fields—education, international affairs, business, Spanish, religion and philosophy, mathematics, biology, social work, political science, intercultural studies, communications, nursing, and engineering. In addition, LASP groups are comprised of sophomore, junior, and senior undergraduate students who possess an interest in cross-cultural experiences.

## **Chapter II**

### **Analysis of Relevant Literature**

#### **Introduction**

The body of research on how study abroad impacts students is growing rapidly in size and diversity. Early efforts to understand how study abroad influenced learning focused primarily on students' development of a second language while abroad (Freed, 1995; Kinginger, 2004). As study abroad destinations and program models diversified in recent decades, however, research has begun to explore study abroad's impact on many other variables, such as students' intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006; Williams, 2005) global mindedness (Golay, 2006; Kehl, 2006), personal growth (Black & Duhon, 2006; Dwyer, 2004), and spiritual development (Beers, 1999; Porterfield, 2002; Rinehard, 2005). Although much of this research provided empirical evidence for study abroad's impact on students, few studies address the specific components of study abroad programs that influence these changes. Furthermore, research has not explored the impact of study abroad on students through a framework of mind change.

In response to these gaps in the literature, I used Gardner's (2006) framework of mind change to identify the components of a specific study abroad program that drive students' changes of mind about important issues, specifically changes of mind about their religious faith. Several studies have explored the relationship between study abroad and students' religiosity. Critical analysis of these studies informed my research.

I will organize my review of relevant literature in three sections. First, I will describe Gardner's (2006) framework of mind change and explain its relevance to my study. Second, I will critique study abroad research and analyze several studies that

addressed study abroad and religion. Finally, I will summarize the salient features of this analysis as they relate to my study.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Gardner's (2006) framework of mind change guided my exploration of how study abroad relates to students' changes of mind about their religious faith. In articulating his framework of mind change, Gardner referenced examples of change in religious, political, and economic spheres to illustrate the kinds of substantive mind change that his work addressed. He explained that mind change happens in numerous contexts. Gardner identified six arenas in which changes of mind take place:

1. Large-scale changes involving heterogeneous or diverse groups, such as the population of an entire nation
2. Large-scale changes involving a more homogeneous or uniform group, such as a corporation or a university
3. Changes brought about through works of art, science, or scholarship, such as the writings of Karl Marx or Sigmund Freud, the theories of Charles Darwin or Albert Einstein, or the artistic creations of Martha Graham or Pablo Picasso
4. Changes within formal instructional settings, such as schools or training seminars
5. Intimate forms of mind changing involving two people or a small number, such as family members
6. Changes within one's own mind, such as those that took place in Nicholson Baker's musings about furniture. (p. 18)

Gardner (2006) described several examples of mind change in each of the six arenas and then unified them with framework through which diverse cases of mind change can be

analyzed. Gardner's framework included six dimensions: (a) present content and desired content, (b) size of audience, (c) type of audience, (d) directness of change, (e) levers of change, and the (f) ethical dimension. I will now describe the six dimensions of Gardner's framework of mind change.

**Present content and desired content.** Gardner (2006) proposed that mind change requires the alteration of mental representations. Mental representations have a content, which can take the form of ideas, skills, concepts, stories, and theories. The first dimension of mind change—present content and desired content—addresses the content of mental representations. Gardner argued that efforts of mind change begin with the identification of the present content of mind and the desired content of mind. He proposed that clearly identifying these two reference points allows one to discern effective strategies for mind change in the light of counter contents to the desired content.

**Size of audience.** The second dimension in Gardner's (2006) framework of mind change is size of audience. Gardner proposed that large audiences respond well to powerful stories, while smaller audiences require strategies tailored to their specific realities. Gardner made special note of audience size in relation to changing one's own mind, which essentially involves interactions with oneself.

**Type of audience.** The third dimension of Gardner's (2006) framework—type of audience—deals primarily with the level of diversity in a change population. Gardner argued that large and heterogeneous audiences respond well to simple and compelling stories. Smaller audiences who share knowledge or expertise respond to more sophisticated narratives and theories.

**Directness of change.** The fourth dimension of Gardner's (2006) framework of mind change is directness of change. Different change events involve the communication of

ideas in diverse ways. Gardner argued that politicians and teachers directly express their messages to their respective audiences. Artists and scientists, on the other hand, communicate their ideas (art, invention, theory) in more symbolic ways. Gardner proposed that the effects of symbolic communication tend to last for longer periods of time than those of more direct approaches.

**Levers of change.** Gardner's (2006) fifth dimension of mind change is levers of change. Gardner defined levers of change as factors that determine whether change agents succeed in changing minds:

1. Reason: Minds can be changed through logical argument.
2. Research: Minds can be changed through data, observations, or case studies.
3. Resonance: Minds can be changed when the mind-to-be-changed resonates with the new content and with the presenter.
4. Representational Redescriptions: Minds can be changed when the new content is presented in a number of different media and symbol systems.
5. Resources and Rewards: Minds can be changed when sufficient rewards (or punishments) are invoked.
6. Real World Events: Minds can be changed when there is a dramatic change in the conditions of the world.
7. Resistances: Minds can be changed when the chief resistances to the desired mind change are neutralized. (p. 12)

Gardner recognized that although each event of mind change is unique, shifts of mind are likely to take hold when the seven levers of change work together. In Gardner's words, mind change occurs when "*reason* (often buttressed with *research*), reinforcement through



multiple forms of *representation, real world events, resonance, and resources* all push in one direction—and *resistances* can be identified and successfully countered” (p. 211).

**The ethical dimension.** The sixth dimension of Gardner’s (2006) framework is the ethical dimension. Gardner recognized that changes of mind can serve amoral, immoral, and moral ends. He challenged agents of change to use the tools of mind change in ways that are life-enhancing.

### **Relevance of Gardner’s (2006) Framework to this Study**

Two aspects of Gardner’s (2006) framework of mind change are of particular relevance to this study. First, Gardner identified changes of mind about religious faith as an appropriate sphere in which to apply his framework for mind change. Through my study of students’ perceptions of how study abroad influenced their changes of mind about religious faith, I explored an important change that unfolds in two of the arenas that Gardner identified: changes within formal instructional settings and changes within one’s own mind.

Second, Gardner’s (2006) levers of change are embodied in the study abroad program components at LASP. Table 1 illustrates the way that each lever of change corresponds to different LASP components. This correspondence between the levers of change and LASP components facilitated my study of how specific characteristics of LASP might serve as drivers of mind change in students. Gardner reflected on how the levers of change operate in changes of mind in the religious sphere. Speaking about the difficulty of religious change in conservative and fundamentalist groups, Gardner proposed that in such changes “one witnesses the conflicting pulls of reason, resistance, resonance, and the realities of daily experience” (p. 189). This study further explored how the levers of change interact to influence changes of mind about religious faith

Table 1

*Gardner's (2006) Levers of Change Reflected in Study Abroad Components at LASP*

Levers of Change	LASP Components
Reason	Discussion groups, assigned reading material, informal conversations with peers, conversations with program faculty, conversations with host families/friends, lectures/presentations
Research	Student research projects/assignments, lectures, interviews with local experts, assigned readings
Resonance	Reading/hearing about a topic and then experiencing something that confirms it through a study trip, home stay experience, internship, daily life, or conversation
Representational Redescriptions	Engaging content in diverse forms—readings, lectures, practical experiences (home stays, study trips), internship experiences, group discussions, observations of daily life
Resources and Rewards	Grades earned on assignments; positive/negative feedback from hosts, peers, or program faculty; adopting a new perspective to survive in a new context
Real World Events	Experiencing Third World reality first hand through home stays and study trips, observing public protests, experiencing natural disasters, observing political processes, second language learning
Resistances	Resistances to (or support for) a potential change in religious faith—from family in the U.S., hosts, peers, program faculty

## Study Abroad Research

**Defining the study abroad experience.** The failure of researchers to define the study abroad experiences at the heart of their studies is a prevalent weakness in this research. Study abroad practitioners and scholars alike recommended that future research contain thorough definitions of the study abroad experiences being explored (Engle & Engle, 2003; Stimpfl & Engberg, 1997b; Woolf, 2009). Woolf (2009) argued that researchers too often approach study abroad as one discreet experience. In response to this tendency, Woolf proposed that they differentiate programs by discerning what, where, and how students are studying abroad. Similarly, Engle and Engle (2003) identified researchers' tendencies to group study abroad programs rather than distinguish them by their unique characteristics. Engle and Engle expanded their reflections by highlighting the research benefits of precisely defining the study abroad experience:

As we begin to gather data about study abroad outcomes, how can we analyze it intelligently when we have no precise language to differentiate or categorize the types of study abroad experiences associated with that data? (p. 1)

Such critiques encouraged the creation of two models to define study abroad experiences—Stimpfl and Engberg's (1997a) International Programming Matrix and Engle and Engle's (2003) study abroad classification system. I will now describe both models and explain my decision to use Engle and Engle's study abroad classification system to define LASP.

Stimpfl and Engberg (1997a) created the International Programming Comparative Matrix to compare different study abroad experiences. They designed their model for two purposes. First, the model allows administrators to better discern how a particular program meets the needs of its intended audience. Second, the model assists administrators in

deciding whether a given program is appropriate for a particular student. Stimpfl and Engberg's model contained the following four categories through which study abroad experiences can be assessed:

1. Level of immersion: ways and degree that students are connected to host culture
2. Level of synthesis: relationships between program curriculum, pedagogy, and environment
3. Level of difference: degree to which the elements of the host culture influence students
4. Level of personal development: development of intercultural sensitivity in students.

Although I view Stimpfl and Engberg's (1997a) model as a useful tool to improve study abroad practice and research, I find the model vulnerable to subjective error. The four categories in the model reflect key dimensions of any study abroad experience. The categories, however, are too broad to ensure consistently meaningful use of this model. Different evaluators bring diverse understandings to the task of assessing a given study abroad experience. For example, what constitutes "deep immersion" for one person might not fulfill the basic requirements for deep immersion in the view of another. Such lack of specificity in Stimpfl and Engberg's model informs my decision to use Engle and Engle's (2003) study abroad classification system to define LASP.

Engle and Engle (2003) proposed a level-based, hierarchical classification of study abroad program types. Their classification system assumes that meaningful interaction with the host culture is what distinguishes study abroad from study at the home campus. Engle and Engle proposed that certain study abroad programs were better than others at facilitating engagement of the host context. Furthermore, they identified certain program

components to facilitate a deeper interaction with the host culture. In their view, the ability to facilitate meaningful interaction with the host culture is what most distinguished one study abroad experience from another.

Engle and Engle's (2003) study abroad classification system contained seven components that categorized study abroad experiences into five progressive levels. Engle and Engle proposed that the seven study abroad program components interlock and interact in varying and complex ways in each program. Engle and Engle's seven components of overseas study experiences are:

1. Length of student sojourn
2. Entry target-language competence
3. Language used in course work
4. Context of academic work
5. Types of student housing
6. Provisions for guided/structured cultural interaction and experiential learning
7. Guided reflection on cultural experience.

A study abroad program's performance related to these seven components places it in one of five levels for each component. Evaluators can then compile an aggregate score for the seven components to classify a given program. Engle and Engle (2003) created the following classification levels:

- Level One: Study Tour
- Level Two: Short-Term Study
- Level Three: Cross-Cultural Contact Program
- Level Four: Cross-Cultural Encounter Program

- Level Five: Cross-Cultural Immersion Program.

