HOW DOES COMMUNITY IMPACT THE EDUCATION ABROAD LEARNING EXPERIENCE?

by

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ABSTRACT

Rising influences of nationalism and xenophobia threaten peace, stability and progress in an increasingly globalized world. Education abroad claims to address these concerns through mobilizing students to foreign countries. This study examines a short term, faculty led education abroad program at St. Stephen’s University through observations, student assignments, surveys, and qualitative interviews to determine what forms of learning take place, what kind of student relationships develop, what impact previous experiences of community have, and what effect being a faith community has on academic engagement. An analysis of data sets provides evidence of transformational learning among students, fostered by safe spaces intentionally facilitated by leaders. Opportunities for individual and group reflection enabled students to connect as a group, process experiences, and further the experiential learning process. Going forward, education abroad needs to equip facilitators to create safe spaces and foster critical reflection, and investigate liminality, communitas and spirituality’s potential contributions.

Key words: education abroad, experiential learning, safe spaces, reflection, liminality, communitas, community, spirituality
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CHAPTER ONE-INTRODUCTION

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
Through the unknown, unremembered gate
When the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning;
At the source of the longest river
The voice of the hidden waterfall
And the children in the apple-tree
Not known, because not looked for
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
Between two waves of the sea.

T.S. Eliot

Hard wired for experiential learning, I have been chasing experiences most of my life, though not necessarily through the broader philosophical framework of experiential education. Early experiential learning moments come from summer camp as camper and staff member, growing up on a farm, and outdoor education trips in high school. My first international experience occurred when my father sold the dairy in 1988 and we went to Disneyland, taking a day trip to Tijuana where I recall my father haggling for a leather gun case and luggage set.

Education abroad forays began with my enrolment at St. Stephen’s University (SSU) in 2005 on a short term faculty led program to Greece and Turkey. I can recall the moment at the airport in Boston when Will spoke about his and his wife’s experience as program assistants on SSU’s Europe education abroad program. Something inside me
latched on to their description and thirteen years later I have participated in the leadership of five Europe and three Southeast Asia education abroad programs at SSU.

I have found that experience alone does not leave the learner truly satisfied. Reflection instills meaning into experience. Without reflection, experiences can be pleasant, even inspiring, but without integration into any pre-existing frameworks, they are prone to slip away, or cease to develop beyond stand alone stories that fail to elicit further conversation.

During lunch at SSU one day, Alan Sears, Gregg Finley and I were engaged in the nuances of the education abroad programs at SSU. Alan noted that a master’s thesis could pursue the matter further, and though I had no prior intention of pursuing a master’s degree, here I am.

**Education Abroad: A Growing Field**

Within every society, there are always those who desire to learn from outside the perspective of the community they are familiar with. So trying to track the origin of education abroad is in some ways an unnecessary task as it is a recognized human practice to go and learn from the other. In contrast, education abroad is a young field academically, initiated as a response to criticisms of the increase in education abroad initiatives in the 20th century. Education abroad is defined as education that occurs outside the participant’s home country, and includes study abroad, work, volunteering, non-credit internships, and directed travel. Key to being included as education abroad is that these programs are driven to a significant degree by learning goals (CBIE, 2018). As education abroad programs sought to justify their own existence, research was initiated
on what students were learning, and how to help them learn more effectively. Moving the field from practice to research has been slow, evidenced by the advent of the Frontiers Journal in 1995, The Forum on Education Abroad in 2001, and the shift to include services to outgoing US education abroad students by the Association of International Educators (NAFSA) in 1990. Knowledge and research are building, but the field is relatively young, and despite the criticisms, there remains pressure to continue to send out more students without corresponding efforts of research and assessment of what students are actually learning (Engle & Engle, 2003; Engle & Engle, 2013; Vande Berg, Paige & Lou, 2012). With student participation growing quickly, there is both need and availability to contribute to this field.

In Canada, this is particularly important, where there has been little published research on education abroad, and where participation rates in education abroad programs stood at just 2.3% of all university students and 1% of college students enrolled in Canada in 2014-15 (CBIE, 2016). Current projections are that 10-12% of undergraduate students will participate in education abroad before graduation (AUCC, 2014). Several groups have been putting increasing pressure on federal and provincial governments, higher education institutions, and the business community to actively support education abroad initiatives to bring Canadian efforts in line with other countries (AUCC, 2014; CBIE, 2016; CIPS, 2017).

**Co-learners Impact on Each Other’s Learning**

Though much recent research explores what students are learning in education abroad initiatives with respect to language and intercultural competencies, it does not
attempt to understand how participants impact each other in the learning process. Research in the past decade has been calling for a significant increase in the role of faculty and other program facilitators in the learning process (Engle & Engle, 2003; Nam, 2011; Pedersen, 2010; Savicki, 2015; Vande Berg et al., 2012). Though an important step in the process of understanding how learning occurs in education abroad programming, it does not address the question of what impact co-learners have on each other’s learning experiences. What is happening to enhance or detract from the learning process outside of formal interventions from program leaders? Do group interactions outside of formal interventions from program leaders serve as distractors or facilitators? Do co-learners serve as encouragers and sounding boards that help to propel each other into further learning, or insulators assuring each other they are engaging and learning from other cultures while in reality they are retreating from engagement, discussing only ideas of engagement in the safety of the group?

Answering the question of what impact co-learners have on each other’s learning experiences helps to narrow which aspect of learning is being examined in this study, and what is defined as learning in that context. For the purposes of this study, learning will not be a restricted term, and will refer to any new realization or understanding a student comes to through their education abroad experiences. The focus point will be attempting to determine what role interactions among the group traveling together play in instigating and facilitating that learning. A social constructivist perspective examining learning that occurs within group interactions helps to determine what learning is taking place in a specific socio-cultural space. A few studies have been completed in education abroad from a social constructivist perspective (Goldoni, 2009; Sutherland, 2011), but the focus
is on interactions students have with the host culture, or with formal interventions from program leaders, not on informal interactions that occur between students and program leaders in unstructured moments.

