Faculty-Led, Short-Term Study Abroad Programs

Spotlight on Teaching

Frederick Glennon, Editor

The AAR Committee on Teaching and Learning (Lerone Martin, Chair) sponsors Spotlight on Teaching*. It appears twice each year in* Religious Studies News *and focuses on teaching and learning around a particular theme, concern, or setting.*

Image: West Virginia University 2014 Study Abroad Students. *Tetsugaku-no-Michi*, Kyoto, Japan, 2014. Photo Credit: Alex Snow

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Teaching and Learning in Faculty-Led, Short-Term Study Abroad Programs: Editor's Introduction

Fred Glennon, Le Moyne College

The desire to globalize and contextualize the education of our students to prepare them for active and responsible citizenship in the 21st century is a part of the vision of many colleges and universities these days (see AAC&U 2007). Authors of the American Academy of Religion's white paper (2008), "The Religion Major and Liberal Education," suggest this has always been one of the five foci of the religious studies major. To achieve this vision, many advocate some type of immersion in other cultures through study abroad programs. Whether or not these programs should be semester-long or short-term, faculty-led or independent, educational or formational is open to discussion and debate (see Barbour 2015). Regardless of the structure, however, the challenge is to develop these programs in ways that realize the intended outcomes.

Interest in the theoretical and pedagogical impact of study abroad programs among professors of religion and theology has existed for some time and is growing. The bulk of a recent issue of *Teaching Theology and Religion* (18:1), which was developed out of a session at the 2011 American Academy of Religion annual meeting, was dedicated to the use of study abroad in religion courses. The thoughtful essays in that issue explore various ways faculty-led study abroad programs provide opportunities for students to experience the study of religion in context, and they provide insight and highlight various implications for the study and teaching of religion.

This current issue of *Spotlight on Teaching* also grew out of an annual meeting proposal about faculty experiences with faculty-led short-term study abroad programs. While the essays highlight the tremendous rewards for students and faculty alike that these experiences generate, they also identify the ways in which institutional context shapes, and at times limits, the structure and experiences of the programs.

The question of pedagogical approach is highlighted in each of these essays. David Howell stresses the importance of being intentional in the design of study abroad experiences to maximize the impact such experiences have on students. He discusses three theoretical frameworks he has used in preparing his own study abroad experiences: intersectional analysis or cultural identity awareness, intellectual and ethical development, and experiential learning; and he provides examples of how he has incorporated these frameworks in his own study abroad courses. Shannon Grimes draws from environmental educators' emphasis on place-based approaches to learning to get students to use their entire selves—minds, senses, and bodies—to learn from the people and place of Iceland.

While such theoretical pedagogical frameworks have a great deal to offer teachers as they construct their courses and programs, Dori Parmenter illustrates how the interdisciplinary nature of religious studies as a field can also enrich the pedagogical approach to study abroad. The methods of bracketing, hermeneutics of appreciation, and hermeneutics of suspicion endemic to the study of religion can prove beneficial to students in an interdisciplinary study abroad context which seeks to enable students to develop more complex and integrated modes of thinking.

Of course, in this day and age of outcomes assessment, connecting our pedagogical approach to the learning goals we have for the course is important. However, one of the realities of leading a short-term study abroad program, especially in institutional contexts with limited financial support and students who have never been out of the country, is that one cannot always prepare for every contingency. Alyssa Beall describes how changes in logistical arrangements can interfere with preparation. Moreover, a study abroad program in one context (Europe) does not always translate smoothly into a very different context (Asia). The professor and the students must adapt in the moment. Alex Snow further notes how sometimes teaching in a short-term study abroad context does not lend itself to "the pedagogical dances" we use in the traditional classroom. Instead, we find ourselves teaching on-the-fly in "expedient" and unpredictable ways, even "pointing at" the sights and sounds we encounter together with the hope that students are experiencing the transformative moment with us.

For most of the authors, the experiences students encounter in the study abroad setting have the potential not only to expand their knowledge and understanding of the global context in which they live, but also have the potential for transformative experiences, which Grimes calls experiences of "mind and heart," and which Barbara Walvoord claims many of our students are seeking (Walvoord 2008). A student in Dori Parmenter's program claims that not only did her experiences in Ireland broaden her understanding of the human context, she believed it would help her to "grow and learn and simply be better." After his experience among the Yup'ik people in Alaska and seeing the impact of global warming there, a student in John O'Keefe's Backpack Journalism class says he is more aware of "his place in the world" and "the impact he can have on it."

John Barbour suggests that a critical reason for the effectiveness of faculty-led study abroad programs versus semester-long immersion programs is the presence of professors who help students understand their experiences and connect it to other learning and to their lives, something that does not always happen in immersion programs (2015, 89). This is certainly the case for the authors of these essays. O'Keefe realizes that students in his classes need help in processing their encounters with the challenges of global poverty in the Dominican Republic, Africa, and Alaska. He relies upon Ignatian pedagogy with its emphasis on the interrelationship between experience, reflection, and evaluation to help students connect the dots. Howell notes how requiring students to write about and reflect on their experiences in journals, an active learning strategy that all the authors encourage in their programs, enables them to make more powerful links with what they are seeing and observing, providing a depth that the classroom setting alone does not.

Finally, many of the authors talk about the impact the study abroad programs have had on their pedagogy back home and on their sense of themselves as teachers. Snow is exploring how he can incorporate culturally specific pedagogies like *upaya* or "expedient means" into his more traditional lecture-based courses. Beall notes how she now blends many of the images and lessons learned abroad into her traditional classroom setting. Grimes says her experiences of engaging with students within and without the teaching context in Iceland enabled her to open herself up to connect with students in new ways that transcend the traditional teacher role. O'Keefe remarks that the immersion programs are one

of the most satisfying pedagogical experiences in his long career. Make no mistake: all agree that faculty-led short-term study abroad programs, especially in contexts where the faculty assume most or all of the responsibility for setting up and conducting the program, are extremely labor-intensive. Yet in spite of this, the constant refrain in these essays is that while exhausting, the experience for their students and themselves is extremely rewarding.

