HELPING WITHOUT HURTING WHEN VOLUNTEERING ABROAD:

DESIGNING A MUTALLY BENEFICIAL INTERNATIONAL

SERVICE-LEARNING PROGRAM

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Adelie Tristan Perkins

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Adelie Tristan Perkins

Thesis Supervisor:

_____
Joanna Ellis, M.S.
Clinical Laboratory Science Program

Approved:

_____
Heather C. Galloway, Ph.D.
Dean, Honors College

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Abstract

In the past decade, international service-learning programs have become more widely

incorporated in the educational experiences of university students. International service-

learning programs are frequently short-term excursions that allow students and faculty to

engage with a culture that is distinct from their own. Recently, these programs have

garnered popularity due to the growing awareness of global inequities, the tailored design

for the benefit of participants travelling abroad, and the transformative experiences for

university students. The magnified focus on the volunteer experience and profit margins

have caused the vast majority of these companies to lose sight of the broader effects these

programs have on recipient communities. As a result, these volunteer programs often

have a negative impact on the host community through the underlying social ideologies

they impose and the unintended harm they can precipitate. If created and implemented

inappropriately, service-learning programs can reinforce the superiority-inferiority

binary, practices of paternalism, and ideas of neo-colonialism amongst host communities.

Based on current research, it has been concluded that these unethical practices could be

prevented by providing volunteers with an understanding of the community's culture

prior to departure, training volunteers in preparation for the projects they will participate

in, and designing programs that prioritize the established needs of the host community. In

order to gain a better understanding of these solutions, existing research findings on

service-learning programs were reviewed. In addition, the primary researcher also

participated in a volunteer program and conducted research by surveying several

community members and program coordinators. Consequently, this thesis will attempt to

provide an in-depth understanding of the negative consequences often associated with

volunteer programs, as well as present a methodology for designing mutually beneficial

service-learning programs that reduce unethical practices.

Preface: The Journey

As a woman who grew up in a privileged household with two loving parents, I was taught that we should treat others with love and respect, as well do our best to help those in need. Due to these beliefs, I made the decision in high school to abandon my previously entertained dreams of becoming a dancer, and adopted the aspiration of pursuing a career in which I could fulfill my passion for helping others. Based on my love for science and my experiences shadowing in clinical settings, I chose to pursue a career in the medical field. Following this decision, I enrolled at an international university during my junior year of high school. The experiences I had opened my eyes to the beauty of diversity, exposed me to the importance of cultural awareness, and provided me with the ability to develop a global perspective, which flourished in the classrooms of so many distinguished professors. Thus, my aspirations adapted once again to include my newfound love for international studies and cross-cultural collaboration. I hoped that, in the future, I could continue learning and developing as a global citizen. In addition, I hoped to have the privilege of practicing medicine internationally through a career not bound by the borders between nations, and which allowed me to make a difference in the lives of others.

Shortly after establishing these career goals, I was sitting in my British Literature class and reading "The White Man's Burden," a poem that romanticized the era of imperialism and focused on the struggles experienced by privileged men, who were trying to help underdeveloped communities that resisted their assistance. It was in that moment that I realized the existing fundamental issues in the ethics of my career goals and the overarching idea of serving abroad. This experience and my subsequent research

on the topic opened my eyes to the understanding that not everyone wants help and that a constant struggle in this career will be working to help others while respecting the agency of the community. As a current student at Texas State University, I have not given up the dream of practicing medicine abroad, and I am still searching for a solution to this ethical problem. As the founder of a new organization that aims to expand students' cultural awareness and global perspective through participation in service projects abroad, I am striving to find a happy medium that not only benefits the students who volunteer but also the communities they hope to serve. Therefore, in this thesis, I will outline the process I developed as well as detail the obstacles encountered on the journey to creating an ethically-sound and mutually beneficial volunteer abroad program.

Chapter I: Good Intentions are Not Enough
An Introduction to the Problem

The benefits to the student participating in such programs are widely lauded: they acquire intercultural competencies, undergo personal growth, and feel their academic experience is enriched upon their return home.
- *Views from the Global South (need citation)*

In the past decade, international service-learning programs have become more widely incorporated into the educational experiences of high school and university students (Pluim & Jorgenson, 2012). International service-learning is commonly defined as an organized short-term excursion that allows students and faculty to engage with a culture distinct from their own (Stebleton, 2013). Recently, these programs have gained popularity amongst college students in particular due to the growing awareness of global inequities and the transformative ability of these experiences. Studies indicate that service-learning programs allow students to foster greater problem-solving skills, critical thinking proficiencies, cultural competency, and respect for other cultures (Stebleton, 2013). As a result, these programs have garnered extensive praise in the educational community for creating 'global citizens,' who, upon returning home, have the newfound abilities to understand multifaceted global issues, appreciate a variety of perspectives, build relationships with individuals from different backgrounds, and have confidence in navigating new challenges (Pluim & Jorgenson, 2012). Therefore, the many student benefits associated with volunteer programs have led to an increase in participation, which has been met by a corresponding expansion in the number of companies that now

exist for the sole purpose of facilitating volunteer programs abroad (Pluim & Jorgenson, 2012).

Where do the problems arise? Service-learning programs have garnered a positive perception due to their tailored programs, which are designed specifically for the development of the participants travelling abroad; however, due to this magnified focus on the volunteer experience, the vast majority of these companies have lost sight of the broader effects their programs have on recipient communities and host nations (Pluim & Jorgenson, 2012). Unfortunately, volunteer programs often have a negative impact on the host community. If created and implemented inappropriately, service-learning programs can reinforce the superiority-inferiority binary, perpetuate the issue of paternalism, and spread neocolonialist views within host communities. Additionally, unprepared volunteers can unintentionally do more harm than good through their unfamiliarity with the culture of the community and their lack of training in particular service projects.