**Community and St. Stephen’s University**

St. Stephen’s University developed an unintentional interaction with community as a by-product of size. Not originally envisioned as a small institution, circumstances in its early years reduced it to a handful of students and faculty for much of its first fifteen years. The organization began to appreciate the sense of community being developed in this small educational context. Faced with the prospect of closing due to lack of enrolment in the late 1980s, discussions among the students, staff, faculty and board of governors suggested a strong emphasis on intentional community needed to be at the core of the university’s efforts (Gorrie, 2015). For the purpose of this study, an intentional community is defined as a group of people that voluntarily and intentionally share several aspects of life together. Since that time, the focus has shifted to developing people of character alongside academic pursuits, as referenced in the university’s mission statement (SSU, 2018). This approach presupposes that people of character have a good basis for moving into academics, leadership and all areas of interest, in line with the original vision of a liberal arts education. Formation of intentional community has continued in partnership with the emphasis on developing people of character and academics. Norman D. Lea, Chairman of the board for several years, spent time researching intentional communities across the world, visiting around thirty personally to understand what helped facilitate building an intentional community. Those efforts saw SSU take an
interest in modern and historic Celtic communities, primarily in Britain and Ireland, because of their efforts at integrating work, food, the environment, life rhythms, and faith experiences into living life well. Authors such as Jean Vanier and Parker Palmer also had considerable impact on the growing concept of an educational community (G. Finley, personal communication, December 21, 2015).

**Historical Overview of Education Abroad at SSU**

St. Stephen’s University’s education abroad programs were born out of the time of reinvention referenced above. While community was a major component of the reinvention, the other aspect was an emphasis on students and teachers immersing themselves in experiential education environments together. Education abroad was viewed as a means to bring students in deeper contact with course content on campus, and provide an opportunity for community to develop as teachers became teacher-students and students became student-teachers (Gorrie, 2015). SSU’s education abroad programs began in 1975 when Don Kantel, the founding president, took a group of students to Europe for three months to study European languages, history and contemporary culture. The education abroad programs took a hiatus after that initial program, re-integrated into the curriculum in 1990 when the Southeast Asia program began, followed in 1992 by the reintroduction of the Europe program. Students have been required to participate in the Europe and Southeast Asia programs, both of which constitute a full academic term, as a part of their BA degree, a requirement not reflected elsewhere in higher education in North America. Goucher College (2018) and Susquehanna University (2018) in the United States have made education abroad a
requirement for their undergraduates in recent years, but they do not require a full academic semester abroad. In addition, Goucher students can only participate in one education abroad program, and Susquehanna students can choose to study in the US if they prefer. Kalamazoo College (2016) also attracts attention with a participation rate of 80-85% in education abroad initiatives. This leaves SSU in a very unique position as the lone institution to offer two full semester education abroad programs as part of its BA program. Since the introduction of its International Studies program in 2009, SSU has also offered additional education abroad opportunities specifically tailored to its International Studies program.

**Current Model for Education Abroad at SSU**

The current model of education abroad programs offered at SSU are short-term faculty-led programs (Vande Berg, 2003). For the Southeast Asia and Europe programs, students participate in on site orientation sessions at SSU for between one and a half and three weeks. They then travel abroad with their class and program leaders for between six and eight weeks. Southeast Asia participants travel abroad in the fall semester of their second year. Europe participants travel abroad in the summer semester at the end of their third year. Southeast Asia participants return to SSU for debriefing sessions and space to complete assignments. Europe participants complete assignments in a location of their choosing. In both programs, program leaders from SSU that students are familiar with plan and implement the programs, and accompany students abroad for the duration of the experience. In the Southeast Asia program, partners that include universities in the host countries facilitate lectures, field trips and home stay experiences. Program leaders from
SSU support students and provide opportunities for personal, intercultural and academic reflection and integration with their course materials. In the Europe program, the experience is more nomadic in nature, with program leaders selecting locations and developing a program around those locations. Academic content abroad features a combination of lectures from program leaders and local professors, and presentations from local guides and SSU students. Program leaders guide students through all of these experiences, along with the logistics of traveling and meals. Both semesters account for a full academic term of fifteen credit hours. All courses are designed, taught and assessed by SSU professors, with some content provided on site by guest lecturers.

To this point, no formal statistics have been gathered on SSU’s education abroad programming, no formal consulting has taken place with other organizations for program development, and no faculty have participated in conferences or submitted papers to journals. Staff have lightly consulted resources from NAFSA, the Forum on Education Abroad and the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) in recent years. Largely due to the necessity of taking care of internal needs at a non-profit organization, SSU has developed its education abroad programs in isolation from the education abroad community.

Community’s Potential Contribution to Learning in SSU Education Abroad

Motivation for pursuing this study stems partly from personal observations of interactions SSU students have on campus regarding education abroad. The Southeast Asia program runs in the fall semester of students’ second year, and the Europe program runs during the summer semester of students’ third year before returning to SSU to finish
their final year of studies. Returning from their programs, conversations abound on campus recalling shared memories and experiences concerning the programs as participants engage each other, staff, faculty, and other students who have yet to participate in their own program, or are veterans of earlier trips.

Conversations often initiate with stories about adventures or other engaging memories. As conversations lengthen, they evolve into topics of art, culture, politics, religious difference and other areas related to students’ areas of study and personal experience during their program(s). As students and most staff and faculty have participated in these programs, opportunities for these conversations abound. Students preparing to participate in their own education abroad program are surrounded by stories, reflections and insights by peers, staff and faculty, building anticipation and initiating informal preparation. Conversations filter into dinner conversations, classroom discussions, and casual conversation in common areas. Students participating in SSU education abroad programs have a rare opportunity amongst people who travel; an audience to share experiences with, and listen to related experiences from.

This set of circumstances appears to both build and deepen experiences of community and education abroad beyond direct participation in education abroad programming at SSU. One large question that emerges from this observation is what impact community has on the education abroad learning experience. The answer is potentially elusive as considerations could extend from the moment a potential student first hears about SSU’s education abroad programs, and could continue as long as they live. For the purpose of this study, the time frame to examine the impact of community on education abroad learning will be limited to a few months before students’ departure
for their Europe program until approximately six months after they complete the program. Guided by the questions below, the research will first look broadly at what students are learning in their education abroad experience, then focus in to examine what impact personal interactions, a community environment, and a background as a faith community have on that learning.