Resources

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Theoretical Frameworks for Designing Study Abroad Courses in Religious Studies

David B. Howell, Ferrum College

Study abroad experiences for students can range from the short-term educational travel with an academic focus to semester- or year-long immersion experiences that provide students with an opportunity for cultural integration. The student learning outcomes for the variety of courses along the continuum will differ significantly. But in each case, study abroad courses provide a context and opportunity for faculty to address in a powerful way some intangible learning outcomes that exist in religious studies courses. Such transformative learning experiences, however, may not result without careful course design by faculty who seek to have students engage different cultures in deep and complex ways. Without purposeful design, the study abroad may be satisfying to students, but become little more than a glorified vacation. In this brief essay, I want to suggest some theoretical frameworks that I have used to design short-term study abroad courses.

Intersectionality and an Awareness of Cultural Identity and Location

Intersectional analysis, originally developed by feminist scholars of color, provides a framework to interrogate constructions of identity and structures of power, and it advocates for social justice issues. Amartya Sen, an Indian native who won the 1998 Nobel Prize in economics, writes about the dangers of what he calls "a 'solitarist' approach to human identity." He argues that with this approach, people operate with the "odd presumption that the people of the world can be uniquely categorized according to some *singular and overarchin*g system of partitioning" (Sen, xii). Such an approach leads to a misunderstanding of almost everyone in the world since we know ourselves to be members of a variety of groups. Each individual is, in a sense, a "multi-cultural" self with multiple identities who participates in a number of different cultural frameworks: race, class, social location, gender, sexual orientation, and religious commitments to name just a few possible groups. Perhaps it might be better to speak of this phenomenon in terms of diversity of identity or multilayered identities and consider the different ways in which these identities are configured, because these configurations of different identities can change in an instant as a person's personal identities intersect with social realities and history. Often the various dimensions of a person's identity lie unexamined, but the experience of being in a different cultural location in a study abroad experience brings to the forefront and questions identities that are assumed and experiences which are perceived to be normative and universal.

During on-campus activities before our study abroad trip, I regularly ask students to engage in a "Who Am I?" exercise which asks them to map their identities. Sometimes this has been done by asking students to move physically to different places in the room in response to a variety of different prompts to see the different people standing with them. Other times, I ask them to prepare a list of ten words that describe who they are. Once the list is complete, students are asked to cross off the list the words they can most easily discard until there is only one word left on the list (Jones and Abes, 80). They find it

increasingly difficult to cross off words. Once we are overseas, however, this exercise is repeated after students have the experience of disorientation in a new place. For example, the first day of a short-term course in Europe on global citizenship, students are "turned loose" in the *Viktualienmarkt* in Munich for an hour for lunch. Since most students who have traveled with me do not know German, they find this a disorienting experience even as they can see the different options for purchasing food at the stands in the open air market. Invariably, when I repeat the "Who Am I?" exercise after this experience, national identity is now foregrounded in student awareness, which then leads to a fruitful discussion of how students may benefit from a position of privilege (e.g., religious, racial, linguistic) back in the States of which they are not even aware.

Intellectual and Ethical Development Theories

A few years ago when I was teaching a world religions course during the college's three-week May term, one student commented, after a visit to the Central Mosque in London and discussion about Islam with the educational specialist who was a recent college graduate, how much he appreciated not only learning about different religions, but learning from perspectives that were not exclusively American. In this case, study abroad with visits to a variety of religious sites in England provided an opportunity to discuss religion not in an essentialist way as if it were a disembodied phenomenon. Rather, students had a chance to explore how religion is always rooted in particular social contexts and interacts with other aspects of identity even as it is part of a wider human experience.

The diversity of perspectives found in the experience which this student found helpful, however, can also be threatening to other students. Cherished notions of religious truth and received knowledge about the world can be challenged when students travel abroad. According to developmental psychologists, every person has an "epistemological theory"—some way of construing the nature of truth. Although the names of the stages change depending upon which theorist one is reading, most cognitive psychologists group the changes into four major identifiable stages. Marcia Baxter-Magolda is typical with her four stages or "domains" labeled "absolute knowing, transitional knowing, independent knowing, and contextual knowing." She discovered that most students enter college as dualists (to use William Perry's term denoting students' viewing knowledge in black and white, right and wrong terms). Studying abroad, then, with its introduction of multiple perspectives on topics, while threatening, can also provide a rich opportunity to help students develop more complex understanding of the nature of knowledge. Faculty who teach study abroad courses can use intellectual development theories not only in the design of their academic experiences to insure that students are exposed to diversity in the course content, the theories can also provide a helpful heuristic lens in understanding the difficulties some students may experience in the diverse cultural contexts.

Experiential Learning Theory

At its heart, study abroad is a form of experiential learning. David Kolb has expounded a theory of experiential learning which I have found very helpful when designing study abroad courses. The four stage cycle represents a holistic approach to learning that moves back and forth between the poles of experience-conception and reflection-experimentation (Passarelli and Kolb). A key component that I require in every study abroad course that I teach is an academic journal because of the opportunity it provides for students to reflect and move to abstract theorizing of their learning experiences. The journal includes notes from readings and lectures as well as observations, questions, and speculations. Study abroad experiences can be powerful learning experiences for students because they engage students in a variety of sensory experiences (e.g., smell, taste, sight, emotions) (Zull).

But if faculty do not provide students an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of the experience, some of the power of the learning experience may be dissipated. So, for example, I frequently include a unit on ritual when teaching a religion course, and then students have the opportunity to attend a worship service in the host country while traveling abroad (these have been as varied as Catholic mass in Austria to a Protestant service in China). In these cases where students don't know the language of the service, they are asked to observe and reflect on how and what is communicated by means of the ritual actions. When I read their reflections in journals after such engagement with ritual, they frequently have a deeper understanding of the way that ritual actions can communicate when they experience it with sight and smell without the benefit of accompanying language than they do when ritual is discussed in a classroom back on campus. In a course on pilgrimage when students are walking a portion of the *Camino de Santiago* in northern Spain, they are asked to construct a simple ritual for themselves as they walk and in journals explain why they chose this particular ritual.