Despite the negative effects often imposed on host communities by these volunteer programs, it would be naïve to believe that companies will eliminate their programs due to the associated ethical issues. According to Bennet and colleagues (2018), there are as many as 10 million volunteers a year spending approximately $4 billion on volunteer abroad programs (p. 6). Due to the growing interest in international service, and the resultant boom in the volunteer travel industry, it is unlikely that companies will disband their programs in the light of ethics. Therefore, this thesis will attempt to provide an in-depth understanding of the negative consequences associated with volunteer abroad programs, as well as present a methodology aimed at reducing the

aforementioned unethical practices and designing a mutually beneficial service-learning

program.

Chapter II: When Helping Hurts
The Underlying Problems of Volunteer Abroad Programs

"Like a blood sucking tick, the superficial voluntourism industry has latched on to the good name of volunteering and spent a decade poisoning its host"
- Jack Paulfrey, Tie Up the Lion

As portrayed in the epigraph above, there are many underlying problems

associated with volunteer abroad programs, which have caused an abundance of negative

critiques to be published. However, the issues is complicated because, in most cases, the

volunteers have good intentions and the communities do indeed need help, but these

underlying issues tend to unintentionally harm the host community. Many of the

problems stem from the ignorance of volunteers, which manifests in a variety of complex

social issues. More problematic is that volunteers not only reinforce these issues but

volunteer companies are built on them. Ingrained in the design of many service-learning

programs are socially damaging constructs such as the superiority-inferiority complex,

neo-colonialist structures, and paternalistic relations.

Ignorant and Unprepared Volunteers

Many of the problems associated with international service-learning programs

result from the cultural ignorance and unpreparedness of the volunteers. Foreign

volunteers who are unfamiliar with the cultural norms of the community, unaware of the

potentially negative effects that can result from 'voluntourism,' or unqualified to help

with their corresponding community projects often, unintentionally, cause more harm than good in host communities.

According to Judith Lasker, who surveyed hundreds of volunteer organizations, most volunteer-sending companies provided information about travel, shots, and packing, but very few provided a historical background on the country (Lasker, 2016). Further, nearly 10% provided no orientation to volunteers at all (Lasker, 2016). As exemplified by this statistic, many volunteers who travel overseas are uneducated on the cultural, social, historical, and political nature of the country they are entering. This general unpreparedness of volunteers, in reference to cultural competency, is harmful to the host community. When volunteers are not prepared to be immersed in a new culture or taught the importance of approaching new ideas with an open mind, these programs fail to facilitate beneficial cross-cultural interactions. Furthermore, volunteers who are not educated on the potentially negative effects of 'voluntourism' can perpetuate the complex issues already associated with these programs. As a whole, ignorant volunteers, who believe their participation alone is sufficient, cannot truly benefit the host community. Volunteers must be trained prior to departure, so that they are capable of engaging with the host community, exchanging ideas with the community members, and learning from the culturally immersive experience.

In contrast, volunteers who are not trained for their particular community projects often cause direct harm to the host community. Pippa Biddle, a once avid 'voluntourist' turned volunteer abroad critic, describes one such example of how unqualified volunteers can have a negative effect on host communities. In high school, Biddle traveled to Tanzania as part of a volunteer trip (Biddle, 2014). The group worked at an orphanage,

where their mission was to build a library (Biddle, 2014). However, with no experience or training in construction, the "group of highly educated private boarding school students were so bad at the most basic construction work that each night the [local] men had to take down the structurally unsound bricks . . . and rebuild the structure" (Biddle, 2014, para. 4). Each night, men from the host community had worked tirelessly to fix their work, so that in the morning, the volunteer group would be "unaware of [their] failure" (Biddle, 2014, para. 4). As a result, Biddle did know this had been occurring until three months after she returned home (Biddle, 2014). In conclusion, due to their lack of project-specific training and relevant skills, Biddle's group essentially failed to fulfill their sole purpose for traveling to Tanzania. Upon reflection, Biddle also concludes that it would have been more cost-effective, beneficial to the local economy, and helpful to the community if the orphanage had just taken their money and hired locals to do the work, thus eliminating their volunteer labor altogether (Biddle, 2014).

Although Biddle's group placed a heavy burden on the host community they were supposed to be helping, there are a variety of other personal accounts that describe much more dangerous and harmful situations. This is especially true for foreign volunteers who participate in healthcare-related projects. According to Noelle Sullivan (2017), an Assistant Professor of Instruction in Global Health Studies and Anthropology at Northwestern University, a volunteer for Projects abroad described "how she performed circumcisions and delivered babies during her volunteer placement in Tanzania," even though she did not have any medical training (para. 2). Sullivan reports that most volunteers have delivered at least one baby, despite being unlicensed and inexperienced (2017). In another example outlined by Sullivan (2017), one volunteer, who he calls

Mary, was allowed to routinely deliver babies without assistance from local midwives because she appeared familiar with the procedure and told her supervisor she was a medical student. During her volunteer trip, Mary violated many obstetrics practices by performing unnecessary episiotomies, a procedure that involves cutting the skin between the vaginal opening and the anus to make room for the baby, and pulling breech babies during delivery (Sullivan, 2017). In Mary's case, she endangered the lives of patients because she was unqualified to deliver babies, uneducated on proper obstetrics practices, and unaware of the risks of her actions (Sullivan, 2017). By performing unnecessary episiotomies, she subjected mothers to potential complications, and by pulling breech babies, she could have suffocated the newborns (Sullivan, 2017). Upon her departure, Sullivan learned that Mary was actually an undergraduate student, who had learned the skill on a previous volunteer trip (Sullivan, 2017).