Table 2 illustrates how each of the five classification levels corresponds to the seven defining components. Engle and Engle's classification system defines LASP at approximately Level Four: Cross-Cultural Encounter Program. I will now describe how LASP performs in each of the seven program components.

Regarding program duration, LASP students complete a full semester of study in Latin America (Level Three). Regarding entry-target language competence, LASP requires applicants to present university transcripts that reflect the successful completion of two college-level Spanish courses. This requirement typically places even the least advanced LASP students at pre-advanced Spanish language proficiency (Level Four). Regarding language used in coursework, LASP coursework requires students to use a combination of Spanish and English (Level Three). Regarding academic work context, students receive some course sessions in-house and complete other course requirements in the company of host-country nationals (Level Four). LASP students' only housing option is a series of individual integration home stays (Level Five). Regarding provision for cultural interaction and experiential learning, LASP requires students to integrate into the local community through individual internship experiences lasting one month in length (Level Five).

Regarding guided reflection on cultural experience, LASP students receive orientation and reentry programming. In addition, students are required to participate in weekly reflection groups to discuss academic and personal topics. LASP also requires reflective writing and research of students (Level Five).

As the above classification of LASP reveals, a program can perform at diverse levels in relation to the different program components. For example, LASP's use of both

Table 2

*Engle and Engle's (2003) Study Abroad Program Levels (p.10)*

Program Components	Level One: Study Tour	Level Two: Short-Term Study	Level Three: Cross-Cultural Contact Program	Level Four: Cross-Cultural Encounter Program	Level Five: Cross-Cultural Immersion Program
Duration	Several days to a few weeks	3 to 8 weeks	Semester	Semester to academic year	Semester to academic year
Entry target-language competence	Elementary to intermediate	Elementary to intermediate	Elementary to intermediate	Pre-advanced to advanced	Advanced
Language used in course work	English	English and target-language	English and target-language	Predominately target language	Target-language in all curricular and extracurricular activities
Academic work context	Home institution faculty	In-house or institute for foreign students	Student group or with other international students	In house student group	Local norms, partial or complete direct enrollment
Housing	Collective	Collective and/or home stay	Collective, home stay visit, home stay rental	Home stay rental or integration home stay	Individual integration home stay
Provision for cultural interaction, experiential learning	None	None	None or limited	Optional participation in occasional integration activities	Required regular participation in cultural integration program, extensive direct cultural contact via service learning, work internship
Guided reflection on cultural experience	None	Orientation program	Orientation program	Orientation program, initial and ongoing	Orientation, mentoring, on-going orientation or course on culture, reflective writing and research

English and Spanish in coursework classifies it as Level Three for the language used in coursework component. In relation to the six remaining components, however, LASP classifies as Level Three in one component, Level Four in two components, and Level Five in three components. The aggregate of the seven components classifies LASP as a Level Four: Cross-Cultural Encounter Program. As Engle and Engle (2003) carefully stated, the classification system does not reflect the unlimited variety of combinations among the seven components in study abroad programs. Nonetheless, Engle and Engle created a tool that empowers study abroad practitioners and scholars to be more precise in defining and evaluating study abroad programs, especially when they are used as a research variable. I will now analyze specific studies that explored study abroad and its impact on religion.

**Study abroad and religion.** My review of literature on study abroad revealed five studies that in varying degrees addressed the relationship between study abroad and religion. Table 3 presents the characteristics of these studies. Two of these studies examined the broad topic of spirituality among university students—Astin and Astin (2010) and Holcomb (2004). Although Astin and Astin and Holcomb’s studies did not aim to explore the relationship between study abroad and religion, their research of spirituality among university students found that many students identified study abroad as having impacted their spiritual development. These findings are consistent with the research that does address the specific relationship between study abroad and religious change.

Three studies centered on exploring the specific relationship between study abroad and students’ religiosity—Beers (1999), Porterfield (2002), and Reinhard (2005). Beers explored the impact of a one-month study abroad mission trip on the faith development of participants. Porterfield examined the making meaning of sojourner spirituality post-study abroad. Reinhard measured the effect of a semester abroad on the faith development of



Table 3

*Characteristics of Studies that Addressed Study Abroad and Religion*

Characteristic	Astin and Astin (2010)	Beers (1999)	Holcomb (2004)	Porterfield (2002)	Reinhard (2005)
Type of research	Mixed methods	Mixed methods	Qualitative	Qualitative	Mixed methods
Purpose	Examine role that college plays in spiritual development	Analyze relationship between short-term study abroad and faith development	Explore faith development of students at CCCU institutions	Explore essence of student spirituality post-study abroad	Measure relationship between time abroad and faith development
<i>N</i>	14,527	171 (72E/99C)	166	5	40 (10E/30C)
Data collection	Interviews and surveys	Surveys	Semi-structured interviews	Semi-structured interviews/artifact analysis (photos and scrapbooks)	Survey, interviews, essay data
Findings	One finding was that study abroad related positively to students' spiritual development	Quantitative data showed no faith development/qualitative data reflected faith development in some cases	Multicultural exposure is a driver of spiritual development	Each participant identified how their spirituality changed while abroad	Study abroad may have an impact on the faith development of students

undergraduate students. Because of their relevancy to my study, I will now analyze the studies of Beers, Porterfield, and Reinhard.

*Beers.* Beers (1999) conducted a mixed methods study on the impact of one-month study abroad missions trips sponsored by a Christian university on students' faith development. I identified several limitations and strengths in Beers' work. Limitations included undefined independent variables and the absence of clear information about how Beers' selected the control group. Strengths included the robust size of his sample and his concise overview of Christian faith development theories. I will first describe the limitations of Beers' study.

Beers' (1999) examined the impact of a one month study abroad mission trip on the faith development of participants in five different trips. The five trips included Ghana, Bahamas, India, Venezuela, and Australia. Beers did not define these five experiences in any way. Beers stated that all students lived in a community, worked on a community project, and participated in reading and reflection guided by a Taylor faculty member. This broad description revealed Beers' treatment of the five trips as a single experience. Such uniform treatment of these diverse experiences affirmed scholars' call for precisely defined study abroad experiences in research (Stimpfl & Engberg, 1997; Engle & Engle, 2003; Wolf, 2009). Beers' failure to define the diverse study abroad experiences weakened the value of his data.

Beers' (1999) lack of clarity about how he selected the control group was an additional limitation in his study. Beers does not explain his rationale for selecting the control group. The absence of such an explanation leaves the reader without requisite information to conduct a critical analysis of the study. I will now describe the strengths in Beer's study.

A total of 171 students from Taylor University (CCCU member) participated in Beers' (1999) study. Seventy two students comprised the treatment group through their

participation in five different one-month study abroad missions trips. Ninety nine students served as the control group from three January term classes at Taylor University. The size of both the treatment and the control groups is large when compared to most study abroad research. An additional strength in Beers' study was his concise overview of literature on Christian faith development. Such an overview assisted the reader in developing an understanding of the complex discourse on this variable.

The quantitative findings in Beers' (1999) study revealed no significant difference in pre- and post-experience tests for either group. Beers' noted, however, that the qualitative data reflected significant changes in relation to specific questions. Beers' examination of these questions indicated that participants in the study abroad missions trips became more accepting of those with different religious beliefs during their time abroad. Unfortunately, the limitations in Beers' study rendered these findings difficult to evaluate.

**Porterfield.** Porterfield (2002) conducted a qualitative study to explore the spiritual meaning that study abroad contributes to the lives of students upon returning home to the United States. Through semi-structured interviews, Porterfield engaged five participants following their year-long experiences in three different study abroad locations—Spain, Germany, and Zimbabwe. I identified multiple limitations and strengths in Porterfield's study. Limitations included undefined independent variables and small sample size. Strengths included Porterfield's use of numerous strategies to strengthen the credibility of her study. In addition, Porterfield's careful analysis of the transcribed interviews informed her identification of salient themes in the data.

Like Beers (1999), the primary limitation of Porterfield's (2002) research was her decision to not define the independent variables—the participants' study abroad experiences in Spain, Germany, and Zimbabwe. Although transcribed interview data

provided glimpses of these study abroad experiences, Porterfield chose not to provide additional descriptions. Unlike Beers, Porterfield briefly recognized the differences among these study abroad experiences. However, she chose not to detail the distinguishing features among them. Without a clear description of the diverse study abroad experiences, the reader is left with an incomplete understanding of what characterized the independent variables in this study.

The small size of Porterfield's (2002) sample represented an additional limitation. Porterfield purposefully selected five students based on their articulation of spiritual experiences during their time abroad. A larger sample would have informed a clearer illumination of the topic. I will now describe the strengths of Porterfield's study.

Porterfield (2002) implemented several strategies to increase the credibility of her study. She consistently performed member checks during interviews to confirm accurate understanding of the data. Porterfield interviewed each participant at least three times for 90 to 150 minutes to ensure prolonged engagement of the students. In addition, she demonstrated sensitivity to the importance of context in qualitative research by describing the participants' backgrounds as related to the study. She also clarified her own background and biases as related to the study. Furthermore, Porterfield's meticulous analysis of the transcribed interview data allowed her to thoughtfully organize the data by theme. I appreciated Porterfield's choice to include much of the transcribed interview data in her report. This decision provided the reader with an understanding of her rationale for data organization and interpretation.

Porterfield's (2002) findings revealed textural and structural themes that were factors in the relationship between participants' study abroad experiences and the development of spiritual meaning in their lives. Some of the textural themes included

influence of mentor relationships, impact of country visited, religious experiences in country visited, relationships with those in country visited, absence from home, and influence of own faith and culture. Some of the structural themes included religious foundations of family, cognitive dissonance upon returning home, and experiences of adversity while abroad. Unfortunately, the limitations in Porterfield's study weakened the credibility of these findings.

**Reinhard.** Reinhard (2005) conducted a mixed methods study on the effect of a semester abroad on the faith development of undergraduate students. He used the Faithful Change Questionnaire and Faith Development Interviews to gather data related to students' faith development. All participants in this study were students at Christian colleges in the United States who spent one semester in Mozambique. My analysis of Reinhard's study revealed numerous limitations and strengths. Limitations included an undefined independent variable and small sample size. Strengths included Reinhard's thorough review of student and faith development theories and his recognition of the study's limitations. I will now describe the limitations in Reinhard's study.

Like Beers (1999) and Porterfield (2002), the primary limitation in Reinhard's (2005) study was his decision not to define the independent variable—the students' experience in Mozambique. Although Reinhard briefly proposed that study abroad experiences can be grouped into three categories—total immersion, spectator, and guided immersion—he failed to clearly describe the Semester in Mozambique Program in the light of these categories. Furthermore, Reinhard did not support his proposal of study abroad categories with the theories of other study abroad scholars. As with Beers and Porterfield, the absence of a defined independent variable weakened the credibility of Reinhard's study.

Small sample size of the treatment group represented an additional weakness in Reinhard's study. The treatment group contained 11 participants, while the control group contained 30 participants. A larger treatment group would have improved the strength of Reinhard's study. I will now describe the strengths of Reinhard's study.