Conclusion

The theoretical frameworks that I have touched upon in this article can be applied to a variety of study abroad courses in religion. Students come to our classes with high interest in exploring concerns about values and spiritual development even if we as faculty don't include such learning outcomes as high on our list (Walvoord, 20–21; 35ff). By being intentional in the design of our study abroad courses, however, it is possible for faculty to be a partner to students as they struggle with profound questions (Barbour, 93–94).[1]

Notes

[1] Barbour's article is the response to a helpful series of essays in *Teaching Theology and Religion* 18.1.

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How to Fall in Love with a Glacier: Teaching Environmental Humanities in Iceland

Shannon Grimes, Meredith College

Setting the Stage

When my colleague from the English department, Eloise Grathwohl, approached me about teaching a study abroad course with her in Iceland last summer, I didn't need much cajoling. She told me we'd be living in a glacial valley where wild horses roam, with magnificent views of active volcanoes, hot springs a short hike away, and that we'd each get our own cabin with a private hot tub on the deck where we could relax after a long day of teaching and hiking, reading novels by light of the midnight sun. I had never been on a study abroad trip, either as a student or as a professor, so I jumped at the chance. Eloise and I both have a keen interest in environmental issues: I teach religious studies and environmental ethics, she teaches medieval and contemporary environmental literatures; and we are both members of an environmental teaching circle at Meredith College. We decided that our central goal for this Iceland trip would be to understand the different ways that Icelanders relate to and find meaning in the natural world.

The Iceland program consists of two courses, one that is interdisciplinary, and the other a cultural course that involves visiting places of cultural importance and asking students to reflect on their travel experiences and cross-cultural encounters. For the interdisciplinary piece, we designed an environmental humanities course that examines Icelanders' relationships with land through the lenses of literature, history, and religious studies. We read Norse myths to get a sense of Viking cosmology; Icelandic folktales about elves, trolls, mermen, and other creatures that reside in hidden places in the landscape; and two contemporary novels by Icelandic authors that weave together social, environmental, and magico-religious themes: *Under the Glacier*, by Nobel-prize winner Halldór Laxness; and *The Blue Fox*, by Sjön, a novelist and long-time lyricist for Björk. For the culture course, we arranged for a variety of guest speakers to talk with us about environmental issues in Iceland. We met with government officials, eco-tourism experts, and environmental activists; we visited Sólheimar eco-village, toured a geothermal power plant, and had dinner at the homes of local farmers. Our students particularly enjoyed a service project where we teamed up with members of a local Lion's Club to plant over 1,000 trees in an area of the highlands that is suffering from desertification. Meeting Icelanders and hearing their stories was an invaluable part of our study abroad experience. We quickly learned about pressing environmental issues in Iceland and heard first-hand how politics, business, and love for the land can motivate people to protect the environment in various ways.

The courses and guest speakers helped set the stage for another kind of learning to unfold. We wanted to go further into our study of environmental connectedness by encouraging the students to deepen *their own* relationships with the land. To that end, we had many field trips and breaks in the day where we could hike around and immerse ourselves in the geological wonders of Iceland, and we asked

students to intentionally make use of these times to reflect on the natural world and their place within it. Much of the magic of this study abroad trip happened during the time we spent outdoors, where we could simply be present with nature.

Falling in Love

Environmental theorists and educators often promote place-based approaches to learning. These typically involve being outdoors, listening to and learning from the landscape not just with our rational minds, but also with our bodies, our senses, and our imaginations. The goal is to develop a deeper connection with place, to let nature teach us that we are a part of the ecological whole, and to instill ecological values like interconnectedness, preservation, and sustainability. Since we were headquartered in a rural area of Iceland, we didn't have to do much prodding to get students to pay attention to the sights, sounds, smells, and textures of the landscape. It became part of our daily routine, and each of us entered into communion with nature in our own ways. One enjoyed nature photography and became a champion for the small things she noticed, like tiny flowers or patches of lichen. Another would sit in meditation in a small grove near our cabins, contemplating the magnificent beauty all around her. Others loved to walk to the hot springs and visit the herd of friendly brood mares that roamed nearby.

It was especially powerful when these moments of enchantment with the natural world happened collectively. One occasion that stands out for me—indeed, it stood out for all of us—occurred during a three-day trip to Snaefellsnes Peninsula. On a whim, we decided to stop at a churchyard located at the foot of Snaefellsjökull glacier, thinking it would be a perfect introduction to the Laxness novel we would soon be reading. It had been a cloudy morning, but the sun had come out and we could finally see the glacier. What a spectacular sight! A lenticular cloud was hugging the mountaintop, making the glacier appear as if it were resting beneath a soft, fleecy blanket. We spent nearly an hour meandering through the cemetery in the back of the church, surrounded by gravestones and patches of purple lupine. All of us were transfixed by the glorious presence of the glacier. Several of us were even moved to tears.

Earlier that morning we'd visited an information center on the coast where a park ranger spoke to us about the Snaefellsnes Peninsula and was lamenting that Snaefellsjökull glacier, one of Iceland's beloved treasures, is receding so rapidly that it is expected to disappear within the next two or three decades. We'd heard this sad news from several people we talked to in Iceland, experts and laypeople alike, but it didn't really sink in until that day in the churchyard. When students wrote about this in their journals, several noted how deeply moved they were by the beauty of the glacier and the knowledge that it wouldn't be around much longer. Climate change, they said, seemed more real to them now. Something about this embodied encounter with a dying glacier had penetrated our hearts in ways that rational discourse could not.

There is a concept in environmental theory called biophilia, which posits that humans have an innate tendency to connect with other life forms, but this connection, or love, needs to be cultivated and nurtured. When we love something, we are more inclined to protect it—that is the hope, anyway, and I hope that's what our students felt that day at the glacier. Iceland provided a model place to cultivate biophilia, because on the one hand, it is so breathtakingly beautiful, but on the other, the arctic climates can be inhospitable, and the ecological degradation there is tragic. Biophilia is an unconditional type of love that includes respect for the harsher aspects of the natural world. While our group didn't experience anything as severe as an Iceland winter or volcanic eruption, we were outdoors rain or shine in all kinds of terrain—hummock-hopping through iron bogs, climbing mountains, and exploring lava-tube caves—and there were times when we were wet, cold, muddy, and miserable. The physical and

even emotional challenges of our outdoor excursions complemented the intellectual rigor of the environmental humanities courses we'd designed.