As exemplified by these anecdotes, volunteers such as Pippa Biddle and Mary can unintentionally be burdensome and even cause direct physical harm to members of the host community they are attempting to aid. As a result, it is imperative that volunteers be prepared accordingly for their respective volunteer projects. Volunteer preparation will be discussed more in-depth in the next chapter; however, in summary, volunteers should be trained for their particular projects and educated on the cultural norms of the country, so that they are able to positively benefit the host community, engage with the foreign culture, interact with community members, and learn from their experience. As a general rule, if a volunteer is unqualified to do a certain skill in their home country, they should not do it abroad.

Superiority-Inferiority Complex

In addition, because volunteers primarily consists of educated, white individuals from affluent American families, this demographic often inadvertently results in the reinforcement of the inferiority complex held by members of the host community (Tiessen & Kumar, 2013). Therefore, although volunteer programs appear to be altruistic on the surface level, viewing these program through a post-colonial lens, has led researchers to conclude that foreign volunteers unintentionally contribute to colonial structures by reinforcing the preexisting superiority-inferiority binary (Pluim & Jorgenson, 2012). Moreover, Pluim and Jorgenson (2012), further state that "volunteer sending agencies, and the broader development sector in which they are situated, at once depend upon, cultivate, and support notions of the hapless/helpless [individuals] while securing our self-depicted innocence and superiority as 'saviors'" (p. 30). This commonality, known as the "whites in shining armor" phenomenon, refers to the notion that foreign volunteers know what they are doing and command respect just because of where they come from. Overall, this phenomenon, exacerbates the host community's feelings of inferiority, while placing foreign volunteers in an unearned, superior position of power.

As an example, some communities actually remove children from their homes and place them in orphanages solely because volunteers express interest in working with orphans (Bennett et al., 2018). In fact, reports from Nepal indicate that approximately 85% of children living in orphanages have at least one parent, and 80% or orphanages are based in the five main tourist hot spots of the country (Bennett et al., 2018). This statistic exemplifies the priority that foreign countries place on the volunteer experience. According to Natascha Beumer (2011), one teacher in Ghana stated that she does

anything necessary to "keep the volunteers happy" when they come to volunteer (p. 56).

Further, this same teacher reported feeling inferior in her own classroom when foreign volunteers visited. These feelings of inferiority, reportedly experienced by many community members, are most likely direct consequences of the skewed global awareness held by members of the host communities. As a perfect example of this phenomenon, Beumer describes an interaction, during her time in Ghana, in which she met a man who did not believe whites had to deal with things like cancer, theft, or rape (Beumer, 2011). This extremely misguided belief exemplifies the views held by many individuals in developing countries. In some parts of the world, people are given the impression and taught that Western societies are devoid of problems, divine in nature, and superior to others (Beumer, 2011). For this reason, community members feel inferior to foreign volunteers, whom they believe to have superior knowledge, skills, and health. Additionally, due to these misconceptions, community members tend to refer to volunteers as "angels," trust volunteers' abilities despite their lack of qualifications, and praise Western efforts even when they are largely ineffective.

While conducting studies on volunteer companies, Lasker also discovered the innate existence of the superiority-inferiority complex. Lasker (2016) states that

> A Guatemalan surgeon noted that racial prejudice on the part of patients might play a role in this preference [for foreign physicians]: 'Guatemalan patients, especially those with less education, tend to put more faith in a blond-haired, blue-eyed, white-skinned foreign physician than their own Guatemalan physicians.' This prejudice, the assumption of European and American superiority, is unfortunately widespread and rooted in centuries

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of colonial and neocolonial influences. It can have a pernicious effect on

the relationship between volunteers and host communities.(p. 156-157)

As a direct result of this pernicious effect, many researchers, such as Pluim and

Jorgenson (2012), have argued that this belief: that service-learning programs "have the

right to enter and intervene in southern contexts needs to be more deeply problemized"

(p. 30). Although this is an extreme view, it is deeply problematic that a booming

industry has been established based on the idea that young, inexperienced, and unskilled

Americans with sufficient funds can travel to foreign countries and assert their own

agendas, beliefs, and cultures on a silenced nation. Furthermore, it is even more troubling

that volunteers often return holding the belief that their two weeks abroad, participating

in unsustainable projects, actually solves the complex problems faced by developing

countries. In effect, the superiority-inferiority binary prevents these programs from being

mutually beneficial for both the volunteers and community members.

In turn, the superiority-inferiority complex is directly linked to other issues

associated with volunteer abroad programs. Since these programs unintentionally

reinforce the inferiority complex of locals, members of the host community often feel

they do not have a voice in how volunteers attempt to fix the problems of their

community. As a result, volunteers are completely shielded from the truth, never

understand the perspective of the community, remain unaware of their harmful effects,

and perpetuate the problem. Thus, to alleviate this problem volunteers should be prepared

in advance to understand the potential implication of their privileged background when

they encounter people with much less power in the form of educational or financial

resources.

Neo-colonialism

Neo-colonialist ideologies, which underlie the structure of many service-learning programs, serve as another contributor to the negative outcomes that can result from welcoming foreign volunteers into a host community. In this context, neo-colonialism refers to the repeated pattern of whites colonizing non-white peoples or cultures (Hallowell & Hickey, 2015). Moreover, an expert on 'voluntourism,' Ellen Hickey, describes neo-colonialism as volunteers being driven by their own agendas and ideas of what they believe host communities need (Hallowell & Hickey, 2015). Thus, problems precipitate when volunteer programs are designed based on goals established by foreign volunteers or volunteers companies, who are disconnected from the host communities. Thus, according to Pluim and Jorgenson (2012), "[the development is] part of an imperial process whereby other peoples are appropriated and turned into objects . . . [and] whereby the 'developed' countries manage, control and even create the Third World economically, politically, sociologically, and culturally (p. 29). Through this process, the lives of some individuals, their plans, hopes, views, and goals, are shaped by others who frequently share neither their lifestyles nor their hopes and values. It is a process whereby the lives of some peoples, their plans, their hopes, their imaginations, are shaped by others who frequently share neither their lifestyles nor their values (Pluim and Jorgenson, 2012). Ellen Hickey has assessed, that "[host communities] seem to be almost too open to being told what to do by foreigners because they are so used to it, and because of the damage that colonialism has done" through instilling the notion that the "Western way" is the "right way" (Hallowell & Hickey, 2015).