**Research Questions**

- What are SSU students learning in their education abroad programs? (facts, negotiating cultural difference, intra/interpersonal awareness?)
- What kinds of relationships and interactions between and among participants are fostered by SSU’s education abroad programs?
- How does the community environment at SSU impact students’ interaction with new cultural contexts?
- How does SSU’s stance as a faith community impact students’ ability to engage their experiences academically?
CHAPTER TWO-EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION, EDUCATION ABROAD, AND COMMUNITY: AN INTERWOVEN EXPLANATION

Addressing the question of how community impacts the education abroad learning experience will involve exploration of three fields of study and their interactions with each other in this context. Experiential education as an overarching field will be explored to gather a clear understanding of how individuals learn and derive meaning from daily interactions in life. Education abroad as a form of experiential education will be explored to ascertain how learning happens while traveling, living and learning together, specifically looking at how co-learners’ interactions effect each other. Finally, community, another form of experiential education, will be explored to understand how group interactions impact individual and group learning. As these topics weave together, they contain the potential to reveal alternative approaches for Western education systems. It is my anticipation that contributions from studies on community may further explain learning interaction beyond what education abroad and experiential education have addressed on their own, but which will also apply to the education abroad context.

Experiential Education

“Truth is not manifest in experience…” (Kolb, 2015, p.xxi), but in the working out of it.

Experiential education is a field that seems akin to the Green Party in that several people might like what you’re getting at, but few may believe you’ll actually make things work if handed the reins. One of the potential reasons for this is that experiential
education as a field has not been able to position itself in a manner that the rest of the educational community can rally behind. Many have been drawn to the inspiration and charisma of John Dewey, but he was only laying a beginning framework for the field. Others need to follow in his footsteps and flesh it out. Blenkinsop (2006) suggests there is a distinct need for a “comprehensive and consistent enough philosophy of education to do the job that is currently being asked in the mainstream.” Kraft (1981) asserts that the field is waiting for someone like Dewey or Piaget to come along and fill that gap. Kolb (2015) has made a significant contribution which will be expanded on below. In the meantime, Smith and Knapp (2011) have attempted to lay more of the groundwork by gathering a collection of works examining the contributions of educational thinkers and practitioners. The Association for Experiential Education currently defines experiential education as “a philosophy that informs many methodologies in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people's capacity to contribute to their communities” (2018).

Human beings engage in experiential activities innately, and have acknowledged the importance of engaging in reflection in addition to activity for thousands of years, as evidenced by Socrates’ statement “an unexamined life is not worth living” and Aristotle’s assertion that *phronesis*, or a contextual judgment using the eye of the soul, is built by moving back and forth between reflection and experience (Stonehouse, Allison, & Carr, 2011; Roberts, 2012). So why bother studying it if it is all intuitive? That basic assumption became significantly challenged with the incremental global advent of the public education system in the mid nineteenth century. This carried with it a suggestion
that a less experiential and more formal, standardized education was what the entire human population really needed, not just administrators, nobility or spiritual leaders. First Nations voices have served and still serve as a counter narrative to this shift, questioning “how Western notions of experience in education are often set up as mechanical and deterministic” (Roberts, 2012, p.25). John Dewey, the founder of progressive education, was one of the most significant opponents within Western civilization and dedicated his life’s work to advocating for experiential education, focusing on how learning combines experience, reflection and experimentation to construct knowledge (Stonehouse et al., 2011).

One of the criticisms directed at Dewey was that he valued students being able to fit into the existing structure of society. Reconstructionism, fuelled by thinkers like George Counts and Theodore Brameld, sought to address this by encouraging students to assess and challenge existing practices, views and values within society (Smith & Knapp, 2011). While Dewey did advocate a position of eventual social integration, he was ultimately interested in alleviating the social problems of the day, which would require standing up to and addressing those problems instead of accepting them. Roberts (2012) points to Dewey’s (1998) ideas of integrated and engaged learning that serve as counters to “mis-educative” and “disconnected” learning experiences, which “function[s] as a form of isolation, something Dewey fought against in all of its forms… A better construction involved connecting the individual, and her experiences, to the larger community” (2012, p. 60).

If Dewey stood in the limelight of experiential education in the early and middle portions of the twentieth century, David Kolb has capped the latter portion, particularly
with his introduction of the experiential learning model (ELM) (Kolb, 2015). This model is a helpful summary of what we have come to know about the experiential learning cycle, which passes through the phases of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. Engaging in this cycle again and again, both individually and culturally, creates a layered and specific understanding about the related experiences and the areas of knowledge surrounding them. Dewey (1998) and Freire (1970) both argued that the reflective process would only become engaged once some unique experience interrupted the established knowledge set (Kolb, 2015). Mezirow (2003) and Beard (2006) also assert that the interrupting experience, combined with critical reflection, provides opportunity for transformational learning. Transformational learning is an external and internal awareness of incongruence with previous ways of knowing, or cognitive dissonance, that gives way to deep learning and changes in thinking, believing and behaving, bringing together students’ inner lives with their experiences of the outer world (Dirkx, Mezirow, & Cranton, 2006). Education abroad poises itself as an ideal candidate for providing these required interrupting experiences.

One of the current challenges for the field of experiential education is that it has a tendency to be overly associated with outdoor education or adventure education. These fields have been criticized for too often settling with the approach of learning by doing without giving enough intentional thought to what the larger purpose is for engaging in particular activities, or giving space for reflection on experiences to understand how they relate to other aspects of life beyond the immediate experience.
**Education Abroad**

Like experiential education, education abroad as a concept has always been a part of how humans interact with each other. The most basic expression of this would be if one person went from their own village to a neighbouring village seeking to understand building processes, access various types of food, learn governance procedures, etc. While those might seem like small examples and the difference between two villages might seem insignificant, the concept behind what is happening in that instance is akin to what happens in education abroad today. While education abroad has been associated with humans for as long as there was knowledge of other groups of people, it only emerged as a field of knowledge in the twentieth century. Most of the effort directed toward this study has come from the Western developed world, though authors from other regions have begun to offer contributions in the past couple of decades.