Reinhard's (2005) identification of the limitations in his research represented a strength of the study. Reinhard identified the reliability of his measurement tools and the small size of his sample as key limitations in the study. An additional strength of Reinhard's study was his thorough review of the literature on student and faith development. As with Beers' (1999) study, Reinhard's review of this literature provided the reader an appreciation of the complex discourse on these variables.

Reinhard's (2005) study revealed a significant change in faith development for study abroad participants pre- and post-participation in study abroad experiences in Mozambique. His findings also revealed a significant difference between the faith development of study abroad participants and the faith development of the control group. Overall, the findings of Reinhard's study indicated that study abroad experiences may have an impact on the faith development of undergraduate students. Like Beers (1999) and Porterfield (2002), however, the limitations of Reinhard's study weakened its credibility. I will now explain how my study builds upon this literature and makes relevant contributions to the field of study abroad leadership.

### **Analysis of Relevant Literature Related to this Study**

This study contributed to the scholarship on study abroad and mind change in three important ways. First, almost all study abroad research addresses the immediate impact of study abroad on participants. My study explored the impact of study abroad on students, spanning several decades and generations. Second, most study abroad research assumes

that study abroad is a uniform treatment variable, which requires little definition or description. This study explored the impact of a specific and carefully-defined study abroad program on students. Finally, although much study abroad research provides empirical evidence of how such experiences relate to student learning outcomes, few studies identify the specific study abroad components that drive such learning and consequent actions. By drawing on Gardner's (2006) framework of mind change, this study isolated those program elements that were most potent factors in a specific change event.

## Chapter III

### Method

#### Introduction

I implemented a qualitative study (with some descriptive statistics) to explore LASP students' perceptions of how studying abroad related to a change in their religious faith. Patton (2002) proposed that qualitative research honors the dynamic nature of change as opposed to understanding it as a linear or discreet event. Furthermore, qualitative research is particularly useful at capturing the perspectives of participants on topics that are personal and complex. Gardner (2006) noted that changes of mind in the religious sphere are deeply personal experiences. As such, I chose qualitative methods to access the perceptions of LASP alumni about a change in their religious faith.

The research of respondents' perceptions, however, presents limitations to the credibility of a study. For instance, respondents' perceptions about a given variable can diverge from agreed upon understandings of that variable. For this reason, the study of perceptions is most appropriate when the variable under consideration is related to the internal lives of respondents (Patton, 2002). In the case of LASP students' changes in religious faith, perceptions are perhaps the only starting point in analysis of this deeply personal change. Without first accessing respondents' perceptions of this change, researchers have no data to scrutinize via frameworks that address such change. This reality informed my decision to invite respondents in my study to *describe* their perceived changes of religious faith and its consequent *actions* in the world. Such descriptions of change and related actions provided some evidence that respondents' perceptions reflected change.



Similar to the challenges of using perceptions in research, the study of variables that relate to religion represents an additional layer of complexity in this study. Scholars debated the definitions, theoretical frameworks, and interpretive tools that influence religion-focused research, specifically studies that address religious development and change (Fowler, 2004; Streib, 2001). Such debate influenced my selection of a guiding definition of *changes in religious faith* for this study. I selected the work of Fowler (1987) to illuminate the meaning of religious faith. Fowler's central contribution to the literature is a stage-based theory of faith development. As such, the heart of Fowler's work addressed the movement of individuals from one faith conviction to another. In other words, Fowler attempted to organize changes in religious faith. Because of this similarity of Fowler's work to my study, I found his ideas to be relevant foundations for the definition of changes in religious faith for this study.

### **Participants**

I surveyed the population of LASP alumni for this study. Since its founding in 1986, LASP has provided study abroad programming to 1,793 students. This large population of study abroad participants allowed me to explore LASP students' study abroad experiences over multiple decades and across several generations.

LASP students attend colleges and universities that comprise the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU). As I noted in Chapter I, CCCU member institutions provide Christian higher education and represent a diversity of Protestant church denominations. CCCU campuses attract Christian students who seek a higher education experience that is grounded in Christian tradition and practice (Patterson, 2001; Railsback, 2006). As such, most CCCU students are what Smith and Snell (2009) describe as *committed traditionalists*. Committed traditionalists clearly articulate a strong religious

faith, actively practice their faith through regular involvement in a mainstream tradition, and identify faith as a central part of their identity and moral reasoning.

Although largely homogenous in relation to religiosity, LASP student groups are heterogeneous in other areas. LASP students major in a diversity of fields—education, international affairs, business, Spanish, religion and philosophy, mathematics, biology, social work, political science, intercultural studies, communications, nursing, and engineering. In addition, LASP groups are comprised of sophomore, junior, and senior undergraduate students who possess an interest in cross-cultural experiences.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

I invited LASP alumni to complete an open-ended, anonymous, and qualitative survey (see Appendix A). As LASP alumni are geographically dispersed, I conducted the survey online. I used the Qualtrics program for the creation and distribution of the survey. Qualtrics provides online survey platforms and related services for researchers (<http://qualtrics.com/>, 2013). Lehigh University owns a license to use Qualtrics' products in research activities. Through this license, I accessed Qualtrics' programs to create an anonymous survey link through which LASP alumni accessed the survey. I sent the link to LASP alumni via an e-mail invitation and a post on the LASP alumni Facebook groups (see Appendix B). To prohibit alumni from completing the survey more than once, the Qualtrics program allowed me to build in a survey feature that blocked second survey attempts.

Parallel to implementation of the survey, I document mined five years of anonymous LASP final course evaluations (see Appendix C) for data related to the research questions. Implementing two data collection methods—surveys and document mining—allowed me to increase the credibility of the study through *triangulation*. Triangulation is

the use of diverse data collection methods to strengthen the credibility of qualitative research (Maxwell, 2005; Patton, 2002).

Through *inductive analysis*, I categorized each response to the survey prompts. Inductive analysis allows categories to emerge from the data as opposed to using existing frameworks to identify categories (Creswell, 2012). In my categorization of the data, I prioritized *emic* voices. Emic voices reflect the language that respondents use to describe their world from an insider (emic) perspective (Patton, 2002).

Following my categorization of all data, I identified themes among the categories via tracking back and forth among responses. I selected themes based on their ability to achieve both *internal homogeneity* and *external heterogeneity*. Internal homogeneity is the extent to which the data in a given theme hold together, while external homogeneity is the extent to which differences among themes are clear (Patton, 2002). In addition, the themes reflected the collective body of data for each research prompt. I will now detail the steps I followed for data analysis.

1. Through the data storage services of Qualtrics, I accessed each survey response and read it thoroughly. Qualtrics uniquely numbered each survey response to facilitate accurate data organization and analysis.
2. I read each survey response a second time to begin searching for and documenting patterns and themes in the data via inductive analysis.
3. Survey prompt #1 required a “yes” or “no” answer about respondents’ perceptions of whether their experience with LASP influenced any changes in their religious faith. I recorded the semester and year of LASP participation for each respondent along with their response to survey prompt #1.

4. With the data collected for survey prompt #1, I implemented a frequency count to determine what percentage of respondents answered “yes” and “no” to the prompt. I then organized the breakdown of these responses by year of LASP participation to facilitate comparison of responses between earlier and more recent LASP cohorts.
5. Survey prompt #2 invited respondents to describe their perceived changes in religious faith. Through careful analysis of these responses, I organized this content into categories that emerged in the data and labeled them accordingly. Some responses contained data that reflected more than one category. Following the identification of categories, I identified themes among the categories via tracking back and forth among responses to discern accurate and comprehensive themes in the data. Finally, I conducted a frequency count of the number of respondents that comprised each theme.
6. Survey prompt #3 invited respondents to describe how their perceived changes in religious faith informed actions in their communities and the world. Similar to my analysis of the data for prompt #2, I organized this content into categories that emerged in the data and labeled them accordingly. Some responses contained data that reflected more than one category. Following the identification of categories, I identified themes among the categories via tracking back and forth among responses to discern accurate and comprehensive themes in the data. Finally, I conducted a frequency count of the number of respondents that comprised each theme.
7. Survey prompt #4 invited respondents to identify which LASP components most influenced their changes in religious faith. Similar to my analysis of the responses to prompts #2 and #3, I organized this content into categories that emerged in the data and labeled them accordingly. Some responses contained data that reflected

more than one category. Following the identification of categories, I identified themes among the categories via tracking back and forth among responses to discern accurate and comprehensive themes in the data. Finally, I conducted a frequency count of the number of respondents that comprised each theme.

8. Parallel to the analysis of survey data, I document mined five years of anonymous LASP final course evaluations for data to confirm or disconfirm the prevalence of religious change among LASP students. I read all qualitative student comments, which students are invited to share at the end of such course evaluations, to search for evidence of students' changes in religious faith. The document mining of course evaluations strengthened the study by achieving triangulation of the survey data.
9. To reduce the possible impact of researcher bias in data analysis, I invited a research assistant to implement expert checks of my interpretations and analysis of the data. Creswell (2000) identified expert checks as one way to increase the validity of qualitative research. I selected Javier Arguedas to implement the expert checks. Javier is a study abroad professional who is familiar with both LASP and its student population. In addition, Javier's successful completion of three research-based graduate degrees prepared him to critically assess my research.
10. Gardner's (2006) framework of mind change, Engle and Engle's (2003) study abroad classification system, and contemporary study abroad research informed my discussion of the findings and their application via practice and future research.

I will now provide critical reflection on the limitations of this study.

### **Limitations**

The study contained several limitations—researcher bias, participant self-selection, low survey response rates among earlier LASP cohorts, its focus on a specific sub-culture

among U.S. university students, and its emphasis on the perceptions of respondents. My proximity to the study's topic presented a risk of researcher bias. As a former LASP faculty member and study broad participant, I brought personal experiences to data analysis that could threaten my objectivity. Furthermore, my experiences abroad as a learner and expat influenced many changes in my religious faith. I view such changes to be positive developments in my life. As such, I analyzed the data with a heightened sense of self-scrutiny to minimize the potential impact of such experiences on my analysis. To further minimize the risk of researcher bias, I implemented expert checks of the data analysis.

An additional limitation of the study was participant self-selection. All survey respondents self-selected as participants in this study. Such self-selection could have influenced bias in the data. LASP alumni could have been more likely to complete the survey if they perceived their study abroad experience with LASP to have been a positive factor in their personal development. As such, participant self-selection could skew the data in a direction that disproportionately emphasizes students' perceptions that LASP influenced a change in their religious faith.

Low survey response rates among LASP alumni from earlier program cohorts represented another limitation. Such low response rates weakened the credibility of comparisons between earlier and more recent LASP cohorts. The U.S. Christian university subculture of the LASP group represented another limitation of the study. The unique characteristics of this subculture require the exercise of caution when interpreting and applying the results of this study.

Finally, this study's emphasis on participants' perceptions was a limitation. Although I chose to explore perceptions due to the personal nature of changes in religious faith, perceptions are difficult to evaluate and confirm. To minimize this limitation, I asked

respondents to describe the nature of their perceived change in religious faith as well as its consequent actions. This served to provide some confirmation of whether respondents' perceptions reflected a substantive change.

## Chapter IV

### Results

#### Introduction

The survey of LASP alumni generated 430 responses, which represent 24% of LASP's 1,793 alumni. I will organize my presentation of the survey results by relating them to each research question. I will then share results of the document mining of LASP final course evaluations from 2008 through 2013 to triangulate the survey results.