Teaching across Borders

This study abroad trip taught me much about teaching across borders: I traversed the lines of interdisciplinary subject matter, international and cultural contexts, intellectual and embodied forms of education, and anthropocentric and ecocentric perspectives. Since my return from Iceland, I have been lingering on two pedagogical questions. The first is more practical: I've been thinking about ways to further develop the intercultural piece of teaching environmental humanities abroad. During our discussions with Icelanders, we learned a lot about their environmental concerns and some of the cultural differences between Icelandic and American environmentalisms, but I am especially curious about different cultural expressions of biophilia. Place-based education is typically inspired by North American environmentalisms that value the local, whereas we were doing place-based education in a foreign country. I am certainly no stranger to thinking about cultural difference and global systems, but doing this from a place-based environmental approach required different theoretical frameworks that I didn't have at the time. Ursula Heise's concept of "eco-cosmopolitanism" (2008) is proving fruitful for thinking about the global dimensions of locality, identity, and environmental world citizenship, and I would like to incorporate some of her work into our course readings (or at least into course planning) for next time. As for method, storytelling has been used by environmental educators as a means of celebrating place and connections to nature; I think we could use storytelling with great effect since it fits well with our curriculum of literature, guest speakers, and outdoor experience. Some of the Icelanders we met shared these kinds of stories with us, even without our asking, but next time we could be more intentional and have students ask our guest speakers, or any people they meet, to share a story about a time when they felt inspired by, deeply connected to, or even overpowered by the natural world. We could reflect critically on these stories together and also share stories of our own. This would give us more insight into cultural and geographical variations of biophilia, and listening to personal stories would also reinforce the kind of emotional and sensory engagement that we're encouraging outdoors.

The Iceland trip has also caused me to reflect on the boundaries I hold as a professor, because they shifted in ways I wasn't expecting. Living in close proximity with students provided more opportunities for us to get to know each other and to see different sides of each other. Developing these personal connections with students was one of my favorite parts of the Iceland trip. But place-based education is what really brought me outside my comfort zone as a *religion*professor. Meditation and entering into communion with nature is an important part of my own spiritual practice, and I'm unaccustomed to sharing this side of myself with students, let alone asking them to do it for a class. I have always drawn a line between teaching and preaching; it's an ingrained part of my teaching ethic. I monitor myself carefully so that I make room for critical engagement with multiple viewpoints instead of privileging my own religious or political views. But working with place-based pedagogy, I found that the "preacher" side of me was often at the forefront, telling my teacher-self to let go of authority so that students could enter into communion with the landscape in their own ways. For example, there were times my teacher-self wanted to point out intellectual connections with our course material, but this voice was silenced by my preacher-self so that it wouldn't disturb the ritual of quiet reflection and sensory engagement. Whenever students described their outdoor encounters as "spiritual experiences," my preacher-self was elated because I want students to "see the light" and become more emotionally and ethically invested in environmental protection; and I know that spiritual reverence for nature can be a powerful inroad (though, as my teacher-self points out, it's not the *only* inroad). It felt good to be able to share my most passionate concerns with students, and finding ways to teach from that place seemed to strengthen my

integrity as a professor, not compromise it.

The many types of pedagogical border-crossing we did in Iceland has me thinking more about the lines I've drawn between teaching and preaching and the ways I've privileged traditional academics over transformative learning. I've come to realize that I can better serve myself and my students by bridging some of these divides between the head and the heart.

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Through the Back Door: Interdisciplinarity in Short-Term, Faculty-Led Study Abroad Programs

Dorina Miller Parmenter, Spalding University

Introduction

Finding the time and the financial resources for study abroad is a challenge for most students at my university, where many of them are first-generation learners and have work and/or family commitments. New adventure and global awareness may seem like unaffordable and impractical luxuries to them, and therefore they are not sufficient points of appeal for recruiting participants for my school's only study abroad opportunity (in Ireland). Students must be able to justify the additional expense and time commitment by taking classes within the study abroad program that they need to graduate, whether those are core requirements or major courses.

Spalding University's short-term, faculty-led study abroad in Ireland program thus involves collaboration with faculty from different departments to offer a variety of courses and to plan the activities during the two-week trip to Ireland. Past iterations of our program have involved successful collaborations between me (a liberal studies faculty who teaches religious studies), a liberal studies literature professor, and a faculty member in social work. Spalding requires two religious studies courses and one literature course as core requirements; classes in those disciplines also contribute to interdisciplinary liberal studies majors. Social work classes at Spalding are only open to majors in their department, but the course offered in the program was also cross-listed, so it was available to psychology majors as well. Thus the course offerings (Irish Religion and Culture, Irish Literature, Social Work in a Global Community, and International Psychology) could appeal to all students seeking core requirements but also to some specialized majors.

While students are attracted to the program based on what individual courses they will take, the classes, as well as the trip itself, quickly emerge as holistic and interdisciplinary. Study abroad in Ireland is designed so that all students in the program meet together for two hours, once a week, for the four weeks leading up to two weeks of travel (Spalding University operates on six-week sessions). Students meet the same amount, on the same time frame, for their individual courses. During the time when all participants are together, students not only become better prepared to travel abroad (in 2014 several students had not been on an airplane before; all but one student had never been out of the United States), but also are given an overview of Irish history and culture. Then when they meet in their individual classes, they can begin to make connections between their more specialized course work and the "big picture" of Ireland. While on the trip, all students are expected to participate in all organized activities, such as visits to significant historical religious sites, discussions with social services providers, and attendance at plays and poetry readings, so students get much more from their educational experience than what they signed up for.