Additionally, problems related to neo-colonialism result when foreign volunteer participants and companies impose their own cultural ideologies through the identification of problems and development of solutions. Pluim and Jorgenson (2012), argue that volunteer programs consistently make the mistake of ignoring the knowledge and capacities of the host community when developing solutions. As stated by a student interning in Kenya, "one thing I had to keep fighting was my Western tendency to think that 'our' way is better, and also to only question and analyze what was happening, and not criticize" (Ouma & Dimaras, 2013). Moreover, since Western countries have different priorities and values as compared to host communities, volunteer companies, who take on the responsibility of detecting problems without the input of host communities, tend to use their home country as a basis for this identification. Due to this comparison, many volunteer projects are fundamentally incompatible with the host community. Volunteer companies often identify problems secondary to the central issue, or identify practices culturally different from their own as the source of a problem. These misidentifications result from the lack of communication and cultural understanding between volunteer corporations and host communities. Thus, the solutions developed by Western companies and carried out by volunteers perpetuate the problem of neocolonialism. Pluim and Jorgenson (2012), argued that post-colonial critiques of Western-driven development in foreign countries highlight the various ways by which these actions reproduce old imperial relationships. Therefore, the colonialist nature of volunteer programs is derived from the implemented solutions that often involve shaping the host community to more closely reflect Western nations. As a result, the projects

completed by volunteers erode the culture of the community and wrongfully impose the beliefs of outsiders.

Paternalism

According to Corbett and Fikkert (2012), paternalism is doing things for people that they can do for themselves. Further, paternalism manifests in many different forms. The forms most commonly seen in service-learning programs are resource, knowledge, labor, and managerial paternalism (Corbett and Fikkert, 2012). In reference to volunteers, paternalism essentially reinforces the misconception that complex problems, such as poverty, can be solved through short-term volunteer projects, material donations, or 'Western' knowledge. Paternalism is harmful to host communities because there is the potential for the communities to develop a dependence on the volunteer groups, who consistently provide labor, resources, and leadership. As a result, this reinforces the superiority-inferiority complex held by community members, and prevents developing countries from ever being able to succeed independently.

Foreign volunteers often bring donations such as used clothes, school supplies, pharmaceuticals, and medical equipment. Due to the materialistic culture of developed countries, volunteer participants and companies tend to view the solution to poverty in tangible terms (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012). They often pour financial and material resources into poverty-stricken communities. However, in these situations, the best solution is to empower the locals so that they can be stewards of their own resources (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012). In addition, another consequence of resource paternalism is that "legitimate local businesses can be undermined when outsiders bring in such things

as free clothes or building supplies, undercutting the price that these local businesses need to survive" (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012, p.110).

Knowledge paternalism occurs when volunteers and organizations assume they have all the best ideas for how to solve problems within the host community (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012). This form of paternalism is difficult because it is true that many volunteers and project planners have knowledge that can help the materially poor with poverty alleviation, operating businesses, and even curing diseases. Nevertheless, volunteers "must recognize that the materially poor also have unique insights into their own cultural contests and are facing circumstances [volunteers] do not understand very well" (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012, p.110). The materially poor and volunteers alike can benefit from the knowledge of others, but "it is reflective of a god-complex to assume that [volunteers] have all the knowledge and . . . always know what is best" (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012, p.110). Overall, it is important for both volunteers and members of the host community to be exposed to new perspectives. Thus, service-learning programs should aim facilitate the equal exchange of knowledge between volunteers and locals.

Labor paternalism is defined as doing work for others that they can do for themselves (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012, p.112). Labor paternalism can be harmful to host communities when it negatively impacts the local workforce and economy. The free labor provided by foreign volunteers undermines the ability of local labor workers to find employment and essentially earn a living (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012). However, volunteers do not only impact the manual labor workforce. At the San Pedro-Sula and Tegucigalpa airports at least one short-term volunteer medical group arrives each day (Seager, 2012). Due to these massive influx of health professionals offering free services, between 2,000

and 3,000 unemployed Honduran physicians are searching for jobs every month (Seager, 2012). According to Seager (2012), many physicians who graduate from medical school in Honduras, and other Latin American countries, have little hope of finding employment and often end up driving taxis or working in other fields.

The last form, managerial paternalism, occurs due to the leadership positions that volunteers and organizations assume when planning, managing and directing initiatives in host communities (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012). The problem is that individuals in these communities are often fully capable of managing these responsibilities without help from volunteers. However, in most voluntourism organizations local community leaders do not create, implement, manage, or evaluate the projects conducted in their communities. There are several possible reasons why. Outside companies frequently do not adequately request and utilize input from local community members when designing volunteer projects. Performing asset and needs assessments to gain a better understanding of the impact potential projects would have on the community takes a great deal of time and energy. For this reason, most companies do not prioritize this important stage and fail to involve the local community during project development.