#### **Research Question #1: Do LASP alumni perceive their study abroad experience to have influenced a lasting change of mind about their religious faith?**

Survey data revealed that 89% of respondents perceived their study abroad experience with LASP to have influenced a change in their religious faith. The first survey prompt invited LASP alumni to provide an affirmative or negative response to research question #1. Of the survey's 430 respondents, 382 answered "yes" to this prompt, while the remaining 48 respondents selected "no." Table 4 presents the data related to research question #1 by LASP cohort year.

Regarding differences in response between alumni from earlier LASP cohorts and those from more recent groups, the data revealed little difference between these groups. LASP alumni from 1986 through 1999 answered "yes" in 87% of cases, while LASP alumni from 2000 through 2013 answered "yes" 91% of the time. However, low survey response rates among earlier LASP cohorts weakened the credibility of this comparison. The response rate for LASP alumni from 1986 through 1999 was 10%, while the response rate for alumni from 2000 through 2013 was 30%. The 382 respondents who provided an



Table 4

*Perceptions of a Change in Religious Faith by LASP Cohort Year*

Year	<i>N</i>	<i>n</i>	Response rate	Yes	No
86	10	0	-	0	0
87	30	4	.13	2	2
88	32	1	.03	1	0
89	27	0	-	0	0
90	44	2	.05	2	0
91	48	2	.04	1	1
92	55	3	.05	2	1
93	61	7	.11	7	0
94	68	5	.07	5	0
95	69	9	.13	9	0
96	71	9	.12	9	0
97	74	5	.07	4	1
98	73	14	.19	12	2
99	73	14	.19	11	3
00	69	16	.23	15	1
01	74	5	.07	2	3
02	82	19	.23	17	2
03	80	20	.25	14	6
04	93	27	.29	25	2
05	95	34	.36	32	2
06	92	26	.28	24	2
07	79	21	.27	17	4
08	85	31	.36	30	1
09	88	21	.24	20	1
10	65	22	.34	20	2
11	69	28	.41	26	2
12	57	30	.53	29	1
13	30	21	.70	21	0
None listed	Na	34	Na	25	9
Totals	1793	430	.24	382 (.89 of <i>n</i> )	48 (.11 of <i>n</i> )

affirmative answer to the first survey prompt were directed to the rest of the survey, while the surveys of the 48 respondents who answered “no” were submitted.

**Research Question #2: When LASP alumni perceive a change in their religious faith, how do they describe this change and its consequent actions in their communities and the world?**

I collected data for research question #2 via the second and third survey prompts. The second survey prompt invited respondents to describe their perceived changes in religious faith. The third survey prompt asked respondents to describe actions that this change informs in their communities and the world. Several themes emerged in my analysis of the responses to these prompts.

In response to the second survey prompt, respondents’ descriptions of their changes in religious faith revealed four core themes and two outlying themes. The four core themes are: increased awareness of culture’s influence on religious faith, new embrace of doubt, more inclusive religious faith, and greater emphasis on social justice. The two outlying themes are left Christianity and solidified existing Christian faith. Table 5 presents a frequency count of respondents’ descriptions of these changes in religious faith.

**Increased awareness of culture’s influence on religious faith** (91 respondents). The responses of LASP alumni illustrated how their experiences in Latin America awakened them to the influence that culture has on their own and others’ religious faith:

Probably the most significant change for me was understanding that the particular form of faith that I grew up with was part of a specific political/cultural context. I think many people grow up believing that the faith group they were born into was normal for everyone. LASP and my experiences in Central America helped me to

Table 5

*Frequency Count of Respondents' Descriptions of Their Changes in Religious Faith*

Changes	<i>n</i>
Greater emphasis on social justice	136
More inclusive religious faith	133
Increased awareness of culture's influence on religious faith	91
New embrace of doubt	71
Solidified existing Christian faith	26
Left Christianity	18

realize that other people were born into very different circumstances and came to understand faith very differently. (Respondent 381)

In many respondents' views, their relationships with Latin Americans required them to approach their religious faith through a new cultural framework:

The experience of being with and learning from Central Americans confronted my worldview and education as a U.S. born, middle class, white, Christian male. As a result, my Christian faith was specifically challenged, and in some ways, upended. I was challenged to begin looking through their lenses to understand how they saw history, politics, theology, and the Scriptural story. Many of these did not resonate or directly conflicted with my perspectives and how I interpret these bodies of study and experience. While I remained a Christian throughout the LASP experience and after I returned to the United States, I could no longer, with integrity, look through the same lenses that I had before LASP. (Respondent 74)

In addition, many responses reflected a heightened awareness of the particular influence that U.S. culture had on students' religious faith:

I think the biggest change for me in my LASP experience was moving beyond the 'God Bless America' slogans and the idea that we should be patriots for our country and recognizing that as a follower of Christ I am part of God's kingdom that does not have borders or social classes or value certain people or ways of life more than others. There is nothing wrong with having national pride in my country, but during LASP I began to see myself as a member of God's Kingdom first and as an American second. (Respondent 320)

Respondents' shared that such realizations about the influence of culture on religion sparked deeper questions and doubts about their previously held religious faith.

**New embrace of doubt** (71 respondents). Many respondents expressed that their study abroad experience in Latin America informed the development of a more critical Christian faith. Their responses reflected a new embrace of doubt, questioning, and uncertainty:

Up until the point that I studied abroad, I was taught that Christianity was a cornerstone upon which to base the rest of my life, an 'owner's manual' for how I was supposed to approach the world and the people in it. Studying abroad forced me to turn a critical eye towards everything I'd experienced thus far in my short span of life. . . . It taught me to think critically about beliefs I'd taken for granted my whole life (maybe Jesus wasn't white, maybe God doesn't care about who you voted for, maybe gay people aren't going to hell). Most importantly of all, it taught me that it was okay to doubt - maybe even essential. (Respondent 178)

LASP was the most influential moment of my life. My paradigms were shaken, including faith. As I rebuilt and asked new questions in light of my LASP, it came out different. Doubt and questions are part of my faith journey all while still adhering to a Christian faith. (Respondent 49)

Related to this new embrace of doubt and questions, many respondents shared about their increased appreciation for uncertainty, mystery and, religious exploration:

It influenced me to be less of a 'black and white' thinker and more 'grey.'

Impressed upon me the importance of accepting that I do not know anything for certain, that 'religion' is not the belief of something defined, but the act of searching and exploration. (Respondent 23)

I am able to ask difficult questions of my faith and celebrate (affirm) the beauty and mystery of my faith. (Respondent 525)

For many respondents, the increased comfort with doubt and questioning allowed their religious faith to become more inclusive.

**More inclusive religious faith** (133 respondents). Contact with diverse cultural and economic realities in Latin America encouraged LASP students to loosen the boundaries they had previously constructed around the tenets of their religious faith. A broader, more inclusive concept of God was a common illustration of this change:

Living in the sheltered reality of the U.S. (other than a few one-week missions trips), I had very little idea of the realities that the majority of people in the world face in everyday life. As such, my view of God was also limited. I had a first-world God, a God who couldn't identify with poverty, pain and suffering. LASP broadened my view of God, while simultaneously bringing me to the realization that

everything I knew about him was just barely scratching the surface of who He is.  
(Respondent 170)

The God I knew when I came to Costa Rica was definable, discernible, and dogmatic. Over a period of months, however, my concept of God shifted with my experiences. I witnessed God as One who indwells the poorest of villages in more intimate and powerful ways than I had ever seen, One who accompanies the oppressed and staunchly defends their cause, and One who asks more of his followers than I ever wanted to believe. (Respondent 120)

In addition to developing more inclusive concepts of God, many respondents stated that their interactions with Latin Americans of non-Christian traditions led them to a more accepting religious faith:

I was already midway between a conservative (almost fundamentalist) childhood and something more liberal in my faith when I went to LASP, but LASP pushed me into something more like Universalism. I was already starting to raise questions about the monopoly of the Christian faith on values like virtue and morality, and meeting people from other faiths (which I had never done before, growing up in a very secluded and exclusive Christian environment) was very eye opening for me.  
(Respondent 355)

Part of what I had believed before LASP was that Christianity and the bible and the Christian God was the ONLY right/true religion and all others were false and their believers were misled. Now, I find that I am able to honor others' beliefs as valid and not judge people or tell them they are wrong, or actively try to convert them and get them to join my religion. . . . I came to understand and feel that what I had

believed about indigenous faiths before LASP was not the truth - that indigenous people are not ‘worshipping Satan;’ in fact the indigenous people I stayed with lived out the principles of the gospel of Jesus more holistically and genuinely than any Christian I had encountered. (Respondent 326)

Accompanying this shift to a more inclusive Christian faith, many respondents shared how their study abroad experience in Latin America convinced them of the need to place greater emphasis on social justice as an expression of religious faith.

**Greater emphasis on social justice** (136 respondents). Placing greater emphasis on actions that achieve social justice was the most frequent change of religious faith cited by respondents. LASP alumni described a decrease in concern for orthodoxy (right belief) and an increase in concern for orthopraxy (right action). For many respondents, a shift in the way they viewed sacred texts initiated this change:

One of the key changes in my faith that was related to my LASP experience was that I obtained a more justice-oriented faith. After learning how many passages in scripture relate to the poor, the widow, and the disenfranchised, and after seeing poverty that I was unlikely to see in my life in America, my faith became more focused not on the major ‘moral issues’ on which American Christianity has been so focused, but on literally living out the words of Jesus to love God, love my neighbors, and to serve those in need. (Respondent 100)

By reading the Bible from the margins, I have to see Jesus's life as a prophet who sought justice and not only as a wise teacher who cuddled with children. Seeing the Bible in this way requires action. I cannot say, ‘It must be God's will’ and sit

passively as the world around me needs healing and needs people that are called to action, called to change. (Respondent 205)

Engaging sacred texts from the perspectives of the marginalized led many respondents to shift their religious axis from belief to justice-oriented action:

I grew up in a very conservative evangelical church. My LASP experience allowed me to critique and question many of the values I held. My faith was formerly focused very much on my personal salvation, and currently I understand my faith to be more outwardly focused--how I respond to others, particularly the poor.

(Respondent 93)

I learned a lot about being both a vertical and horizontal Christian (loving God and loving people), more than just being a horizontal Christian and letting it stop there.

The LASP experience also gave me a burden for the poor and marginalized

(Respondent 132).

While a majority of respondents described the changes to their religious faith through the themes above, two outlying groups described changes that depart from these core themes. One group shared that the change they experienced while studying abroad was a deepening of the religious faith they held prior to LASP. Another group reported that their decision to leave the Christian faith was related to their study abroad experiences in Latin America.

**Solidified existing Christian faith** (26 respondents). Some respondents stated that their study abroad experience presented them with challenges that ultimately strengthened their existing Christian faith:



I feel that the LASP experience helped me to struggle with some concepts of my faith, and ultimately to strengthen it. Attending LASP helped me to rely on the firm foundation of faith that I already had and to strengthen it by coming up against some important issues. (Respondent 390)

Participating in study-abroad education not only increased my faith, it caused it to become more solidified. Perhaps this is true for many in the typical college-age group, but for me, relying on my Savior to get me through some of those trying times was all I had. (Respondent 5)

LASP made me question previously held beliefs- things I had been brought up having been born and raised in a Christian home- go through a period of doubt, but then in the end come out more certain and steadfast in most of the things I had believed in previously. If anything, being exposed to LASPs teachings made me all the more certain of the necessity of never giving up on what I had been taught. (Respondent 246)

In direct contrast to the strengthening of Christian faith that these respondents reported, a smaller group shared of their decision to leave Christianity.