**Current challenges of Education Abroad**

One of the distinct challenges facing education abroad today is the commodification of the industry, with pressure on underfunded departments to get more students to participate in education abroad experiences. With a resounding emphasis on the need for quality programming over duration of time spent abroad or number of students sent abroad, how can practitioners avoid a factory mentality that seeks to push as many students as possible through poorly designed and implemented programs supported by dangerously thin rhetoric that has both plagued and propelled the industry for decades?
Recent studies suggest that a quality program is the most important aspect of an education abroad experience, specifically in contrast to the value of a program’s duration (Anderson, Lorenz & White, 2016; Engle & Engle, 2012; Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2003; Nam, 2011; Ripamonti et al., 2018; Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, & Paige, 2009; Vande Berg, Paige & Lou, 2012). Interestingly, this is synonymous with Dewey’s (1998) assertion that “everything depends upon the quality of the experience which is had” (p.16). This is in distinct contrast to the prevailing previous opinion that “more is better” (Dwyer, 2004), and provides an opportunity for short-term education abroad programs to assert themselves as significant contributors to the transformational process of participants, whether through the acquisition of intercultural competence, academic skill and content, or personal transformation.

One critique of education abroad at this time is the striving for quantifiable results of student learning, with a distinct focus on intercultural competence as the major take away from education abroad. It appears that pressure from the world on outside education abroad has caused the movement to make a knee jerk reaction and put much of its reputation at stake under this one aspect of learning. Intercultural competence is a significant area that should be examined, but not at the expense of other aspects of learning. Areas of learning less easily codified and measured are no less valuable. Learning is messy and professionals across a breadth of fields agree that the models we develop to describe and categorize it are but suggested frameworks that learners stray from frequently. This straying is, in fact, part of the process of the knitting together of the wider tapestry of knowledge and understanding, which Kolb (2015) illustrates as he dialogues about the relationship between common perceptions of experiential and
objective knowledge and learning. This is, after all, the basis of a liberal arts education. Grünzweig and Rinehart (2013) touch on this when they reference Buber’s “dialogical principle of education” (p.18) and assert that

it is possible to develop a humanistic matrix which allows us to judge the success or failure of what we are doing…metaphors, being the basis of human life and perception, have an important place in international educational exchange and also in the description and appreciation of its outcome (p.18).

Understanding intercultural competence and the degree to which students progress in it is valuable, but the net needs to be cast wider, which is part of what this study does; capture the wide view of what students are learning in their education abroad experience, and understand what role ongoing personal interactions with co-participants play to facilitate that learning process.

Community

Community is a dream. Whether lived out, sought after or reminisced, it is a dream that people desire. A place where all can be accepted and respected while they strive to move life forward in a way that honours the environment in its human and more-than-human respects (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Noddings, 1996; Tönnies & Loomis, 1964). There is value in the interactions and movement of the group as a whole, and it is important to acknowledge that interactions consist of personal encounters between people within that group, whether in a small group setting or one on one.

And yet community is a trap, at least for our current cultural mindset. Shared space, whether physical, psychological, or digital, requires some form of shared beliefs
and values that the community will need to choose and find ways to adhere to. Seeking good outcomes for all means dedicating personal time, energy and other resources to others in a time of need, regardless of the reason they have encountered that need. Sharing each other’s fate suggests that we need to take in stride the weaknesses, errors and inefficiencies of those in our community, whether perceived or real. This is in conflict with the values of efficiency and individualism present in Western civilization today. Putnam (2001) discusses how the declining social capital in America is pulling practical and necessary components of community apart, contributing to isolation and a disengaged citizenship. Noddings (1996) recounts the societal perception of a decline in community starting with Robert Nisbet and Paul Tillich in the 1950s. Recent acknowledgements of the decline in community include the United Kingdom’s appointment of a Minister of Loneliness on January 17, 2018 (Mead, 2018).

Interacting with Dewey’s idea of community needing individuals to have freedom of mind and freedom of action to develop and contribute to society, Greene (1988) claims “that the person—that center of choice—develops in his/her fullness to the degree he/she is a member of a live community” (p.43). This points to the idea that the tension between personal freedom and the potential constraints of life in community is key to fostering personal development.

Acknowledging the potentials and pitfalls of various expressions of community (Barrett, 2015; Noddings, 1996), it is also one of the spaces where liminal experiences take place. Liminality is a space between phases of regular life where individuals or a group engage in experiences that have the potential to remake them. In that space each participant is neither their previous self, nor the self they will become after. Liminal
spaces are often initiated through some form of facilitation by a leader(s) and involve a levelling of social status and hierarchies to free participants to engage in questions and meaning making (Turner, 1969).

Communities engaging liminality can encounter the phenomenon of communitas, where participants can bond to (with?) each other in ways that previous social hierarchies do not allow for. This can result in breaking away from old practices and social structures to engage in antistructure together, to make way for new ways of seeing and experiencing life and constructing knowledge and understanding (Turner, 1969). The space that is created in this context provides an opportunity for Buber’s I/Thou perspective (1958) to grab hold, shed previous conceptions of reality, and see something for what it is. In communitas, antistructure pulls participants away from regular life and provides space for transformation to occur as the door opens to creativity (Turner, 1969). The phenomena of liminality and communitas are examples of the disruptive experiences referenced earlier which need to occur before the reflective process becomes engaged (Beard, 2006; Dewey, 1998; Dirkx, Mezirow, & Cranton, 2006; Freire, 1970; Mezirow, 2003; Kolb, 2015).

Turner’s work originated out of observations of indigenous communities, and not surprisingly complements First Nations’ views that offer different notions of validity and verification based upon experience as accumulated wisdom in particular places. They illustrate a construction of experience not individually located but rather intersubjectively connected—both in and between other humans but extending out beyond that to other experiencing
subjects while connecting the natural and supernatural realms (Roberts, 2012, p. 25).

Post-secondary education can provide an opportunity for liminality and communitas to exist, a pulling away from regular routines to enter a time of re-creation, and forming bonds and bridges with other participants, building relationships and social capital. Liminality and communitas are not automatic by-products of post-secondary education though, for many students may pass through without experiencing either. Within post-secondary education, a second opportunity can arise to engage in liminality and communitas via education abroad. Here again the stage is set for the potential to engage in both. Education abroad can be a liminal space, a time set aside from regular society where participants engage in activities that have the potential to remake them. Groups with a pre-existing common experience entering the liminal space of education abroad together have the potential to experience communitas. Here the breaking down of social hierarchies provides a certain freedom where questions emerge about the meaning of life to an extent seldom experienced in regular society. These instances cannot be sustained indefinitely, but they are not meant to be, they are meant to provide an opportunity to enrich regular society. If students are able to engage these experiences, the potential for authentic transformation becomes significant.