Individuals in low-income communities may not feel the need to take charge because they know that with enough time foreign volunteers will do the work for them (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012). Additionally, they may lack the confidence to assume leadership positions, particularly when "superior" Westerners are involved (Corbett and Fikkert, 2012). Another possible reason is that they, like volunteers, "have internalized the messages of centuries of colonialism, slaver, and racism: Caucasians run things and everyone else follows" (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012, p. 112). Locals may also not want the

project to occur as much as the volunteers. For example, they may know that the project will accomplish little but are afraid to tell the volunteers for fear of offending them (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012). Lastly, community members know that by allowing volunteers to take control they are more likely to bring money and other material resources for donation (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012). Taking all of these forms of paternalism into consideration, volunteer groups should aim to seek solutions with the host community rather than for them.

Based on the current research exposing the underlying issues of volunteer programs, a methodology for creating ethical service-learning programs was developed. This methodology was put into practice during a service trip to Costa Rica through the Service Abroad organization at Texas State University. Following the trip, the methodology was modified based on feedback and personal experiences. In the last two chapters, the service trip to Costa Rica will be summarized, and the improved methodology will be presented in detail.

Chapter III: Researching the Solution
Testing the Methodology in Costa Rica

When planning the first group volunteer trip to Costa Rica for the Texas State University Service Abroad organization, I was overwhelmed by the immense amount of research on the negative consequences associated with service-learning programs. Initially, discovering this research was disheartening. The more I learned about the potentially harmful impacts, the more I worried about the effect my group would have on the Costa Rican community. As a result, I decided to change the mission of our organization and the goal of our volunteer trip. Rather than just allowing students to help by volunteering abroad, the new aspiration was to teach students cultural competency through pre-departure education and hands-on experiences, convey the importance of learning from others, and facilitate a mutually beneficial volunteer program. In order to achieve these goals, the current research on volunteer programs was reviewed and, based on these findings, a new methodology for conducting service-learning programs was developed.

The methodology was implemented and tested while planning the Service Abroad student volunteer trip. The first step in organizing this trip was finding a company that shared our goals. This proved to be more difficult than I had anticipated. In my searching, I came across many large companies, with locations across the globe, and numerous projects; however, the problem was that each location had nearly the exact same projects,

thus displaying the utter lack of communication between the companies and the communities. Other companies heavily advertised the tourism aspect of their programs and appeared to almost entirely forget the service projects. Finally, Hibiscus Travels, was discovered when the owner visited our campus for a Peace Corps panel that was being hosted by the International Studies Department. Hibiscus Travels is based in Costa Rica, but focuses its efforts within the Provence of Puntarenas. Upon discussing our goals with the company owner, Lauren Markey, I was impressed by her awareness of the negative consequences, her efforts to negate them, and her involvement in the host community.

Before deciding to use Hibiscus Travels, I asked Lauren how she determined the needs of the community and the best means for meeting them. In response, she stated that, "[the host community members] are in charge of determining their needs and means" for addressing them, while her organization strives to "supply what is needed" and create plans of action together with the community. I was also moved by Lauren's commitment to supporting the local economy. She informed me that, for her programs, she utilizes local transportation services, buys all supplies locally, and employs community members to work as the program coordinators, tour guides, house repair workers, and volunteer supervisors. Another positive aspect of Hibiscus Travels is that Lauren makes an effort to follow-up on volunteer projects after the students have returned home in order to improve future programs. Lauren stated that she determines the success of hands-on projects "by meeting, after our groups leave, with each project site's local manager and asking for feedback." She assesses the impact of social projects by "meeting with the person in charge of the project and speaking with the affected community members for feedback." Overall, I was impressed by Lauren's company, and

although we discovered aspects of her organization that could be improved during our time abroad, I am still satisfied with the choice I made in selecting Hibiscus Travels as our program facilitator

According to Ellen Hickey, it is "important to have strong communication . . . [and] we must find out from [the host community] what they see as their needs and what sorts of solutions they have tried" (Hallowell & Hickey, 2015, p.1). Therefore, our next step, after selecting our company, was to assess the needs of the Costa Rican community we would be working in. In order to properly asses the community's needs, Lauren acted as our representative and met with the host community members. In addition, the community members were also asked for suggestion on how we should meet this needs. After this information was collected, each student was asked to do a mental evaluation of their skills. By asking the students to objectively appraise their own abilities, we were able to determine what projects, from those suggested by the community, would best suit the qualifications of our group. Thus, based on the needs explicitly described, the solutions suggested by the community, and the qualifications of our volunteers, projects in healthcare, conservation, and teaching were developed.

For students pursuing careers in the health professions, a hospital shadowing opportunity was offered. Through this program, students had the opportunity to gain shadowing hours, while learning about the different conditions and treatments used outside of the United States. In order to prevent any dangers to the patients by unqualified volunteers, the students were only only allowed to observe. Another program dealt with conservation. Through this program students participated in beach cleanups and assist at the Ojochal nature reserve. At the nature reserve, the students were responsible for

creating signs to identify the different plant species. Lauren ensured that, before beginning the project, the students were instructed on how to use the tools and how to identify different plant species. Then, Lauren scheduled all of the volunteers to help with a teaching project. Through this project, the volunteers were expected to teach two English classes per day: one for children and one for adults. Due to my initial opposition towards imposing on or competing with the local school teachers, Lauren arranged for our classes to take place in the afternoons, as an extracurricular opportunity for interested students. However, even with this adjustment, I was still worried about including this project because none of our volunteers had teaching qualifications. Nevertheless, due to the high demand from the community, as the most requested project, the teaching project was included in our volunteer program. As a whole, our goals in designing the program were to listen, collaborate, and empower the locals. Thus, the projects for the Service Abroad volunteer program were designed based on the needs prioritized by members of the community as well as the capabilities of our volunteers. After finalizing all the volunteer programs, the volunteers were adequately prepared for their experiences abroad and their specific projects.