**Left Christianity** (18 mentions). Some LASP alumni expressed that their study abroad experience influenced their decision to leave the Christian faith. Respondents shared that exposure to harsh realities in Latin America informed the abandonment of their religious faith:

In a nutshell, after being exposed to extreme poverty and gaining a better understanding of the geopolitical realities that contribute to that, I stopped believing in god. It seemed pretty clear that either god didn't exist or didn't care or was

impotent to do anything about major injustice. God became irrelevant for my life.

Christianity then became anathema as the system that lied to me. (Respondent 407)

Others reported that studying abroad opened them to a spirit of critical exploration that influenced their departure from Christianity:

I wouldn't say that I don't believe in God, but I can confidently say that I no longer call myself a Christian. Attending LASP has sparked my curiosity in so many different areas of life, and because of that, I often find myself internally conflicted with believing in a 'higher power'. While the existence of God makes sense on certain days, there are days where I put complete faith in science over faith. I have also started to research other world religions, particularly Buddhism, that just seem to make more sense than Christianity. In summary, I guess I would say that the changes that began during my time at LASP have led me to question more about everything in life, and taught me never to believe something simply because it was something that I was taught. (Respondent 294)

In summary, the data from the second survey prompt illustrated that respondents perceived intercultural experiences during study abroad to spark reflection about their religious faith. Such critical reflection informed the development of new religious beliefs and convictions among respondents. These included the adoption of a religious faith that was more inclusive and focused on actively seeking social justice. While most respondents' changes in religious faith were characterized by these core themes, two outlying groups experienced changes of a different nature. One group chose to leave the Christian religion, while another group experienced a deepening of the religious faith they held prior to studying abroad.

The third survey prompt invited respondents to describe actions that emerge from their changes in religious faith. I identified five core themes among the responses to this prompt—justice-centered vocation, creating sustainable economies, transforming communities, family decisions, and personal development. Table 6 presents a frequency count of respondents’ actions.

**Justice-centered vocation** (86 respondents). Respondents’ changes in religious faith influenced their vocational paths and practice. In their articulations of the impact that studying abroad had on their vocations, LASP alumni described the justice orientation of their work:

It has led me down the path I follow today as I engage in humanitarian work. It has guided me toward approaches that focus on social justice, and planted the seed of thought that reminds me to prioritize the ‘least of these’ and highlight vulnerabilities in new ways. I work in women's protection, and what I learned about oppression, vulnerability, and risk during LASP has largely influenced where I direct my professional efforts. (Respondent 56)

When I returned from LASP I had an immediate draw to serve the lost and broken, specifically my community. I was drawn to non-profit work and serving the underprivileged and marginalized people in my society because of my interactions with the various people from different cultures and socio-economic statuses in Costa Rica. As a result, I have served at the same non-profit for 4 years and currently act as the Executive Director. (Respondent 222)

As a direct result of the LASP experience and learnings, my projected career path changed dramatically. I now work for a non-profit organization helping small

Table 6

*Frequency Count of Actions that Respondents Related to Their Change in Religious Faith*

Actions	<i>n</i>
Transforming communities	148
Justice-centered vocation	86
Creating sustainable economies	56
Personal development	56
Family decisions	43

farmers in Latin America and Africa access financing and higher-value markets.

(Respondent 539)

Respondents’ descriptions of their vocations suggested that they measure career success in the currencies of service and justice—not dollars and euros. In fact, no respondent equated high earnings with vocational success. Instead, respondents’ comments on economic matters focused on their actions to achieve sustainable economies.

**Creating sustainable economies** (56 respondents). Many respondents stated that they express their changes in religious faith through consumer choices. In respondents’ views, their study abroad experience encouraged them to consider the connection among their religious faith, the natural environment, and their economic behavior:

First of all, an environmental consciousness became a huge part of my faith.

Following my semester at LASP, stewardship became a huge deal to me. I understood the connection between organics, recycling, fair trade, and what God thinks about all that and why it should matter to me. Shortly after my semester I

became a strict vegetarian and have been ever since. This all relates profoundly to my faith because I see it as being a good steward and honoring the things that God has entrusted to us (i.e. the planet, my body). (Respondent 369)

Other respondents reflected on the relationship between consumer culture in the U.S. and its relationship to global problems:

As an attempt to ease the hurt of those around the world affected by the overconsumption that is present in the United States, I have become a more informed consumer. At the local level, I try to consume products that are locally grown. I also research companies before I purchase their products to make sure they have healthy practices in the U.S. and globally. I am not perfect, but hopefully these small changes will add to the growing effort to change the U.S. consumer behaviors and change how we interact with global poverty. (Respondent 287)

Many respondents' credited their new economic behaviors with strengthening their sense of responsibility to their communities.

**Transforming communities** (148 respondents). Involvement in the transformation of communities was the most frequent action that respondents perceived to emerge from their change in religious faith. Such actions included a general increase in community involvement (44/148 respondents), advocacy for the marginalized (42/148 respondents), political activity (22/148 respondents), and donation of money and time (40/148 respondents). The following response reflected one LASP alumnus' general increase in community involvement:

I gained a more global outlook after my study abroad experience, but this also translated into becoming more plugged into a local community. I sought out ways to get connected in areas like local community organizations, shelters, education

groups. I had a strong desire to live out my faith in ways I had not done so in the past by serving others. (Respondent 71)

Many respondents focused their increased community involvement on advocacy for the marginalized:

It was very influential for me to spend time with all of the low income, marginalized communities that we visited. This helped me get to know people from so many different backgrounds and so many groups of people that I had never even been aware of. It helped me see how privileged I am and how I should never take that for granted. This ignited a passion in me to find marginalized groups within my community and help them as well. (Respondent 319)

Several women and homosexual respondents shared of how their study abroad experience empowered them to advocate for *themselves* as marginalized peoples:

After my time at LASP, I was able to advocate for myself as both a woman and a homosexual in my work and with my family. I see now that there is room in the good news for me as well. (Respondent 205)

Additional actions that respondents related to their change in religious faith unfolded in the political sphere of their communities:

I think it is my religious duty to educate myself about perspectives other than my own and to call out racism, sexism, classism, imperialism, etc. It is my religious duty to vote and to write letters to elected officials telling them to stand on the side of the people. I do not know what else I can do. (Respondent 38)

Over time, my ideology shifted from conservative Republican (to put it in US political terms) to actively Socialist. I firmly believe that societies cannot (or should

not) exist unless we -- all of us -- take care of the sick, the poor, the elderly and the disenfranchised. The more unequal a society becomes, the more people there will be who are disenfranchised. I don't think that one can follow the teachings of Christ and be against a living minimum wage, housing and food programs for the poor, universal healthcare, unemployment benefits and so many other programs that work to alleviate the negative effects of inequality. (Respondent 196)

Respondents identified the donation of money and time through volunteerism as another community-based action that reflected their change in religious faith:

I support three missionary families who have moved to communities and are building grassroots movements and who put a value on building relationships with the communities and people they are serving and focus on economic development as well as sharing the gospel. I also sponsor a couple of kids through World Vision, focusing on holistic outreach, not just preaching. I also put together packs of food and supplies to give to homeless when I am driving around my own community. (Respondent 54)

These changes have pushed me to become more personally involved in fostering the well-being of my community, through volunteering with local projects in my free time. (Respondent 115)

In addition to community-focused actions, respondents also connected their change of religious faith to actions that impact their families.

**Family decisions** (43 respondents). Respondents identified family decisions as another way they express their change in religious faith. Such decisions relate to spouse

selection, child rearing, location of residence, and church choice. Several respondents commented on how their change in religious faith influenced spouse selection:

These changes have influenced the most important decision of my life - the decision to choose a spouse of a different 'religion.' Although not compatible in name, we are in spirit. (Respondent 23)

Respondents also addressed the impact of this change on the way they raise children:

With my own children, I try to give them a world view that includes the third world by discussing the poor and having them involved with some of our giving decisions as a family. (Respondent 68)

The choice to live in marginal and low-income neighborhoods was also identified as an action that emerged from this change:

My husband and I chose the neighborhood where we live because of its ethnic diversity, percentage of Spanish-speaking residents, and its lower-middle class socio-economic status. We enjoy the community around us and try to live a life of love towards our neighbors. (Respondent 8)

Church choice was an additional decision that respondents attributed to their change in religious faith:

My husband and I sought out a church community that focuses a huge majority of its resources (time and money) to building trusting relationships with people in our city who have been marginalized and impoverished. (Respondent 165)

While many respondents stated they now prefer a church that prioritizes justice issues, other respondents reported they no longer attend church:

We do not go to church because we do not identify exclusively as Christians and because everywhere we have tried seems to be too self-righteous, judgmental,



narrow-minded and/or patriarchal, but we have a community of amazing friends of varying faiths and backgrounds who are committed to making the world a more just place. (Respondent 228)

While most respondents described actions that addressed communities or groups, some respondents spoke of actions that are more personal in nature.

**Personal development** (57 respondents). Respondents expressed that their changes in religious faith allowed them to develop skills and awareness at a personal level. One respondent, for example, reported that she experienced a new awareness about her gender:

I realized that I as a woman actually had as much value as a man, and started going to therapy to heal the self-hatred I felt for no reason other than growing up thinking I wasn't as good as a man. (Respondent 228)

Other respondents shared about developing the skills of listening and practicing nonjudgment:

I think that my time at LASP allows me to truly listen to what others believe and not to dismiss their opinions just because they differ from mine. (Respondent 336)

I am so much less judgmental than I used to be. It is easier to dialogue with people of other faiths and lifestyles and form relationships with them even if we disagree. (Respondent 200)

In summary, respondents articulated diverse actions that emerged from the way their study abroad experience influenced a change in their religious faith. Such actions are embodied in the justice-centered vocations of many LASP alumni. Other respondents described their actions as consumers to achieve more sustainable economies. Many respondents shared of their efforts to transform their communities through advocacy,

volunteerism, and political activity. LASP alumni also reported actions that related to their family life, such as child rearing and church choice. Finally, respondents shared of many ways that their change in religious faith had fostered their personal development.

**Research Question #3: When LASP alumni perceive such a change in their religious faith, to which LASP components do they ascribe this change?**

The fourth survey prompt invited respondents to identify which LASP components most influenced their changes in religious faith. In understating responses to this prompt, it is important to note that only 49 of 382 respondents chose to identify a single LASP component as the most influential factor in this change event. The remaining 333 respondents perceived their changes in religious faith to have emerged from multiple components that worked together. Therefore, in my presentation of the results for research question #3, I will address two groups of respondents—those who identified multiple components and those who identified a single component. Table 7 presents a comparative frequency count for both response groups as well as their combined total.