Beard (2006) and Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich (2002) argue that the potential for transformation is strongly tied to the ability of facilitators to set a conducive environment and guide participants through that environment in an effective manner. This requires several skill sets that are essential to realizing the process of transformation.
St. Stephen’s University’s education abroad programs are composed of components that foster the potential for liminality and communitas. Liminal space is created by the act of drawing away from the activities and routines of regular society, even regular university life, to engage in an extended exercise of exploring other cultures. Within this space the potential for communitas is fostered by the specific desire for students to become student-teachers and teachers to become teacher-students. This fulfills Turner’s requirement for participants to willingly give up previous senses of status and hierarchy to engage their circumstance together in a manner that fosters in-depth reflections on those shared circumstances.

CHAPTER THREE-METHODOLOGY

Overall Design

As I engaged this study, I came from a constructivist paradigm, primarily social constructivism, which looks at the “cognitive structures that are still in the process of maturing, but which can only mature under the guidance of or in collaboration with others” (Berkeley, 2016, Social Constructivism). Drawing heavily on Vygotsky’s Mind in Society (1978), this definition acknowledges the importance of the social nature of learning, and stands in contrast to Young’s (2010) “social realism” which suggests that the social constructivist approach is too simplistic and overruled by more authoritative transmissions of culture and knowledge. Social constructivism complemented my primary question: How does community impact the education abroad learning
experience? Central to this question is the impact on learning of the ongoing interpersonal interactions amongst co-learners, and social constructivism addresses that aspect of learning specifically. While the question is specific, the topic is still quite broad, and will require an examination of the situation from several vantage points to bring together observations that can describe this particular educational phenomenon. This points in the direction of a case study approach.

Case studies allow us to “retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (Yin, 2009, p.4), in a manner that allows us to contribute to particular fields of knowledge; in this case, experiential education, education abroad and community studies. The use of “how” questions in this approach points to the desire to understand how various factors within a single phenomena interrelate, a process that requires staying with the phenomena for a period of time. Through the process of description and interpretation of the phenomena, realizations emerge that serve as reference points for further studies (Merriam & Simpson, 1984; Yin, 2009). Additional criteria for case studies include: conducting the research in naturalistic settings (Yin, 2009); the analysis of data from several and varied sources; and to be looking in depth at a unique situation that has not been previously researched within its field (Merriam & Simpson, 1984; Stake, 1995).

Site, Participants, Data Collection Procedures

The specific instance I engaged was the group of students and staff participating in the SSU Europe 2016 education abroad program. A unique phenomenon amongst higher education programs, the class progresses through their liberal arts education
together and then travels as a unit with familiar staff and faculty who guide them in situ through their educational experience. Unstudied previously both as a specific phenomenon and through the lens of community’s impact on learning, this case study is revelatory in nature (Yin, 2009). This is clearly a ‘bounded system’ with particular temporal and organizational parameters that can then be examined as a whole to determine what the system reveals (Stake, 1995; Thomas & Myers, 2015). Establishing its status as a bounded system ensures that the case is a viable option to study and sets the space within which the researcher will conduct their observations and analysis.

**Figure 1. Data Collection Methods, Timeline**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>May</th>
<th>June</th>
<th>December</th>
<th>December</th>
<th>Dec-Jan</th>
<th>January</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(orientation)</td>
<td>- Pre-program questionnaire - Sense of Community Index 2</td>
<td>- Observations - 2 weeks with group in Italy, Austria</td>
<td>- Invitation to students to participate in research</td>
<td>- Post-program questionnaire - Sense of Community Index 2</td>
<td>- Interviews - Analysis of data sets, including Assignments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I utilized indexes, questionnaires, observations, interviews, and student assignments as data sets. The index used was the Sense of Community Index-2 (SCI-2) (Appendix 7). This index examines the perceptions that a participant has regarding a community they are a part of. Students were given the index to voluntarily complete during the first day of their pre-program orientation in May 2016. Students were also invited to complete the Pre-Program Questionnaire (QU) (Appendix 6) that was adapted from Nam’s (2011) Pre-survey questionnaire to meet this program’s and thesis’ needs. This was an adjustment from the original intent to conduct surveys with the students before they participated in the program. This adjustment was made because as the research process unfolded, I believed that the index and questionnaire would yield better
data than an interview before the program began. Additionally, there would not have been time to complete individual interviews. The SCI-2 index and Pre-Program Questionnaire were distributed by the program leader, collected by them, and stored in a secured location. All students voluntarily completed both except for one student who was Skyping into the orientation component and so did not complete the initial SCI-2 and Pre-Program Questionnaire.

Observations (OB) were collected by myself between the dates of June 8-19 when I joined the group partway through the program at their base locations in Perugia, Italy and Vienna, Austria. The group, including leaders, stayed for one week in a Franciscan monastery on the edge of Perugia, Italy that rented out rooms to university students and travellers. There was a shared kitchen and dining area where the group ate breakfast and supper together for most of their meals, aside from two evenings where they ate out.

In Vienna, Austria, the group stayed for one week in a hostel with apartment style units where approximately four people shared each unit. Breakfasts and suppers were prepared and shared per unit, except for one night when the group ate out.

Observations were conducted in a variety of settings, including accommodations, during transportation, while at site visits, in group visits and during other non-program times. Observations included individual interactions between myself and another participant, small group discussions, and large group scenarios. Data was collected via field notes that were recorded during or as soon as possible after the event, or via audio recordings.

This study involved all willing participants from the SSU Europe 2016 education abroad program. The original intent was to approach the Academic Dean for permission
to conduct the research with students. On further reflection this did not appear to be the best choice as the Academic Dean was also the program leader. The next appropriate authority was the President, who was approached for permission to conduct the research via the Letter to Educational Authority (Appendix 1), and who gave their consent.

Twenty students enrolled in the program and nineteen completed it for academic credit. Since the assignments were a key component of the data sets, only the students who completed the program for academic credit were invited to participate in the research.

In late December students were invited to participate in this study via the Letter to Students (Appendix 2), and One Page Summary (Appendix 3). Those enrolled in classes at SSU had the forms placed in their student mailbox and those who had already graduated had the form emailed to them. Students were given up to two reminders about the form and the last date that it would be accepted. Those who agreed to participate were presented with the SCI-2 again and the Post-Program Questionnaire (QU) (Appendix 4) to complete and return to myself. Nineteen students agreed to participate in the research and seventeen completed the SCI-2 and Post-Program Questionnaire. Once both forms were returned for each student I began scheduling and conducting semi-structured interviews (IN), using the Basic Interview Protocol (Appendix 5). They were conducted individually via Skype for those who were not physically present at the university, and in person for those who were in the area. Their consent was recorded either on the completed consent form that they returned, or else in the interviews, which were digitally recorded. Interviews generally lasted between forty-five and ninety minutes. I used a
saturation method for the interviews and stopped conducting additional interviews once
eleven were completed as there ceased to be additional significant information added.