Maximizing the Interdisciplinary Nature of Religious Studies for Study Abroad

Those of us who teach religious studies already know that through our engagement in an interdisciplinary subject-field rather than a narrow discipline (Capps, 1995, 331), religious studies has the capacity to address multiple facets of human experiences. What I have learned both by leading a short-term study abroad program and by teaching in a department that only has interdisciplinary majors (at a school where most majors are in professional training programs) is the importance of being explicit with ourselves and with our students about the benefits that religious studies has to offer precisely *because* of its interdisciplinarity. Students' experiences with a new culture (or with their own, for that matter) will not be narrowly confined either to a singular topic or a particular approach, and need to be understood in their complexity. Religious studies course offerings are thus an ideal starting place for shaping short-term study abroad programs, whether alone or in collaboration with other disciplines.

Religious studies also offers techniques that are beneficial for students' approaches to and understandings of the new situations they will encounter in their diverse study abroad experiences, whether those situations are explicitly religious or not. Explaining bracketing to students helps them to be more self-aware of their own personal beliefs and habitual ways of understanding the world so that they can be open to different ideas and cultural practices with less judgment. Employing both a hermeneutics of affection and a hermeneutics of suspicion invites empathy in unfamiliar situations as well as permission to think about problems and pitfalls (Nash, 2003, 211–212). On our last trip to Ireland, I saw students employing these techniques as they shared their experiences and analyses of many different situations. Religiously conservative students who were exposed to Dominican nuns advocating evolution awareness and creation-care theology recognized that while they may not agree, they could understand how the environmental perspective related to Celtic spirituality had a different relationship toward the land. Students who had prior experience to TV reality shows like *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* could see beyond their stereotypes when exposed to systematic discriminatory government policies and cultural attitudes toward Travellers, yet students could also refrain from flipping their views into idealism about Traveller lifestyles and behaviors. Students with no prior personal exposure to homelessness or drug addiction were challenged when visiting a safe house that offered clean needle exchange and an injection room, and they could discuss both the pros and cons of the services. Other disciplines certainly teach analogous methods to bracketing, hermeneutics of appreciation, and hermeneutics of suspicion, but I have found that explicitly identifying these techniques and then walking students through how they are employed are beneficial exercises outside of the specific context of religious studies, and can thus invite complex and integrated modes of thinking.

"Everything I learned will continue to help me in many years to come."

The National Academies report *Facilitating Interdisciplinary Research* (2004) defines interdisciplinary education as that which "integrates information, data, techniques, tools, perspectives, concepts, and/or theories from two or more disciplines or bodies of specialized knowledge to advance fundamental understanding or to solve problems whose solutions are beyond the scope of a single discipline or area of research practice" (2). If given the proper tools for analysis and models of collaborative thinking, when exposed to the lived culture of Ireland, students come to realize that they cannot understand religious conflict if they don't also learn about Irish history and the complexities of political and economic power. Contemporary social work policies are not only about changing ethics in the present, but the factors that have contributed to religious conservatism in the past. The psychology of identity is tied to long cultural memories and family histories, bound up with religious and political allegiances,

regionalism, and nationalism. Irish literature reflects all these factors, as well the beauty and spirit of the land, which only makes sense when seen and felt firsthand. As one student in Spalding's Study Abroad in Ireland Program wrote in her journal, "Throughout our trip we constantly [learned] from different disciplines, like religious studies, history, and psychology. All of these things [together] provide a broader picture…[about what] makes us human.…This will help me grow and learn and simply be better. Everything I learned in the past two weeks will continue to help me in many years to come."

The benefits of study abroad programs for cultivating cross-cultural and global awareness are obvious. While this consciousness is an important part of developing complex thinking skills, other aspects of a holistic study abroad experience can help to provide students with tools to explore the multifaceted real-life issues that they encounter both abroad and at home (Newell 2010).

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There and Back Again: Study Abroad and the Traditional Classroom

Alyssa Beall, West Virginia University

Teaching Strategy

In July of 2013, I found myself on a plane to Japan with nine very excited students. I say "found myself" because I remember very little of getting to the airport. I had flown in from Rome the night before, after stepping in as a last-minute chaperone for a study abroad to Italy. After four hours of sleep I was back on a plane. The preparation time I had scheduled immediately before the trip hadn't happened, and any last-minute planning with my colleague (who is also my husband) was promptly undermined by my falling into a very deep sleep.

After a long plane ride, an unfortunately planned but successful train trip, and a few taxis, we were in the heart of Nagoya around 6 pm. Our small neighborhood had everything I had hoped for: the "western-style" hotel to help ease any possible culture shock, a variety of different restaurants for the students to explore, and the typical tiny Shinto shrines that are found in each block of the city. The majority of our students had not been outside of the United States; in fact, three of them had never been on a plane. Though I knew we needed to help the students adjust, I would be lying if I said that *I* didn't need to adjust as well. This was my first trip to Asia, and while my experience with traveling in other areas served for basics like metro systems and currency exchange, I quickly realized that Rome and Nagoya are drastically different!

The first thing I noticed the next morning was the reaction of the students to the range of religious practices they observed. They were not accustomed to people engaging in multiple religions at the same time and in the same place. Simply wandering around the grounds of Atsuta Shrine and Osu Kannon in Nagoya, for example, demonstrated the combinations of Shinto, Buddhist, and folk and indigenous religious iconography and practices. While I do typically start my semester-long world religions courses by discussing issues of syncretism and combinations of practice, and many of our study abroad students had heard similar lectures before, the experience was quite different for them. This overlapping of traditions became a very interesting entry point into discussion both on the trip and later in my home classroom.

Our goals for this trip, and the assignments required, were relatively straightforward: a short paper before the trip addressing a major site, a daily journal kept during the trip, and a longer theoretical/reflective paper after the conclusion of the trip. Part of the first assignment was also to take place each day. Students were expected to contribute to the on-site teaching for their particular place. It was this assignment that proved to be the most effective for learning, as well as being the assignment that started my thinking about how to best incorporate "the classroom" into study abroad, and how to bring those ideas back into the traditional classroom at WVU.

Background and Theory

Short-term study abroad trips appear to incorporate "active learning" by their very nature, yet the broad scope of the programs can be overwhelming, especially when combined with first-time travel. Since we do not usually hire guides for large portions of the trip, it is part of our faculty responsibilities to cover historical background, religious significance of sites, and other main points along the way.