As stated by Brooke Hallowell, a professor at Ohio University, "it is absolutely critical that we prepare extremely in advance of going anywhere" (Hallowell & Hickey 2015, p.1). Both Hallowell and Hickey (2015), emphasize the importance of pre-departure training in successful volunteer trips. Accordingly, the students were scheduled to be trained on the Costa Rican culture, history, social norms, language and a variety of other topics; however, obstacles to the study's approval prevented this training from occurring as scheduled. As a result, the students were not as prepared as I had wished

before departing for Costa Rica. All the students were provided with a basic understanding of the host community's culture, history, society, and language, but the instruction they received was not as in-depth as I had planned. Prior to departing, Spanish lessons were provided by Hibiscus Travels. In addition, I presented lectures on photography ethics, common gestures, cultural customs. The students were also prepared educated on the different characteristics between societies such as collectivist vs. individualistic and monochronistic vs. polychronistic. Aside from these lessons, we had planned to volunteer domestically in projects similar to those we would complete in Costa Rica, but did not have time before the trip to organize these opportunities. More project-specific and cultural awareness training would have been ideal to properly prepare the students.

To evaluate the impact and success of our program, I surveyed several Hibiscus project managers and local community members. One of the local community members involved with the healthcare program commended us for our commitment to learning, but also pointed out how our transportation, appearance, and clothes created a barrier between us and the host community. Thus, this is one examples of an issue that could have been easily solved through more extensive pre-departure training. Although we did advise the students on what to wear and what the Costa Rican community considers acceptable dress, our American clothing looked strikingly different from that of the locals. In future projects, I would consider asking the students to purchase clothing upon arriving at their destination or adapt their clothing choices to blend in better. This may appear to be an extreme solution; however, if the purpose of the volunteer trip is to empower and learn from the host community, then barriers should be broken down

whenever possible. If our clothing is viewed as a barrier due to the appearance of superiority, then the solution is to eliminate that inequality in our dress. Despite a few critiques, such as the students' appearance, the rest of the survey responses were complimentary. Even though the students lacked some of the planned preparation, they were still commended for their grasp of the culture, their dedication to the projects, and their willingness to learn. One community members stated that, based on his experiences with other volunteers, our group was "more interested in learning than in sharing." I believe this is a direct result of the emphasis we placed, during pre-departure training, on the importance of learning from others and not imposing our ideas on the host community.

As for the programs, the healthcare, conservation, and teaching project went relatively smoothly. Upon arriving, there were some initial problems with the healthcare program. It became clear that although the director of the hospital had approved our presence there, he had not informed any of his staff. At first, we were dropped off with random health professionals, who saw our presence as a burden, but, with time, each of the students was able to get to know the professionals they were observing and learn from the experience. In the surveys, one negative criticism was that our students should ask more questions. One hospital employee stated that, although he knows it was not our intention, by not asking questions, we "give the impression that [we] already know everything." Several of the hospital employees also stated that not being informed by Hibiscus Travels was an inconvenience because they would have liked to prepare what they were going to teach us; however, each of the health professionals wrote an abundance of positive reviews about our group as well. The students were praised for

their professionalism, eagerness to learn, and respectful attitudes. As in the healthcare project, our volunteers also received praise in the conservation project. The local program supervisor at Ojochal commended our students for their dedication and work ethic. Through this program, the students were able to clean four different beaches, make a community composting system, and create signs for the different plant species at Ojochal. Upon reflection on these projects, both appeared to be ethically sound, but we were concerned about whether we were taking jobs from local labor workers who could have completed our tasks at Ojochal. In future programs, it may be more beneficial to raise money while at home, donate the funds to nature reserves, and allow them to hire workers to complete the jobs.

Although we were initially worried about including the teaching project, since none of the volunteers had qualifications to teach English, no issues related to the volunteer's preparation arose. This is likely due to the time we dedicated each day to creating the lesson plans and preparing for the class. Many of the lessons for this class were inspired by our own Spanish and Culture class provided by Hibiscus Travels and taught by a local instructor. We also utilized this instructor as a resource in creating our lesson plans. She assisted us with finding culturally appropriate materials, and reviewed our lessons to ensure they were applicable and at the correct level for students in Costa Rica. Due to the close student-teacher relationship that existed in the classes, I was concerned that the students would feel obligated to complete the survey or provide biased opinions; therefore, I did not ask students to complete surveys. However, we did have many members of the community approach us after class and express their appreciation.

Despite these positive affirmations, there were some aspects of the project that could have been improved. For instance, since we decided to make the classes open to the entire community, we did not know how many students would attend each class. Due to the large fluctuations in numbers from day to day, it was difficult to make lesson plans that were adaptable for five or thirty students. Additionally, we were also not provided with the proper facilities to teach the number of students who attended our class. Each afternoon, the school janitor would come by and open one classroom for us. There were logistical issues when trying to teach a group of 30 children, ages 3 to 12, in one room. Although we helped many community members, we were left wondering if we had stolen a source of income from local teachers, who could have made money by holding the same classes. In future programs, I would like to ensure that we are not competing with any local instructors prior to offering free English classes for the community. In spite of these obstacles, the project was still an extremely enriching experience that allowed the volunteers to learn from and interact with the community.

During our time in Costa Rica, we met each morning to implement the last step of the methodology: reflection. Using prewritten questions, approved by the Texas State University Institutional Review Board, I led the group discussions each morning and questioned the students on topics ranging from their experiences abroad to how their national identity affected the privileges they were granted in Costa Rica. By leading these reflective exercises and talking to the students, I was able to watch as their adjustment and growth over the two-week period as well as listen to a variety of different perspectives on the experiences they shared. Many students noted how differently the community members treated them, and reported experiencing the superiority-inferiority

complex firsthand during their interactions. The group expressed that each interaction, whether they were shopping at a market or boarding a bus, was laced with the community's feelings of inferiority. They said that in comparison to the locals, they were granted many unearned privileges simply because of their status as an American. I believe that more preparation could have alleviated this issue. Despite the student's best efforts, the staggered power dynamic remained in the eyes of the community and it appeared there was nothing we could do to change it. I strongly believe that if the students had a more fitting appearance, greater grasp of the Spanish language, and instruction on how to deal with these situations, the barrier would have been reduced. The students would have been allowed to interact more with the community members and potentially contribute to the gradual dismantling of the power dynamic.