The group consisted of twelve females and seven males, were between the ages of
twenty one and twenty five at the time of completing the Post-Program Questionnaire,
and indicated that their ethnic background was either Canadian or European. At this time
two students were in their third year of studies, thirteen were in their fourth year, and four
had completed their degree. Seven students were International Studies majors, four were
Psychology majors, one was a History major, one was a Religious Studies major, and the
remaining six were double majors of varying disciplines. When asked where they lived
during their formative years, there were six from New Brunswick, five from Ontario,
three from Alberta, two from Nova Scotia, one from Saskatchewan, one from England,
and one whose formative years were spent internationally. When asked what their native
language was, sixteen declared that theirs as English, one as French, one as English and
French, and one as English and Dutch.

Most students had previous international travel experience of one month’s
duration or less. A little under half had spent between a few months and a few years
living in a foreign culture. All but two students had been on an education abroad
experience previously. A little over half had experience living in intentional community
prior to attending SSU.

Assignments used for this research were drawn from the syllabus for International
Studies 3091: Engaging Contemporary Europe (Appendix 8). Of the five assignments,
four contained material deemed relevant to the research goals and were selected to be part
of the data set. These included a field journal (FJ) where students recorded their learning
engagements during the program and integrated them with material from the other courses in the program and previous educational and life experiences. Two other assignments revolved around student responses to articles or portions of books that were assigned reading to assist students in preparing for the program (PR). The final assignments included in the data sets were the blog entries (BL) that students submitted to SSU’s travel blog that focused on a learning moment the student experienced as a result of participating in the program.

Multiple data sets enabled the development of “converging lines of inquiry” (Yin, 2009, p.115) so that the observations gained strength by and achieved triangulation by being drawn from several information sources. Together, these data sets have the potential to show the nature of and to what extent the community environment at SSU impacts the learning experience for students in education abroad programs. The findings will have relevance to the broader education abroad community as they seek to further understand what impacts student learning in education abroad programming, and how to improve program offerings.

**Role of the Researcher**

Identifying and constructing the case to be studied, establishing and carrying out the information collection mechanisms, and organizing, interpreting and reporting the information that has been collected are a conceptually diverse and daunting set of tasks placed together in the context of a research study. Add to this the flexibility that is given to the researcher in choosing what information to gather, but also the flexibility required to adjust to shifting circumstances and emerging realizations in the midst of the research,
and it becomes quite apparent that the case study researcher must be well prepared and adept at several skill sets.

Though there is no standard to measure any researcher against their proposed study, Yin (2009) suggests five essential aptitudes of a case study researcher. They should be: (a) able to ask good questions in all aspects of the study, from initial identification of the topic to interview skills to teasing out observations from the data; (b) a good listener who can lay their own preconceptions aside to remain open to what an interviewee, participant or document is trying to say, or not say, via words, tone, availability and body language; (c) exercising adaptiveness and flexibility so that shifts that occur in the trajectory of the work are responded to appropriately, even if it means starting over; (d) firmly understanding their topic of study so they can recognize relevant, contradictory or complementary information as it arises, and quickly adjust, collect and potentially change course as a result; and (e) avoiding bias that may consciously or unconsciously push the researcher to prove a particular position or advocate a specific issue.

As I worked at the same place where the research was being conducted and was a teaching assistant for the course that I was drawing the assignment data from, I needed to be vigilant to ensure that I did not compromise the research data I was collecting, harm the individuals I was conducting the research with, or bring my own biases, values and desires for research results inappropriately into the study (Creswell, 2014).
Data Analysis Procedures

The procedure used for data analysis in this research study closely followed Creswell’s (2014) model for data analysis, summarized as:

1. Organize and prepare all data for analysis
2. Read all of the data
3. Begin coding all of the data
4. Generate a description of the setting and emerging categories and themes
5. Bring the themes and description together into a narrative
6. Interpret the results

Organizing and preparing the data for analysis began when I started to accumulate audio recordings once I was with the group. I had anticipated that I would take more notes by hand, but I quickly recognized that using an audio recorder permitted me to more actively and naturally listen and/or participate in the situation I was observing. Since I was not taking notes at the same time that the recordings were being taken, I recognized the importance of storing and securing this information so I backed up the audio recordings in a secure, online location. This became the central place for all digital content related to the research. Once I completed my research time with the group I began to combine my written observations and audio recordings into a single document focused around observations, differentiating between when an observation was manually or digitally recorded. Most assignments were submitted electronically and were stored in the same location as the observations. The Field Notes journals were the only physical assignments submitted and were stored in a locked location. Once all marks were returned to students then the Academic Dean gave me access to the CSI-2 indexes and Pre-Program
Questionnaires that students had completed. The results from these two components were transferred into a spreadsheet format so that pre and post program results could be compared. When the students completed the second CSI-2 and Post-Program Questionnaire and returned them I compiled those results alongside the pre program components to facilitate analysis. This completed the organization and analysis preparation stage of the research.

**Review data**

All of the data was encountered by myself once before embarking on the coding process so that I could have a general sense of the whole picture. I engaged the observation notes while making them and also when I transferred them to an electronic format. I also encountered the audio recorded observations while making them but did not review them prior to coding because of the number of hours of material. I read all of the assignments in their entirety prior to coding because I was not sure what students had written in them and I wanted to be familiar with this content. Questionnaire and index results were reviewed after they had been transferred to an electronic format. Interviews were the last set of data to be collected and were completed just before beginning the coding process.

**Coding**

I had intended to use an online transcription service and a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) to assist with the processes of transcription and coding with both the interviews and assignment analysis components. After researching and experimenting with various options I determined that it would be more
beneficial to complete these aspects manually for accuracy and to ensure adequate contact to ensure familiarity with the material.

Entering the coding process I used three filters to focus my efforts while engaging the various data sets. I looked for patterns in the material, individual instances in the data that stood out as being particularly significant, and data that connected to the research questions of the study.