Obviously there are a variety of ways to incorporate lecture into any study abroad program. On previous trips, I had observed or participated in several different setups: nightly one-hour lectures; on-site, hands-on instruction (in the case of an archaeology-based trip); planned and/or off-the-cuff lectures at stops during the day. As someone who likes to incorporate visual aids into any class, I prefer on-site lecture and discussions while traveling. Lecturing on medieval women mystics immediately before taking students to view the head-relic of Catherine of Siena is difficult to top!

As we hoped, allowing the students to take over part of the responsibility for on-site "lecture" accomplished several key things. First, even limited to a specific city or site focus, the students gained a good knowledge of the larger context we were exploring. For example, though they had (hopefully) looked at a map before leaving the United States, few of the students had any idea of the relative size of cities and their suburbs. Researching a particular site and its historical context seemed to bring the country as a whole into clearer focus for each of the students.

Second, the idea of serving as the class's designated expert on a particular site or city, and sharing that information with their peers, did seem to encourage in-depth learning for students. This is not surprising if one accepts the idea that teaching *others* is an effective learning tool. As an added bonus, I found that the students were more likely to stop and pay close attention to the information from their peers, knowing that all the students were equally "on the spot" for the information at their chosen site.

Finally, the students also learned a great deal from the very real interaction between theory and practice. In other words, we can talk all we want about purification rituals in Shinto, but the students gained far more from observing how people followed (or *didn't* follow) the correct rules. Many of their final papers ended up reflecting on how "real life" varied from our textbook explanations. This is, for me, the real benefit of study abroad.

Conclusions and Extensions

Obviously, the city/site presentation is a version of a teaching and learning technique that many of us already use in the classroom. In my other courses, I have been experimenting with extremely short on-the-spot group presentations. In my humanities course, for example, I assign a piece of art for a group to examine and discuss in the context of the period we are covering. After five or ten minutes, they deliver a brief summary of their findings to the rest of the class.

Study abroad experiences don't end when the trip does. Over the last three years I've stayed in contact with the majority of students and have seen repeated instances where a three-week trip has changed the direction or focus of a student's studies. Two of our students from the 2013 Japan trip applied to teach English in Japan after graduation and a student from the 2014 Japan trip is enrolling in an intensive Japanese language internship in summer 2015.

As a teacher, I have found myself blending many of the images and lessons learned by our overseas students into my traditional classroom, and this is the area where I believe our study abroad experiences can continue to be developed. My goal after our programs this summer is to incorporate

even more of the students' own experiences into my classrooms, in part by having a short presentation at WVU as an option for the study abroad assignments. Many of our students already help us staff our Study Abroad Fair table and speak at informational sessions; the incoming students take previous stories very seriously. In a state where international travel is not terribly common, I am excited to develop new ways of incorporating the "student-as-instructor" role into my classroom at home.

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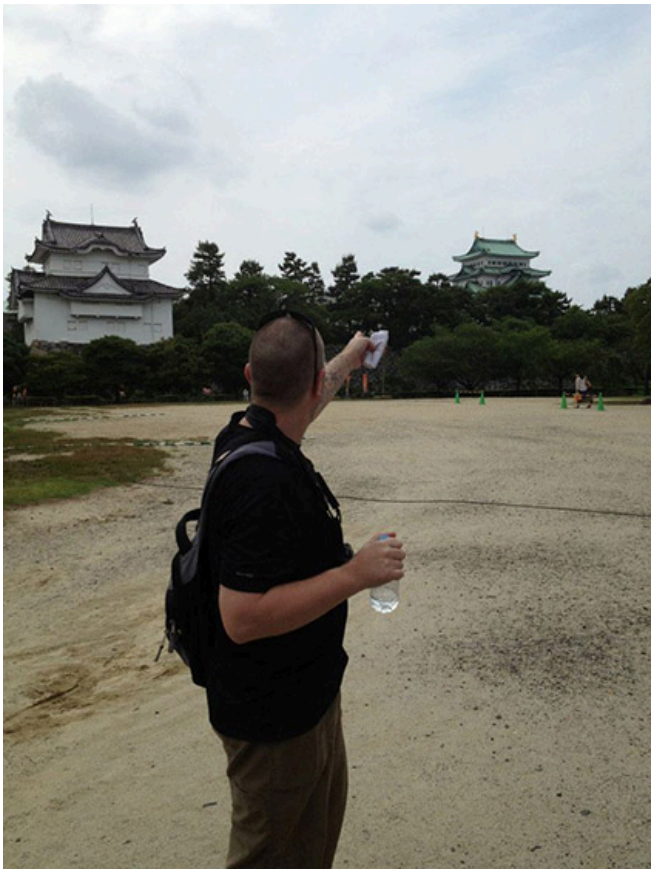
Study Abroad, Pedagogy, and "Expedient Means"

Alex Snow, West Virginia University

Introduction: "Fingers Pointing at Castles"

In June of 2013, I helped lead a group of undergraduate students from West Virginia University on a three-week study abroad trip to Japan. As part of my job responsibilities within the Program for Religious Studies, it would be the first time I had been in charge of coordinating such an excursion, having had the opportunity to visit parts of Israel the previous summer on a colleague's trip so as to "get the hang" of things and "learn the ropes" of short-term study abroad. I had been teaching part-time, and now full-time, for over fifteen years but never outside of the classroom. Then, with the help and support of my wife and disciplinary colleague, I found myself about to begin a three-week adventure in travel, advice, and daily student mentorship; and by association, an almost continuous, usually spontaneous, strategic experiment in on-site pedagogical techniques.