Another way to dissolve the barrier between our students and the host community would have been to incorporate more time in the program for the students to interact with locals outside of their community projects. This was suggested by one of the surveys collected. Javier, an employee at St. Thomas Hospital, stated that it would be more beneficial to the students to interact with Costa Ricans outside of the work environment. By seeing the locals in a less formal setting, he stated that the students would be able to learn more about the everyday life of a "Tico," or Costa Rican, and gain a better understanding of who they are attempting to learn from and serve. In future programs, this is definitely something that should be considered when scheduling and planning projects. I believe that allowing the students to interact with locals would provide a different perspective than what the students gained through their projects and would better facilitate the interactions we are aiming to foster.

As a whole, all of the volunteer's experiences and criticisms received were considered to modify the proposed methodology. Outlined in Chapter 4 is the fine-tuned methodology for creating mutually beneficial service-learning programs.

Chapter IV: The Working Solution
A Methodology for Designing Volunteer Programs

"Action without learning is ignorance. Learning without action is selfishness"
(Learning Service, 2017, 9)

Based on the current underlying problems, existing research, and feedback from Costa Rica, a methodology for guiding individuals through the process of creating or finding a mutually beneficial volunteer programs was designed. Below are the most important guidelines one should keep in mind when deciding to volunteer abroad.

Self-Evaluation

Volunteer programs, when done ethically and with a learning approach, can be a powerful way to experience and help the world around you; however, it is not the only way to achieve these goals. Before choosing to volunteer, make sure it is the best option. If you are drawn to the adventure of seeing new places and learning about different cultures, then you may consider simply traveling rather than volunteering overseas. If your priority is to immerse yourself in a new culture and take advantage of learning opportunities, then you may want to consider signing up for an educational trip with local educational institutions. Further, if you are a university student you may consider affiliated study abroad programs. In addition to these options you can also find an internship abroad or simply volunteer in your own community. To conclude, although volunteering abroad is an impactful and life-changing experience, there are many alternatives that are just as rewarding. Before committing to a volunteer program, you

should consider alternative options, ensure volunteering abroad is the best option for you, and make sure you are truly ready for the experience.

Once you have decided to volunteer abroad, the next step is to do a self-evaluation of your own qualifications, skills, and abilities. There are a variety of volunteer projects related to education, childcare, health, agriculture, human rights, enterprise, environmental issues, and disaster relief. You should choose a program that best fits your own abilities. After selecting a program, you should consider what locations you are interested in traveling to. When choosing a location you should take your own language skills and the local living conditions into consideration. You should try to pick a location where you speak the native language, so that you can easily interact with the locals. Additionally, you should reflect on your personal ability to adapt to different environments and consider the living conditions associated with different locations.

Choosing a Company

When choosing a company, it is advised that volunteers choose an organization that is nonprofit because, when profits are a motivating factor, volunteer concerns and expectations often take priority over the needs and impact on the community (Bennett, Collins, Heckscher, & Papi-Thornton, 2018). Additionally, it is also recommended that volunteers participate in longer programs because they are often more sustainable in comparison to short-term projects (Bennett et al., 2018); however, it is up to you to decide how much time you can allocate to your volunteer experience. Once you have narrowed down your choices based on the location, project, and length of the volunteer program you can begin comparing the remaining organizations.

Many organizations have attempted to create volunteer program rating systems, but, according to Bennett et al. (2018), they are largely inadequate as a basis for selecting programs. Rather, it is best for you to do your own research on the programs you are interested in pursuing. One method for eliminating unsatisfactory programs is to browse their websites and look for red flags. The marketing materials that an organization utilizes convey a great deal of information about the program's mission and priorities. Some common red flags in marketing materials include fueling sympathy instead of empathy, poverty voyeurism, the savior/hero dynamic, creating unrealistic expectations, overuse of tourism language, and the infamous all-inclusive buffet (Bennett et al., 2018).

Companies that fuel sympathy instead of empathy, by presenting people overseas as helpless victims waiting for saviors, should also be avoided (Bennett et al., 2018). This marketing tool goes hand in hand with poverty voyeurism, which is often referred to as "poverty porn" because it uses images of poverty unethically. Poverty voyeurism is harmful to the volunteer experience because these images communicate a simplistic view of poverty and reinforce the incorrect stereotypes already held by some foreign volunteers (Bennett et al., 2018). In addition, the savior/hero dynamic essentially presents volunteers as heroes while portraying the host community as helpless and in need of saving. This dynamic raises a red flag in marketing because it communicates the idea that a lack of learning, preparation, and self-reflection still gives the opportunity for volunteers to be heroes. Thus, the hero dynamic rewards intentions rather than outcomes. By creating unrealistic expectations, such as suggesting that making an impact will be easy or have an immediate or lasting effect, organizations set up their volunteers for disappointment. Overuse of tourism language is another red flag because overselling of

the 'tourist' aspect indicates that the organization does not prioritize the volunteer projects for community empowerment. Lastly, the 'all-inclusive buffet' describes organizations large enough to facilitate trips in dozens of locations (Bennett et al., 2018). Companies that offer identical projects in different countries and diverse communities suggest that the organization has determined general needs and developed generic solutions, rather than creating projects uniquely designed with the local community members as contributors at every step of development, implementation, management, and evaluation. These types of companies treat impoverished or resource-poor communities as monolithic societies with problems and challenges that can exacerbate paradigms like neo-colonialism and paternalism. Searching for these red flags is imperative because altogether, these marketing tools portray a skewed and simplistic view of complicated issues such as development, poverty, and aid (Bennett et al., 2018). By avoiding organizations who utilize these marketing tools, you have a better chance of finding an ethical organization that genuinely wants to aid the host community and understands the dilemma at hand.