Beginning with the student assignments, I reread all four assignments used for this research (preparatory readings, field notes journal, blog) and took notes on them. I proceeded one assignment at a time, writing summary notes for each student in a document dedicated to that assignment. Once I finished reading and taking notes on all of the students for that assignment I would compile a summary of base themes emerging across the student data for that assignment. This was accomplished by first recalling what themes stood out in my memory from that assignment, and then by going over the notes I had compiled per student for that assignment to see what additional base themes were present in the data. This process was repeated for each assignment and then for the observations and interviews, both of which required extracting notes from audio recordings. The last sets of data to be integrated were the SCI-2 and Pre and Post Program Questionnaires.

With base themes identified in each data set, a document was created that began with the research questions, and was followed by the list of themes that emerged after engaging all of the data the first time I went through it. Following that were the base themes from each data set. Once compiled, this document was printed, laid out on a table, and reviewed several times to determine what consolidating themes ran through all of the
data sets. Eventually some consolidated themes began to emerge and were written down in a list. Going back through the comprehensive list of base themes, each consolidating theme was connected to all of the base themes that identified with that consolidating theme. During this exercise more consolidating themes emerged, were added to the list, and were connected with base themes. Additionally, it became apparent that some base themes could be paired with more than one consolidating theme. The list of base themes was reviewed several times to ensure that all of the base themes were paired with all of the potential consolidating themes, and that multiple consolidating themes were connected to a base theme when appropriate. Twelve consolidating themes were identified by the end of this exercise: Career, Community, Leaders, Learning, Liminal, Locals, The Other, Program Structure, Reflection, three different expressions of Safe Spaces, Spirituality and Students.

At this point a spreadsheet was created that organized the themes by consolidating theme, base theme, and the data set the base theme had originated from. This enabled all themes to be sorted so that data could be looked at from several perspectives to better understand what the relationship between data sets, base themes and consolidating themes revealed.

**CHAPTER FOUR-RESULTS**

After the base themes and consolidating themes were organized in one spreadsheet, consolidating themes were pulled aside to further summarize them. At this stage Career was placed under the consolidating theme of Program Structure. Learning, Program Structure, and Safe Spaces were grouped together and termed Learning
Environment. Community, Leaders and Students were grouped together and termed Group Interactions. Liminality, Locals, Other, Reflection, and Spirituality composed a third group termed Outside Ourselves (see Figure 2).

With the emergence of the three groups: Learning Environment, Group Interactions and Outside Ourselves; the spreadsheet was revisited to get a sense of what emphasis each data set gave to each of the groupings. By sorting the spreadsheet according to data sets, patterns emerged.

**Figure 2. Coding Themes from Data Sets to Final Groups**

![Coding Process Diagram]

**What the Themes Reveal**

The Learning Environment, Group Interactions and Outside Ourselves groups began to give a picture of what the base themes that emerged from the data sets were
indicating. The overarching picture showed that a group of students familiar with each other were exposed to an intentionally wide range of academic and cultural content and encouraged to engage that content through questions, discussion and reflection. A leadership group that was knowledgeable, professional, relational and accessible facilitated this process of engagement. This produced a program containing a wealth of academic, cultural and personal learning opportunities that students engaged individually, amongst their peers, and with the leadership. Their ability to engage and the depth of engagement was enhanced by the safe learning environment and shared learning experience. This enabled them to emerge from the program with significant conceptual, intrapersonal and intercultural learning; strengthened and broadened personal relationships; and expanded, curious worldviews.

**Learning environment.**

**Learning.**

Learning themes dominated the Learning Environment group, focused on a wide range of topics and were present across all data sets. Key representations in this area were: conceptual learning; the impact of the group on learning outcomes; the perceived benefit of students learning on their own and in a manner connected with their interests; and the level of awareness that students brought with them into the program. One notable aspect that was absent was evidence of students negotiating intercultural difference.

**Conceptual learning.**
Conceptual learning comprised the largest representation within themes focused on Learning. Erickson (2017) states that

Conceptual thinking requires the ability to examine factual information critically, relate new learning to prior knowledge, see patterns and connections, draw out significant understandings at the conceptual level, evaluate the truth of these understandings based on the supporting evidence, transfer understandings across time or situation, and, often, use a conceptual understanding creatively to solve a program or invent a new product, process, or idea (p. 23-4).

While students regularly engaged factual information, they consistently focused their learning efforts on the conceptual significance of that information. This was conveyed in several respects. During both programmed and non-programmed times, students frequently engaged on their own initiative in conversations with each other and leaders on topics ranging across fields of politics, philosophy, culture, religion and their personal lives. One example of this occurred when a small group of students engaged in conversation over dinner one evening.

Conversation was initiated with a question regarding praying to saints. An approach of dialogue and finding common ground pervaded alongside disagreement. Content stayed close to the initial idea of sainthood and praying to saints, but also flowed into prayer, pondering how other faiths interacted with these concepts. As the conversation continued, the students questioned how faith and practical aspects of faith manifest in other cultures, with concepts of tolerance and intolerance incorporated into the discussion. One section near the end of the conversation stood out when Roy asserted,
I feel like tolerating intolerance is a privilege that we are blessed with. Because we live in a world where we can tolerate intolerance because we have so many people, and human rights in the West is so widely accepted. So we have the ability to tolerate intolerance (OB).

In the course of dialogue, Roy, and the group he was dialoguing with, had engaged not just the concept of faith, but what cultural factors impact how faith plays out in cultures. The group surmised that tolerant cultural settings can make room at the table for intolerance at several levels, including intolerant faith expressions, to exist initially, but that intolerance will become more moderate the longer it co-exists in a primarily tolerant cultural setting (OB). Contributions to this and similar concept-driven conversations included academic references from previous courses and previous travel experiences, including the SSU Southeast Asia education abroad program. This was highly evident throughout the observation data set and connected directly with a primary program learning objective: “building connections between the abstract thoughts, concepts and narratives analysed throughout their undergraduate experience and the tangible sites, art, geography and people of Western and Central Europe (SSU, Package Intro).”