Author at *Nagoya-jo*. Nagoya, Japan, 2013. Photo Credit: Alyssa Beall

In preparation, my students and I spent the better part of a year working through various undergraduate courses on Japanese religious culture, history, and practice, including Religions of China and Japan, Asian Sacred Scriptures, Zen Buddhism, and Religion and Culture and Contemporary Japan. Specifically, we immersed ourselves in a literary and pragmatic worldview that many practicing and teaching Buddhists would recognize as "upayic," if I can make an adjective out of the classic Sanskrit pedagogical term *upaya*, one of "expedient means." Yes, we learned about Siddhartha, the historical Buddha, and about the various political sects of practice like Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana. Yes, we studied and debated philosophic ideas and concepts like "interdependence" (*pratitya-samutpada*), "impermanence" (*anicca*), "emptiness" (*sunyata*), and "no-thingness" (*anatman*). And yes, we tried to put the Four Noble Truths into their historical context and to generate adequate interpretations of certain sacred texts (*sutras*). We even debated the merits and demerits of the "precepts" (*sila*). Finally, we desperately tried to imagine, with as much detail as possible, the various relationships between personal and social salvation that Japanese practices like meditation, tea ceremonies, flower arrangements, archery, calligraphy, and even *koan* practice, might embody. In sum, we compared and contrasted, with as much academic vigor as possible, the interrelationships between Japanese politics, colonial Buddhism, imperial Chinese influences like Taoism and Confucianism, and indigenous traditions like Shinto; and of course, we included the post-WWII conditions in Japan that led to the now-variegated and complicated forms of secularity, new religious movements, and 21st century expectations/anxieties of new generations today.

Nothing, however, could have prepared us for our first morning out on the city streets of Nagoya. No amount of coursework, no amount of reading, no amount of theoretical or philosophical sophistication, no fancy pedagogical dance within the comfy confines of the classroom prepared me for the first time I found myself, with twelve bright, eager, slightly naive, and greatly jet-lagged students, standing before the first supposed site of interest on our trip's itinerary. And so, as the photo above attests, I found myself leading them up to the sprawling public grounds of*Nagoya-jo* (Nagoya Castle). And there, to my own shock and surprise, I began my first unplanned lecture by "pointing" at the looming structure (a metaphor for the next three weeks of teaching anxiety!) that we were ever-so-slowly approaching. I cannot help but think of the many classic examples of "fingers pointing at moons" in so much of the academic literature; hence I ask the pedagogical questions: Who/what spoke on this trip, and how, and for whom? Was it me, or was it the structures, history, and inherent Japanese meanings and material cultures themselves that I found myself precariously pointing at?

One *Torii* Forward, Two *Toriis* Back

These stories are part of a larger discussion about the benefits (one step/*torii* forward) and pitfalls (two steps/*tori* back) of extending the student learning experience into travel outside the university or college. We ask questions about how these travel experiences benefit students in the long term and how study abroad might make us better teachers. We explore the most useful paths to prepare for and implement different methods of teaching and learning while abroad, as well as how to incorporate those lessons into our classrooms back at home. Specifically, we pursue particular teaching and learning techniques that provide the best experience [read: most useful] for study abroad participants, and we explore whether culturally specific pedagogies like *upaya* can be incorporated into the more traditional, lecture-based experiences; if so, where or how?

In Sanskrit, *upaya* is defined as "expedient means" and is often combined with the term *kaushalya* ("cleverness"), forming *upaya-kaushalya,* meaning "skill in means." *Upaya-kaushalya* emphasizes that teachers/practitioners may use specific methods or techniques that befit the situation—a skill which refers to the ability to adapt one's message to any audience. The most important concept in "skill in

means" is the use of a specific teaching (means) geared to the particular audience taught. Edward Conze, in *A Short History of Buddhism*, says "'Skill in means' is the ability to bring out the spiritual potentialities of different people by statements or actions which are adjusted to their needs and adapted to their capacity for comprehension."

Author at *Sanko-Inari Jinja*. Inuyama, Japan, 2013. Photo Credit: Alyssa Beall

Several days after *Nagoya-jo* and wondering just how spontaneous and effective my on-site teachings had gone, I found myself literally standing within a tunnel of *torii* gates (shrines demarcating the presence of the "sacred") at *Sanko-Inari Jinja* in Inuyama, with one trusting student apparently ready and willing to move forward and through, and yet another hanging back, seemingly hesitating, if just for a moment, to follow me to the next big thing. What do I say? What do I do? What technique to I employ? What strategy do I apply? As a teacher, how do I teach on the fly, how do I mediate meaning and context while sweating and re-hydrating? How do I talk about the "sacred" in Japan while constantly taking one step forward, and two steps back?

Before coming to Japan, my students and I learned about Buddhist teaching techniques indebted to legends, history, and myths like the Buddha's famous Flower Sermon, Master Joshu's infamous "Mu!", the sixth Patriarch Hui-neng's"sudden" enlightenment, Basho's *haiku*, and Chuang-tzu's poetic and real-life wandering. Within all of them simmered a refusal to dogmatize, a refusal to canonize, a refusal to systematize or categorize. They all point to esoteric, spontaneous, and unpredictable styles of teaching and learning that harbor great potential, in my opinion, for application to study abroad situations and

scenarios.

Nostalgia: Coming Home and Beginning Again

WVU 2013 Study Abroad Students. *Yasukuni Jinja Shrine*, Tokyo, Japan. Photo Credit: Alex Snow

Our trip that first summer lasted three weeks, and by the end, we were all physically, emotionally, and intellectually drained. Above you see the students walking out of *Yasukuni Jinja* in Tokyo. The next morning they would all, somewhat nostalgically, catch a flight at Narita Airport for the long trip back home. They have been pushed to consider issues of spirituality, history, gender, language, and food incredibly foreign to them all. They have dealt with the prescience of politics, specifically that day at Yasukuni, struggling to understand the complexities of war, geopolitics, and religion. And so, trailing somewhat behind, I took a small snapshot of these weary travelers and wondered if they'd learned what they/I/we set out to learn three weeks previous while sitting at the departure gate in Pittsburgh International Airport.

However, the religions, philosophies, and worldviews of Japan necessitate openness to repetition. After another year's refection, another year's worth of teaching, research, and planning, another year's worth of expectations and anxieties, I set out to do it again! Below is a photo of a new set of students that embarked on the "Philsopher's Walk" (*Tetsugaku-no-Michi*) the following summer, in 2014.