Once you have looked through the websites of your choice organizations and eliminated any that presented red flags, you may consider reaching out to returned volunteers or calling the organization directly to learn more information. Speaking with past volunteers is a great way to gain a realistic insight into how the organization operates. To get a better picture of the organization you could ask past volunteers questions such as

- How effective do you think you were in your volunteer project? Why?
- What were your biggest challenges?
- What are the greatest concerns you have about the organization?
- What type of person would be the best fit for this program?

- What advice would you give to future volunteers participating in the same program as you?

Although past volunteers are a great source of information, it is important to remember that a positive experience should not be equated with an effective one, and one negative volunteer experience is not enough to rule out the organization completely. Additionally, to make your final decision, you could also speak with the organizations directly. Below are a list of questions you may consider asking the organizations you are interested in.

- Is the program sustainable? Are the program services offered year-round at a standing operation with frequent short-term volunteers providing support for local professionals?
- Do you perform community asset assessments before beginning a project? If so, may I see the report or executive summary of community involvement?
- How do you evaluate the needs of the society and attempt to fulfill them?
- Why do you believe volunteers are a plausible solution for meeting the needs of the community?
- Can you please describe your experience so far working with volunteers from other countries.
- From your experience, what would you say makes a volunteer better equipped to help?
- What have you noted about the interactions between the volunteers and the local community members? In what ways do you think these interactions could be improved?
- Do you believe foreign volunteers have a positive impact on the community?
- How would you say that the host community benefits from the work of foreign volunteers, if at all?
- Do members of the local community have leadership roles within the base of operations?
- How do you ensure that volunteers are prepared for their experience serving abroad?
- How do you prevent volunteer programs from competing with the local businesses?
- How much of the money from volunteers is allocated to the community?
- How do you define a successful service abroad program and how have you evaluated your program to determine if it is meeting these goals?
- If you do evaluate the impact, what results have you collected? What patterns have you noticed? What conclusions have you drawn?

Then, you can make an educated final decision. With this information, you can choose an ethically-sound company that not only creates sustainable projects but also shares your values.

Volunteer Preparation

As discussed by Hallowell and Hickey (2015), student pre-departure preparation is essential to the success of any volunteer program. In order to be equipped for their experiences abroad, volunteers must maintain a basic understanding of the host communities language, culture, society, and history. More specifically, volunteer preparation should include: project-specific training, basic language skills, cultural competency, demographics, history, common gestures, photography ethics, appropriate attire, and social norms. In addition to these fundamental lessons, volunteers should also be educated on the many underlying problems such as the feelings of inferiority, practices of paternalism, and lack of sustainability, which are often associated with international service projects. By understanding the host community and being aware of the potential harm they could inflict, volunteers are better suited to interact with the host community members and avoid unethical practices. Further, the education provided to volunteers should emphasize the importance of learning during their program. Most importantly, throughout the entire process volunteers should be reminded of their primary goal in traveling abroad: to help by empowering the locals to the best of their ability, while also learning from and exchanging information with the host community.

Reflection

The last step to this methodology is to reflect on your experiences while abroad and after you return. Reflection is an imperative step to this process, which allows us to learn

more about our motivations, actions, and identity. While you are volunteering abroad, it is advised that you either keep a journal to write about your experiences or designate time each day to contemplating what you observe. In order to guide your reflection, questions are provided below.

- What did I observe or experience that surprised me today?
- What did I learn today?
- What aspects of the host communities culture do I like? Are there any values, traditions, or practices I would like to adopt?
- What have I learned about the foreign culture, religion, history, government, etc. that I did not know prior to arriving?
- Have I noticed any overlap between the cultures or ideas in my home country and the host community?
- What are the main differences between my culture and the host community's culture?
- How do the members of the host community view my actions here?
- Have I seen any verbal or non-verbal communication from locals that indicate that I have offended, shocked, or made them uncomfortable or envious?
- How does the country I am from shape who I am?
- How has my national identity affected the way I view the culture of the host community?
- What privileges have I been awarded due to my national identity? How do these privileges compare to what I am granted in my home country?
- How would I describe the national identity of the host community? How does this compare to how I would describe my national identity?
- How do I think members o the host community view my national identity?
- If a member of the host community traveled to my home country, what would their experience be like? How do our national identities influence the experience we have in foreign countries?

Conclusion

In summary, volunteering abroad is not simply traveling to a foreign country with the purpose of offering aid. Good intentions are not enough. Rather, serving abroad, when done properly, is a massive undertaking that involves a challenging process of vetting organizations and intensive, multi-faceted preparation prior to departure. Despite these obstacles, I do not dissuade the individuals, who are willing to give their best effort

to volunteering ethically, from serving abroad. When done ethically, volunteering abroad can be a life-changing and eye-opening experience. As long as volunteers complete all the pre-departure responsibilities and remain respectful while abroad, they should be able to engage positively with the community. I hope that this methodology is helpful to any future volunteers. As the title of this chapter states, the methodology I have developed is only a "working solution" to guide you through your experience; however, there is still much work to be done. With each new personal account and research study, we learn more about our impacts on developing nations, and with each discovery our methods should be adjusted accordingly. As a final note, when attempting to create your own mutually beneficial volunteer program, remember to act with compassion, consider different perspectives, find ways to empower the locals, learn from the community and reflect on your experiences.

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