**Multiple components** (333 respondents). Respondents who identified a mix of LASP components that influenced their change in religious faith described study trips, relationships with host families, lectures, readings, and discussion groups as the components that most often worked together in this change event. Such responses suggest that this change was influenced by a combination of traditional learning experiences (lectures, readings and assignments), relationships (with host families, LASP faculty, and other students), and reflection (via discussion groups):

The readings began the thought process, opened my mind to the conceptual ideas that would later be made a personal matter of the heart via my relationships with host families and informal conversations. (Respondent 50)

Table 7

*LASP Components that Participants Identified as Most Influential in Changing Their Religious Faith*

Component	Respondents Who Identified a Single Component	Respondents Who Identified Multiple Components	Total
Study trips	14	163	177
Relationships with host families	12	143	155
Lectures/speakers	8	144	152
Reading material	5	122	127
Discussion groups	2	74	76
Relationships with faculty	4	49	53
Relationships with other students	2	47	49
Viewing bible from new perspective	2	-	2

Relationships, study trips, readings, process groups. Everything. It was incredibly well-balanced to spark thoughts through the study, readings, and lectures, and then go out and see things in the world related to those ideas, have conversations with people in the middle of those issues in the world, and process the whole mixture of everything with our peers and professors who had a good idea of what we were experiencing. (Respondent 191)

A combination of factors--the most important factors were being able to stay with host families, and also being able to hear firsthand from leaders from embassies and

governments, leaders of social change movements, famous poets and authors, workers, survivors of war, business men and women. Meeting people whose lives were affected by these intangible global realities helped me to develop empathy, and meeting with people whose decisions affected their everyday realities made me realize how important it is to make decisions with the poor in mind and heart.

(Respondent 168)

While many students describe a balanced mix of factors, other respondents emphasized the value of certain components in this blend. Respondents often emphasized the value of discussion groups:

The process groups [discussion groups] helped me think through our shared experiences because it provided a soundboard in which we could share our thoughts together and think of things I wouldn't have considered or thought about on my own. (Respondent 169)

Some respondents emphasized their interactions with LASP faculty as a key ingredient in the mix of components they described:

It would be hard to say which component was the most influential. However, there were a few aspects of LASP that still stand out to me years later. The first of which is one of my professors, Laura. I remember her saying that she always sided with the marginalized, so I felt comfortable talking to her about my homosexuality. Through the conversations that followed, she recommended many books and authors to read to help me in that much needed healing. It was the first time I was shown that the Bible could be read differently. (Respondent 205)

Other respondents mentioned the important role that relationships with LASP peers had on their change in religious faith:

The very tight camaraderie that existed among the members of our semester (many of us are still in contact with each other) helped create that safe space in which to challenge the presuppositions we came with. (Respondent 153)

Respondents highlighted as well the way certain assignments required them to integrate formal learning with engagement of the local community:

Our assignments required us to ask interview questions - sometimes of our host families, sometimes of people on the street, or in a rural town, etc. If I hadn't been required to go out and interview people about very specific things (i.e. How do you feel about America? Do you feel like you have a voice in your own government? What do you think of our president? What do you think about God? Do you think God cares about you?), then I wouldn't have improved my Spanish OR gained varying perspectives about a lot of different issues. (Respondent 151)

While a most LASP alumni described multiple components that influenced their change of religious faith, a smaller group of respondents identified a single component as the most influential in this change.

**Single component** (49 respondents). Similar to the results from those identifying multiple components, LASP alumni selecting a single component identified study trips, relationships with host families, lectures, and readings as the most influential components in this change event. Many respondents in this group stated that study trips created political, religious, and economic contrasts that facilitated a change in their religious faith:

Our trip to Nicaragua was highly influential in shaping the opinions I now hold. I will never forget the few days I lived in Pasmata [rural village], entering into a world of injustice-fueled poverty and inexplicable, abounding joy despite the circumstances that I never could have imagined. I remember well one off-hand

comment of my host brother, who remarked, ‘Oh, you're a Christian? You must be a Democrat, then.’ Well, I wasn't back then, but he sure did make me think about it. It was remarks like these that truly caused me to start at the beginning and rethink everything I believed. (Respondent 120)

Guatemala and Nicaragua revealed to me that some of the history that I had been taught as a child, was not just taught from an Evangelical-American perspective, but was purely false. People of my nationality and faith had committed atrocities. Though I had long before stopped idolizing my nation, these experiences taught me that the idolizing of my faith in my nation was equally foolish. The experience was both sobering and humbling. (Respondent 107)

My LASP experience opened my eyes to poverty and to true religion - I met people in Nicaragua who had nothing, and yet they gave freely to me, a perfect stranger. It was humbling to realize that as an American I do not always know best, I do not have a corner on knowing God better simply because I own a half dozen Bibles. (Respondent 220)

Respondents in this group also identified relationships with host families as the key factor in their changes of religious faith. In respondents’ views, living with a host family connected them to relationships that grounded their learning in tangible realities:

Host families gave me a place to learn as a member of the household in a real-life situation, rather than just ‘learning about’ the way other people live. (Respondent 169)

In addition, many LASP alumni noted that living with a host family encouraged them to value diverse religious traditions:

My homestay with the Bri Bri people [indigenous community in Costa Rica]. I saw how reverently they interacted with nature, how generously they treated strangers, and how simple and peaceful their existence is, and then couldn't fathom how I once believed that their indigenous faith was evil and of Satan. This taught me that my concept of my Christian God being the One and Only God for all mankind had no footing - and that was I was experiencing with the Bri Bri actually confirmed the opposite - that the Bri Bri seemed to be worshipping the same god (one that embodies peace and generosity and goodness) and that perhaps there is only one god and he/she shows up in each religion differently. (Respondent 326)

In summary, a majority of respondents described a mix of LASP components that influenced their changes in religious faith. This group of respondents perceived the influence of their study abroad experience to be characterized by the way formal learning experiences could be tested against their daily experiences in Latin America. Such testing unfolded through reflective relationships with host families, LASP faculty, and other students. A smaller group of respondents listed a single LASP component as the most influential in this change event. Their responses also emphasized the important role that study trips, host families, lectures, and readings played in changing their religious faith.

### **Document Mining of LASP Course Evaluations**

To achieve triangulation of the survey data, I document mined anonymous LASP final course evaluations from 2008 through 2013. I examined the qualitative section of these evaluations for evidence of how students' perceived their study abroad experience to influence a change in their religious faith. The LASP final course evaluation (see Appendix C) is a brief survey that invites respondents to assess the overall semester and its final reentry component. Following a series of quantitative prompts that address these areas,

students are invited to record additional comments under a prompt that reads “Additional comments about your semester at LASP.” I document mined students’ qualitative responses to this prompt.

In my examination of final course evaluations from 2008 through 2013, I encountered 258 qualitative comments. Of these 258 comments, 23 reflected students’ perceptions that their study abroad experience influenced a change in their religious faith. Most of these comments were brief and fragmented expressions, such as “My ideas about Christianity changed a lot” (Respondent from 2008) and “I only wanted to learn Spanish, but I learned so much more, I learned how to think critically, I learned and experienced how big and inclusive God is. Challenged every belief I’ve had and forced me to really think” (Respondent from 2009).

Although these 23 responses represented only 9% of the qualitative comments, they illuminated from a new angle LASP students’ changes in religious faith. As the prompt under consideration reflects, students were not asked to comment on issues related to their religious faith. Therefore, the 23 responses that suggested LASP’s influence on students’ changes in religious faith supported the survey results.

## **Conclusion**

Respondents perceived their study abroad experience with LASP to have influenced a change in their religious faith in 89% of cases. When invited to describe such changes in religious faith, respondents’ descriptions revealed four core themes— increased awareness of culture’s influence on religious faith, new embrace of doubt, more inclusive religious faith, and greater emphasis on social justice. Two outlying descriptions of change also emerged from this data—left Christianity and solidified existing Christian faith. Regarding actions produced by this change, responses revealed five themes— justice-centered



vocation, creating sustainable economies, transforming communities, family decisions, and personal development. When invited to identify the LASP components that most influenced this change, most respondents described a mix of components, while a small group of LASP alumni identified a single component. Both groups identified study trips, relationships with host families, lectures, readings, and discussion groups as key drivers of this change in religious faith. Finally, mining of LASP final course evaluations provided supporting evidence for the prevalence of this change.

## **Chapter V**

### **Discussion**

#### **Introduction**

I will organize my discussion of the results into five sections. First, I will share my critical reflections on how key limitations influenced the results. Second, I will discuss the findings as they relate to Gardner's (2006) framework of mind change. Third, I will illustrate the convergence of the results with study abroad research. Fourth, I will connect the results to the practice of educational leaders. Finally, I will identify areas of future research that emerge from the results.

#### **Key Limitations**

As I noted in my description of the methods, participant self-selection is a limitation of this study. Program alumni were more likely to complete the survey if they perceived their study abroad experience with LASP to be a positive factor in their personal development. As such, participant self-selection could skew the results in a direction that disproportionately emphasizes students' perceptions that LASP influenced a change in their religious faith. Thus, the results likely reflect the perceptions of alumni who were most impacted by their study abroad experience, while revealing little about the views of students who were not as influenced by their time abroad.

Low survey response rates among earlier LASP cohorts represents another key limitation. Although the survey response rate was 24%, alumni from recent cohorts (2000 through 2013) were three times more likely to respond than alumni from earlier cohorts (1986 through 1999). As such, the perspectives of alumni from LASP's earliest cohorts are underrepresented in the data. Overall, the results emphasize the perceptions of LASP's

younger alumni who view their study abroad experience as a positive factor in their personal development.

### **Gardner's Framework of Mind Change**

Gardner (2006) identified seven factors that influence substantive changes of mind—reason, research, resonance, representational redescriptions, resources and rewards, real world events, and resistances. Gardner called these factors levers of change. The levers of change provide a relevant framework through which to analyze LASP students' perceived changes of mind about religious faith.

Gardner (2006) noted that each change of mind emerges from a unique blend of the levers of change. The degree of influence that each lever exercises varies by change event. Gardner argued, for example, that “in that battle over faith . . . one witnesses the conflicting pulls of reason, resistance, resonance, and the realities of daily experience” (p.189). The results of this study both confirm and expand Gardner's proposal on the drivers of religious change.

Consistent with Gardner's (2006) ideas, a majority of respondents (333/382) indicated that their changes in religious faith were influenced by a mix of factors during their study abroad experience. Respondents most frequently identified a blend of study trips, relationships with host families, lectures, readings, discussion groups, and relationships with faculty and other students as the drivers of this change event. Numerous respondents detailed the way that such components worked in unison to influence this change:

I think it was the combination of all of them. Lectures themselves would not do it (I've had similar lectures here in the states), but lectures/speakers in the context of

living with host families and being surrounded by faculty and students who encourage you to explore these issues and challenge you to grow. (Respondent 303)

As this response illustrates, students perceived their changes of religious faith to emerge from the way that formal learning experiences were brought to life through the concrete engagement of Latin American realities. Examining this event through Gardner's (2006) framework of mind change, LASP students perceived this change to be driven by the integration of the levers of *reason* and *research* (readings, lectures), *representational redescriptions* (experiencing course content in multiple forms through study trips, host families, and daily life), and *resonance* (through discussions and reflection).