WVU 2014 Study Abroad Students, Tetsugaku-no-Michi, Kyoto, Japan, 2014. Photo Credit: Alex Snow

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Theology, Filmmaking, and Social Justice Immersion

John J. O'Keefe, Creighton University

Introduction

Several years ago, I, with two of my colleagues here at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska, created a program called The Backpack Journalism Project. A collaboration between the Department of Theology and the Department of Journalism, Media, and Computing, this program uses the tool of documentary filmmaking to educate undergraduate students about the challenges facing people in the developing world and marginalized societies.[1] To date, our project has produced four short documentary films, one set in the Dominican Republic, two set in Uganda, and one set in Bethel, Alaska.

In our first film, *Esperanza,* we profiled the work of Pedro Pena, a Catholic deacon who works in the heart of the worst slum in Santiago, Dominican Republic. The slum is built around and on top of a city dump. Pena labors to improve the health and education of local residents.

The second and third film projects are set in Northern Uganda. Both of these films explore some aspect of the legacy of violence. *Mato Oput* portrays local efforts to forgive former child soldiers and to reintegrate them into the community. *Wer Uganda* is a film about the healing role of music in the traditional culture of the region. *Mato Oput* screened in several film festivals in the United States and was awarded Best Picture at the Re-Image Film Festival in 2012.

Our most recent film, *Mother Kuskokwim,* considers the impact of climate change and economic hardship on the Yup'ik people of Southwestern Alaska. This film is currently making its way through the film festival circuit and has been accepted to four festivals at the time of this writing.

Theory and Strategy

Creighton is a Jesuit and Catholic university, and the Backpack Journalism Project is best understood as a product of this context. Beginning with the leadership of Pedro Arrupe, who became Superior General of the Jesuits in 1965, the global Society of Jesus committed itself more deeply to serving those at the margins of modern society. As a part of this effort, the Jesuit order has encouraged all of their affiliated institutions around the world to attempt similar engagement.

Of special relevance for our project is language that appears in the decrees of the 35th General Congregation of the Jesuits, which took place in 2008. In decree 3, paragraph 29, we encounter an invitation and a challenge:

> Among the defining characteristics of our globalized world are new communications technologies. They have a tremendous impact on all of us, especially the young. They can be

> powerful instruments for building and supporting international networks, in our advocacy, in our work of education, and in our sharing of our spirituality and our faith. This Congregation urges Jesuit institutions to put these new technologies at the service of those at the margins.[2]

The Backpack Journalism Project is one response to this invitation.

The program is structured around a five-week intensive summer immersion experience. Students receive six core credits (in theology and journalism) for their efforts. We require no prior experience in filmmaking, and we welcome students from any major.

The five weeks unfold as follows. In week one, the students meet all day to receive intensive instruction in video shooting, interview techniques, and video editing. In addition, they receive lectures in ecclesiology and journalistic storytelling. In weeks two through four, we travel to our destination and shoot the film. The topic of the film, as well as most of the key interviews, is arranged in advance by the instructors. However, these plans often change as the project unfolds, and the students assist in making necessary adjustments to the production schedule. Before returning to Omaha, we spend a few days traveling as tourists rather than working as filmmakers. The final days of the project are dedicated to creating a "rough cut" of the film, which is finished later by the faculty and student volunteers. Along the way, students also complete all related academic assignments.

This program is an intense experience for both students and faculty. Not only are we working very hard to do a good job, but we are together all the time and wrestling with the reality of global poverty. Most students are deeply challenged by this reality, and we want them to be. However, we also recognize that students need help processing the encounter. In order to facilitate this, we rely upon the principles of Ignatian Pedagogy, which stress helping students connect the dots between academic content and their own experiences. Ignatian Pedagogy, with its emphasis on developing quality educational experiences for students and encouraging reflection, action, and evaluation of those learning experiences, is a tool that helps to facilitate intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth.[3]

Conclusion

The Backpack Journalism Project is designed to invite our students to wake up to their own privilege and, in so waking, become more engaged with the needs of the world. To help facilitate this shift in perspective, we meet before, during, and after the trip for reflection and discussion.

We remind the students that the goal of this project is to tell the stories we encounter with as much reverence and respect as we can, not to parachute in with life-changing solutions to global problems. While we genuinely hope telling these stories will in some way assist the people and communities who receive us, we also remind the students that we are going to receive more than we give and that we need to receive this gift with humility and thanks. The following comments from students who participated in our latest project suggest that they have accepted well this invitation:

> "The Backpack Journalism Project has been the most incredible experience of my college career. While I learned so much during the entire program, the most powerful aspect of the trip to Alaska was hearing the stories of the Yup'ik people and how climate change is threatening their way of life. Being in this vulnerable part of the world has reminded me to be conscious of my actions, both big and small. I am thankful to be able to share our documentary with others and give a voice to the people of Bethel."

> "Participating in the Backpack Journalism trip, particularly our experiences in Alaska, really

> taught me a lot about global impact. When you visit another place that is experiencing the negative side effects of others' actions, it really makes you step back and reevaluate your own life choices."
>
> "Visiting Alaska has taught me more about myself and my place in the world, and the consequential impact, whether it is positive or negative, that I can have on it."

I have been teaching undergraduates for twenty-two years, and this is one of the most satisfying pedagogical experiences I have had in my career. Although it is extremely labor intensive, I have emerged from each of our projects with deeper commitment to Jesuit liberal arts education. It can, and often does, change lives.

Notes

[1] For a more detailed discussion of the goals of the Backpack Journalism Project see, O'Keefe, John J. 2012. "God Through the Camera Frame: Backpack Journalism and the Catholic Imagination." In *Religion and the Visual,* edited by Ronald A. Simkins and Wendy M. Wright, 154–166. Omaha, NE: The Kripke Center. http://moses.creighton.edu/jrs/2012/2012-12.pdf.

For more information about the idea of "Backpack Journalism," visit the blog of Bill Gentile, one of the first backpack journalists: http://billgentile.com/backpackjournalism/

[2] The official Decrees of General Congregations 35 are available at: http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/GC35/

[3] A useful summary of the principles of Ignatian Pedagogy can be found on the website of Xavier University: http://www.xavier.edu/jesuitresource/ignatian-resources/jesuit-education-ignatian-pedagogy.cfm

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