An additional lever of change also emerged in the results—*resistances*. Gardner proposed (2006) that changes of mind are more likely to occur when resistances to change can be minimized and overcome by the weight of the other levers. Although survey prompts did not invite respondents to comment on the role that resistances played in this change, the influence of resistances was apparent in the data. In the case of this change event, respondents identified their home culture as a resistance to religious change. Furthermore, they noted that studying abroad distanced them from this resistance and allowed it to be overcome by the combination of other levers driving their religious faith in a new direction:

The LASP experience and core content gave me the space to question many things about my faith that I did not feel I was able to question in other more conservative environments. It allowed me to highlight issues of blind faith, hypocrisy, relationships between religion and politics, cultural and religious oppression and "missionization", etc. It provided a safe environment for tough questions to be asked, and ultimately led me to define and become comfortable with my current

stance on religion. The experience was very instrumental in this regard.

(Respondent 56)

Respondents also reported that their return to the United States reconnected them to the very resistances from which studying abroad had distanced them:

While I remained a Christian throughout the LASP experience and after I returned to the United States, I could no longer, with integrity, look through the same lenses that I had before LASP. This certainly conflicted with my faith community of origin, and sometimes felt irreconcilable to the lives they led inspired by their faith. It led to many hard conversations with parents, friends, theology professors, and a pastor who was a mentor to me. I didn't always feel welcome, desired to be seen and known in my new perspectives, and felt alone in my experience and new perspectives. (Respondent 74)

Thus, the results revealed that changes in the religious sphere often require difficult and ongoing engagement of resistances.

Clearly, Gardner's (2006) levers of change provide a framework for interpreting LASP students' changes in religious faith. Gardner's seven levers, however, fail to capture one element that respondents' identified as central to their changes of mind—relationships. Respondents frequently identified that relationships formed the connective tissue among the other levers at work in this change event:

Readings, assignments and lectures gave me insight in to different ways of thinking. Spending time with people in relationship is where the real changes occurred. These changes were mostly the result of conversations spurred on by the material we were studying at the time. (Respondent 94)

In fact, three of the components that respondents identified as the most influential in this change were *relationships* with host families, *relationships* with faculty, and *relationships* with other students. Combined, respondents' identified these relationship-centered components more frequently than any other theme in the data (257 respondents). Therefore, I propose that in the case of LASP students' changes in religious faith, relationships served as an additional—and central—lever of change.

### **Study Abroad Research**

In this section, I will discuss the results in the light of two groups of research and scholarship. First, I will analyze the results as related to research on study abroad and religion. Second, I will connect the results to Engle and Engle's (2003) study abroad classification system.

**Research on study abroad and religion.** In my analysis of literature, I analyzed five studies that addressed the relationship between study abroad and students' religiosity—Astin and Astin (2010), Holcomb (2004), Beers (1999), Porterfield (2002), and Reinhard (2005). The findings of my study converge in several ways with the findings of this body of research. In addition, the results make new contributions to this literature.

Astin and Astin (2010) and Holcomb (2004) studied the religious and spiritual development of university students. Although their studies did not focus specifically on how study abroad influences religiosity, both studies found that study abroad and intercultural experiences positively related to the religious development of university students. In a broad sense, the results of my study support these findings, as respondents in my study described how their study abroad experienced changed (perhaps developed) their religious faith.

Unlike Astin and Astin (2010) and Holcomb (2004), Beers (1999), Porterfield (2002), and Reinhard (2005) implemented studies that focused on the specific relationship between study abroad and students' religiosity. Each study found that education abroad influenced students' religiosity to varying degrees. The findings of my study, which also identified study abroad as an experience that influenced students' religiosity, provide additional support for this thematic finding in the research.

A more specific finding in Beers' (1999) study converged with a sub-theme in the results of my study. Beers found that students in her study became more accepting of those from different religious backgrounds following their short-term mission trip. Many participants in my study reported a similar change to their religious faith, stating that their study abroad experience influenced them to become more accepting of non-Christian religions.

The results of my study make several new contributions to the research on study abroad and religiosity. While Beers (1999), Porterfield (2002), and Reinhard (2005) identified a connection between study abroad and students' faith development, my study both established this connection and invited respondents to identify the components of study abroad that drove it. Furthermore, my study invited participants to describe the actions that emerged from this change. Such findings about how specific study abroad components work together to influence religious change adds a new dimension to study abroad research that addresses religion. Likewise, the results on how this change informed students' actions over time provides new information about how such changes impact behavior.

**Engle and Engle (2003).** The results of this study both support and challenge Engle and Engle's study abroad classification system. Engle and Engle argued that practitioners

and scholars must categorize diverse study abroad models by their ability to connect students to the host culture. In this spirit, Engle and Engle created a study abroad classification system that organized study abroad models into five levels according to their unique characteristics. In their model, the higher levels reflected those programs whose structures and curricula facilitated the greatest amount of intercultural contact between student and host culture.

The results of my study support three of the characteristics that Engle and Engle associated with higher level programs—student housing with host families, frequent guided reflection on cultural experience, and ample provision for cultural interaction/experiential learning. Regarding student housing, the results provide vivid support for the value that students' placed on living with host families during their study abroad experience:

I would say that my relationships with my 4 host families was by far the most influential component of the trip. Everything that I experienced with them would have been completely lost had it been a study abroad program where we stayed in dorms. (Respondent 264)

Such perceptions about the influence that host families had on respondents' changes in religious faith support Engle and Engle's decision to associate this component with high level programs.

Regarding guided reflection, respondents' identified this characteristic as another key driver of their changes in religious faith:

LASP provided guidance and orientation to help understand the context and evaluate one's own values (or the way one expresses one's values) in light of this different context. So I think the main components are: quality staff that know how to challenge students and orient them; experiences that expose students to differing



perspectives and/or values; *intentional reflection* [emphasis added] on these experiences and what they mean. (Respondent 197)

In a similar way, LASP alumni frequently identified the importance of direct cultural interaction and experiential learning as characteristics that galvanized their learning experience:

During my semester, we visited a ‘sweatshop’ in Nicaragua, and I saw them making a shirt from Target that I already own. In that same sweatshop, people called out to us and asked us to buy more Levi jeans, so that they could keep their jobs. That rocked my world. (Respondent 151)

Such findings support Engle and Engle’s (2003) association of frequent guided reflection and ample provision for cultural interaction/experiential learning with higher level programs.

Although many results from my study support Engle and Engle’s (2003) classification system, some findings challenge one characteristic of their system—academic work context. Engle and Engle proposed that higher level programs are often characterized by the direct enrollment of foreign students at a local university. The participants in my study, however, reported a high level of intercultural engagement while participating in hybrid program—LASP. In the case of LASP, the program structure captures the cultural features of direct enrollment by foregrounding Latin American lecturers in coursework, while creating an independent schedule (not tied to university calendars) that allows for regular study trips to neighboring countries. As respondents’ comments indicated, both lectures and study trips were central drivers in their change in religious faith. Thus, the

results of my study invite critical reflection on whether direct enrollment represents a deeper engagement of the host culture than hybrid models.

In addition to contradicting Engle and Engle's (2003) views on the superiority of direct enrollment programs, the results of my study suggest that their model should place more emphasis on the nature of formal assignments that students complete during study abroad. For example, numerous respondents in my study identified the interview component of their research assignments as a factor in this change event:

The assignments that put us face to face with people in interview experiences had the most impact on me. This includes: interviewing my Nicaraguan host family about the impact of politics on their faith and family, talking to the homeless and the women in Costa Rica who were formerly prostitutes, and time spent talking to people from the Kuna Yala tribe and the Bri tribe about their creation and origin stories and tracing how indigenous religions synchronized with Christianity.

(Respondent 88)

Thus, the results of my study encourage additional reflection on the role that assignment structure can have in students' learning experiences abroad. Such findings suggest that assignments should emphasize students' engagement of primary sources that are unavailable to them on a U.S. campus. Furthermore, such engagement should remove students from the classroom and place them in direct contact with the host reality. Respondents in my study identified interviews as a meaningful way to achieve this contact.

### **Practice of Educational Leaders**

As a study abroad practitioner, I have invested 13 years in the development, implementation, and evaluation of study abroad programming. Such experience provides me with a practice-based framework that informs my interpretation of the results and their

implications for the practice of educational leaders. The results of my study converge with my experience as a study abroad professional to highlight several ways that educational leaders can improve their work related to study abroad. I will discuss these recommendations for practice in the context of two groups of educational leaders—field-based study abroad professionals and campus-based study abroad professionals. The results of this study suggest that both field-based and campus-based study abroad leaders can benefit from critically considering the following proposals.

**Field-based study abroad professionals.** The results support the following practices among field-based professionals:

1. Prioritize home stays over other student housing options. The results of this study indicate that host families play a central role in the transformational learning of students during study abroad. Thus, field-based study abroad leaders should center their student housing efforts on the host family.
2. Increase the prevalence of guided reflection in coursework and extracurricular programming. The results of this study identify intentional reflection as a key ingredient in meaningful student learning while abroad—experiential learning alone is insufficient. Study abroad presents a unique reflective window through which students can access new insights. To achieve this, however, learners often need the ideas of others to catalyze important development in their thought and action.
3. Prioritize the perspectives of the host community in coursework and learning experiences. Most students of study abroad will spend the majority of their university careers behind desks in the United States. Thus, field-based study abroad leaders should honor students' decisions to study abroad by presenting them with perspectives that cannot be obtained on a U.S. campus. The results of this study

indicate that the contrast between students' views and those of hosts sparked an important shift in students' development.

4. Integrate community-based research with written assignments. Results from this study reflect the impact that certain written assignments had on student learning. Specifically, respondents reported that being required to interview members of their host community added an important dimension to their experience. Thus, field-based study abroad leaders should consider ways to structure interview requirements into their written assignments.
5. Consider modifying direct enrollment programs. The results of this study show that U.S. university students benefit from hybrid study abroad models that allow for guided regional study trips and careful intervention from faculty who understand U.S. and host cultures. Thus, field-based study abroad leaders could improve direct enrollment programs by negotiating schedule space to accommodate regional study trips for study abroad students.

**Campus-based study abroad professionals.** The results support the following practices among campus-based study abroad leaders:

1. Use Engle and Engle's study abroad classification system to critically assess the programs that universities support. Through this evaluation, consider disapproving experiences that do not meet the characteristics of the higher level programs. In short, the findings of this study support programs that force students to critically engage the host context.
2. Engage faculty who lead short-term study abroad programs. Such engagement should facilitate dialogue about best-practices for their study abroad efforts. These practices should include integrating home stays into short-term

experiences, inviting experts from the host community to lecture during coursework, structuring assignments to require student engagement of the host community (via interviews). The findings of this study clearly support such study abroad components. Unfortunately, these components are absent from most short-term, faculty-led experiences. Thus, campus-based leaders should encourage a change in this regard.

3. Engage students with an eye on goodness-of-fit between participant and program. Not all students are prepared to digest the intensity of rigorous study abroad. Direct the appropriate students towards programs that require them to engage the host context. In the cases of students who are not prepared, however, tactfully dissuade them from studying abroad (rather than encouraging them to participate in a low level program).
4. Improve reentry programming for students returning from study abroad. Findings from this study indicate that many students experience difficult transitions when returning to the U.S. following their study abroad experience. Being more intentional about accompanying students during this transition will improve their ability to make relevant connections between new learning and their home contexts.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The results of this study point to several areas where scholars can direct future research. In a broad sense, this study confirms the usefulness of Gardner's (2006) framework of mind change as a tool to interpret change events and processes. Additional research that uses Gardner's framework will add to our understanding of its ability to explain mind change in different spheres and contexts. In a similar spirit, the results of my

study confirm the effectiveness of Engle and Engle's (2003) study abroad classification system as a tool to evaluate study abroad programming. Additional research on how this tool converges with student learning would strengthen the literature.

This study explored students' perceptions of how the specific components of a study abroad experience worked together to influence change. Additional research to explore the impact of specific study abroad components on student learning would add to current understanding of what makes education abroad transformational. Such research, of course, should examine study abroad outcomes beyond that of students' religiosity.

One dimension of this study included the exploration of how respondents' perceived this change to influence actions in their communities and the world. Additional research to explore how study abroad relates to students' actions would also strengthen this body of literature. Although much research illustrates study abroad's impact on diverse learning outcomes, research rarely examines how such outcomes inform students' future behaviors.

Participants in this study reflected on the difficulty they experienced upon returning to their home cultures with new and changed ideas. This process of cultural reentry presents multiple research opportunities. Exploring how students cope with such adjustment following a period of transformation would serve educational leaders in their efforts to facilitate healthy readjustment for students returning from study abroad experiences.

Finally, respondents in my study frequently articulated the importance of relationships they developed with people in their host communities. Unfortunately, study abroad research largely ignores the perspectives of host communities. Particularly when examining students' development of intercultural competencies, it would be relevant to include perspectives from hosts on how such student learning unfolds. Researching the

views of host communities about student learning and study abroad in general would add a valuable and absent dimension to the literature.

## **Conclusion**

In addition to supporting Gardner's (2006) ideas on the levers of change, the results identify an additional lever at work in this change event—relationships. The results also support most of the categories in Engle and Engle's (2003) study abroad classification system, while challenging their assumptions about the superiority of direct enrollment programs. Regarding study abroad research that addressed students' religiosity, this study confirms the broad relationship established in the literature between intercultural experiences and students' faith development. The study also adds in important ways to this literature by exploring how such changes inform students' actions. The findings also contributed to the literature by identifying which study abroad components most influenced this change. Respondents' perceived this change to be driven by a blend of formal learning experiences, direct contact with the Latin American context, and reflective relationships. As such, the findings suggest that educational leaders should prioritize study abroad programs whose structures and curricula achieve integration between formal learning and reflective engagement of the host context. The findings also encourage future research on how specific study abroad components relate to student learning, the relationship between intercultural experiences and religious change, and the perspectives of study abroad's host communities.

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## Appendix A

### Survey of LASP Alumni



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## CONSENT FORM

Mind Change as Related to Study Abroad:

Students' Perceptions about Changes in Their Religious Faith at the Latin American Studies Program

You are invited to participate in a study about the impact of study abroad programming on students. You were selected as a possible participant because you studied abroad with the Latin American Studies Program (LASP). I ask that you read this form and ask any questions before agreeing to be in the study.

**This study is being conducted by** Trevor Poag at Lehigh University's College of Education, under the direction of Dr. Jill Sperandio at Lehigh University's College of Education.

**The purpose of this study** is to explore students' perceptions of how their study abroad experience at the LASP influenced a change of mind about their religious faith. In addition, the study aims to identify which LASP program components most powerfully influenced this change event.

**If you agree to be in this study, I ask you to** invest a few minutes in the completion of the survey below.

**Possible risks** for participants in this study include experiencing emotional discomfort while completing the survey, which invites you to describe changes to your religious faith. Your completion of the survey is voluntary. Should you experience any emotional discomfort while completing the survey, you may choose to stop participating at any time.

**The benefits to participants in this study** include having the opportunity to reflect on how your study abroad experience with LASP impacted you. In addition, your participation contributes to ongoing knowledge about how study abroad influences students. Such knowledge will improve the design and implementation of future study abroad programming.

**You will not receive compensation for your participation in this study.**

**Confidentiality** of the data in this study is of highest importance to the researcher. In fact, your completion of the survey is anonymous. The researcher will have no record of which LASP participants choose to participate in this study. Thus, in any published report of this study, it will be impossible to identify a participant.

**Participation in this study is voluntary.** Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the researcher or the institutions he represents. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting such relationships.

**If you have questions about this study**, do not contact the researcher (this would threaten the anonymity of the study). Instead, please contact Susan E. Disidore at (610)758-3020 (email: sus5@lehigh.edu) or Troy Boni at (610)758-2985 (email: tdb308@lehigh.edu) of Lehigh University's Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. All reports or correspondence will be kept confidential.

**Your decision to complete the survey is confirmation of your consent to participate in this study.**

## Survey of LASP Alumni

Thank you for investing a few minutes in the completion of this survey, which explores how your religious faith was influenced by your study abroad experience at the Latin American Studies Program (LASP). For the purpose of this survey, *religious faith* describes one's efforts to know, value, and construct meaning in the world.

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Please note the semester and year that you attended LASP: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Was your LASP experience influential in changing your religious faith in any way? Yes / No

If you answered "no" to question #1, you are finished with this survey. Please submit the survey. If you answered "yes" to question #1, please complete the rest of the survey.

2. Briefly describe the key changes in your religious faith that you feel are related to your LASP experience.
3. How do such changes in your religious faith inform your actions in your community and the world?
4. Which LASP components (readings, assignments, lectures, relationships with host families, informal conversations, process groups, study trips, some mix of these, or other factors) *most influenced* the changes and actions you described in questions #2 and #3?

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Thank you for investing your time in the completion of this survey. Your perspectives provide useful data for this study, which aims to improve future study abroad programming.

Appendix B  
Survey Invitation

Dear LASP Alumni:

I write to request your help with a study I am implementing for my dissertation research.

In short, my research explores how study abroad influences students' religiosity.

I would be grateful if you had a moment to complete a brief (four total questions) survey about how your experience at LASP influenced your religious faith.

To complete the survey, simply paste the following link into your browser:

[https://lehigh.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_9HvBTXTibfsAf5P](https://lehigh.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_9HvBTXTibfsAf5P)

The survey will require only a few minutes and is completely ANONYMOUS.

Please feel free to share the link above with any other members of your LASP semester group.

Sincerely,

Trevor Poag  
LASP Program Assistant, 1996-97  
LASP Program Associate, 1998-99  
LASP Assistant Director, 2002-2013

Appendix C  
LASP Final Course Evaluation

Name (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

Council for Christian Colleges and Universities  
Latin American Studies Program  
Final Evaluation  
Fall XXXX

**A. REENTRY RETREAT**

1. Miami (appropriate location for reentry?).....thumbs down 1 2 3 4 5 thumbs up
2. Hotel.....inappropriate 1 2 3 4 5 appropriate
3. Student talent show.....waste of time 1 2 3 4 5 a must
4. Workshop.....worthless 1 2 3 4 5 valuable
5. Overall assessment of reentry activities.....worthless 1 2 3 4 5 valuable

**B. OVERALL LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES PROGRAM**

1. The value of studying in Latin America.....very little 1 2 3 4 5 priceless
2. On LASP I learned about Latin America.....hardly anything 1 2 3 4 5 very much
3. On LASP I learned about myself.....hardly anything 1 2 3 4 5 very much
4. Overall assessment of LASP .....awful 1 2 3 4 5 excellent

**C. SURVEY QUESTIONS**

1. How did you learn about LASP?
2. Did you seriously consider any other off-campus program for this semester or any other semester?  
Where?
3. Why did you choose to participate in this student program?

**Additional comments about your semester at LASP:**

Appendix D  
Researcher's Vita

## Trevor Poag

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• [trevorpoag@gmail.com](mailto:trevorpoag@gmail.com) •

### EDUCATION

**Doctor of Education**, International Educational Leadership, 2014

Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

*Dissertation Topic: Components of Study Abroad Curricula as Related to Student Mind Change*

**Master of Arts**, Educational Leadership, 2004

Framingham State University, Framingham, Massachusetts

**Bachelor of Science**, Social Work, 1996

Roberts Wesleyan College, Rochester, New York

### EXPERIENCE

#### Latin American Studies Program of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities

Costa Rica, Cuba, Guatemala, Nicaragua

**Assistant Director**, 2002- 2013 / **Acting Director**, 2010

- Exercised senior leadership in the development and evaluation of this international education center in Latin America that serves 115 constituent universities
- Facilitated decision-making among program staff/faculty on curriculum, personnel, student services, and budget issues
- Created and maintained relationships with program partners in Latin America—educational institutions, NGOs, local scholars, politicians, and community leaders
- Collaborated with faculty and administrators from U.S. constituent universities regarding student recruitment, student safety, academic advisement, and admissions processes
- Directed coursework on Latin American studies, international business, and sustainability
- Led regional study trips to Cuba, Guatemala, and Nicaragua
- Managed selection, orientation, and evaluation of the program's visiting scholar initiative
- Provided student services related to health concerns, security issues, and conduct
- Implemented professional development experiences for faculty and administrators from constituent campuses
- Supervised the operations of the program's second language learning institute
- Consulted constituent campuses regarding diverse international initiatives—study abroad programming, research, internship development, and visiting scholar programs

**Program Associate**, 1998-1999

- Led student orientation and reentry programming
- Developed and supervised student internships in marginalized communities
- Coordinated program communication with constituent campuses

**Program Assistant**, 1996-1997

- Developed and maintained program's promotional material
- Implemented system to select and monitor student host families
- Designed and edited biannual program newsletter



## **Society for the Protection and Care of Children (SPCC)**

Rochester, New York

### **Bilingual Social Worker**, Middle School Preventive Program, 1999 -2002

- Performed primary case management and counseling in this family development program designed to prevent foster and residential care placement for at-risk youth from the Rochester City School District's Frederick Douglass Middle School
- Forged and maintained relationships with students' families to address their child's progress at school as well as any challenges the family was experiencing
- Advocated for at-risk youth and their families through the family court system
- Coordinated case conferencing between school administrators, teachers, human service professionals, students, and students' families
- Connected students and their families to community resources—job training, mental health services, recreational therapies, substance abuse programs, and social services
- Accompanied students in their classrooms to perform group and individual interventions regarding behavior and academic performance
- Collaborated with teachers and administrators to develop creative ways of connecting with students who were experiencing difficulty at home/school

### **Bilingual Family Liaison**, How Was School Today? Program, 1997-1998

- Performed case management in this elementary-school based youth development program at the Rochester City School District's Clara Barton Elementary School (#2)
- Participated daily in classroom activities to accompany teachers in developing and practicing strategies for managing student behavior
- Implemented weekly home visits to form relationships with students families and encourage their participation in school activities
- Collaborated with colleagues to create and implement an afterschool program for students

## **Catholic Family Center**

Rochester, New York

### **Counselor**, Francis Center, 1997-1998 (part-time)

- Supervised the basic functions of this men's homeless facility
- Counseled residents in regard to their progress with central goals in their service plans
- Connected residents to community services—employment training, mental health treatment, substance abuse programs, and social services

### **Assistant Counselor**, Freedom House, 1996 (part-time)

- Accompanied senior staff in carrying out diverse components of this residential substance abuse program for men—individual and group counseling sessions, recreational activities, family visitation, and case management services
- Documented house activities and interactions with residents for inclusion in program records and individual progress notes