Engaging the wide range of topics and concepts encountered throughout the program extended beyond conversation and involved students weaving together various sources of information, both past and present. This cyclical process of questioning, reflecting and suppositioning contributed to the process of building knowledge and understanding, both individually and collectively, and the merging of personal impressions with program content took several forms.
“Aha,” or epiphany moments, emerged in blog entries, densely populated with instances of questions residing alongside insights. Two blog posts convey the conceptual integration that ensued from merging historical and modern viewpoints, academic content, in situ impressions, personal experience, intercultural interactions, and questions:

Valentina - Géricault, Bonheur, and Cod Liver Oil

My primary struggle on this journey has been, for me, an unexpected one. Periodically, and as early on in our itinerary as London, I have been nearly paralyzed by homesickness. I’m not isolated. I’m surrounded by friends. I adore the cities that have welcomed me. But, in a truly horrific throwback to middle school, I have felt shapeless and ungrounded…This feeling struck me especially hard in Paris, on the day we visited the Louvre…The passionate images surrounding me seemed to mirror my feelings. No matter their stories, the characters seemed dreadfully homesick to me…Girodet’s “The Entombment of Atala” was not bereaving the death of his lover, but the loss of a family farm…What was incredible about the torture of the Romantic paintings, was that we fell short of communion. Atala and I suffered in relative silence, validating each others’ pain without subduing or healing it. This is not a critique of the art. The expressions and emotions on the canvases were exquisite. But it is a common human pitfall that in recognizing our pain, we all too often venerate it, and give it a home in us…I moved on from the Louvre to the Musée d’Orsay- where there hangs the most realistic portrayal of a cow in the known universe- by Rosa Bonheur. And that was home. Cows are not great sympathizers. But there is something about rural living, and livestock, that can snap you out of a reverie as if
to say “Get back to work!” I walked out of Musée d'Orsay feeling ready to really live, to engage with the city, and ended up spending the afternoon making a new friend. I made a temporary little home in Paris (BL).

**William - Revering Fort des Dunes**

When we visited Fort des Dunes in France, I had my view of reverence and how one should be reverent challenged…Fort des Dunes in summary is a WWII fort on the English Channel that was crucial to the British operation Dynamo and the end of WWII. Anyhow, when I explored the bunkers on the beach I found them covered in peace graffiti, and the tops of the bunkers were covered in smashed alcohol bottles. Now one might be outraged at how disrespectful it is to paint and smash glass on something so historically significant and more importantly in a place of reverence. However I disagree, I do not think that it is because the people that did those things do not care; rather quite the contrary…Life has to go on; if you want to go to the beach you do not want to see bunkers reminding you that this is a place of death…I think that keeping the site as it originally was back in WWII is important but we also need to heal and have a modern engagement with history or else what was the point of all of those men fighting for freedom?...I think if we try to control how people want to engage with history then it starts to sound like what all of the young men were fighting against (BL).

Building on the curiosity and conceptual development of blog entries, field journals teemed with instances of students engaging in dialogue around big questions and concepts. Questions reached beyond a surface level interaction with their experiences and
environment, stretching thinking processes and challenging pre-existing knowledge, thought patterns and paradigms. After spending time in Rome, Wesley reflected while transiting via train from Perugia to Florence:

I want to reflect more on Rome and more particularly on urbanization as a source of technological advancement. Here are my questions stemming from the museo in Rome.

What created the first cities?
What were the first cities and what link do they have to particular technological advancement?
Does knowledge always get lost at the fall of an empire, era or culture?
Maybe the real question I’m asking is what ought our relationship to each other and nature or place be? (FJ)

During orientation Valentina reflected on changes she perceived within herself and how those changes relate to concepts of perception and engagement:

From the morning I first woke in Park Hall- a week ago today- I felt a distinct shift in my psychological personality. For the first time ever, I have felt introverted but not sad. I have kept to myself but I am not lonely. It is in recognizing this shift that I have discovered a new well of curiosity. What is it like for introverts? I have wondered. Their detachment has always been incomprehensible to me. This psychological phenomenon may be short lived (I hope it is- I rather miss my old self), but it is an equally phenomenal opportunity to explore my “Other” while it lasts.
I don’t write all of this as a way to process my feelings, I did that yesterday, but I am reflecting today on how the different elements of change recreate your understanding (FJ).

Chuck used the dialogue around Brexit to connect with and build on concepts he had previously engaged in Southeast Asia:

The newspaper is talking all about Brexit. This reminds me of ASEAN and the questions and struggles they face. How do you keep a community beautiful, affordable and sustainable without giving everything away? It seems that wealth comes at a price, whether natural resources, forced labour or lost freedoms (FJ).

Assignments completed following the travel component of the program continued to engage concepts and reveal learning that integrated previous experience into new and further refined expressions of understanding. Following up on personal goals set before the program commenced, Lawrence recounted his subsequent observations of power structures:

I don’t like how emotionally rigid I seemed to feel about structure. In reality, it manifests itself in many ways academically and communally. The program offered me the opportunity to interact with power structures in constructive, and systematic ways…With power structures in mind, Barcelona was most interesting because of the Catalan Independence Movement. Seeing and feeling the independence movement there was rich with excitement and tension. I sensed its sights and its smells and was present as a population sought revolution…From a more removed perspective, I saw paintings with bold mason imagery in the church beside the central square in Perugia. Their subtle yet loud placement
echoed an elusive undertone. Every theme, class, and experience was a vehicle for my confrontation of power and I think that this challenge helped me to keep me focused on observation instead of judgement (PR).

Valentina had challenged herself to understand rural aspects of Europe during her program. In her preparatory readings assignment she conveyed enhanced understandings of urban and rural life:

I found that I was able to learn more about rural living from city scapes than I had expected. Somewhere between a poor rural area and a bustling city, there lies a balance that is called a “healthy rural economy”. Watching the industry in the cities showed me opportunities for the countryside (PR).

Luisa re-engaged material covering theories of experiential learning and intercultural engagement and explored concepts of exclusion and power dynamics:

I now believe my resistance to the idea of exciting experiences came from a desire to defend what I felt was being undervalued; the little things. However, my defence has, perhaps, been too vigorous…I have noticed this trend in myself in other areas as well, I exclude that which excludes. If I am going to strive to be a truly inclusive person I need to learn to value both the excluded and the excluder in the ways that they offer goodness and truth and not only live in reaction (PR).

It is hard to compare communication styles, except in the way that I felt my demeanor changing from culture to culture relative to the power I felt I had. It illumines how pervasive power dynamics are and how ingrained they are into our very beings. Whether or not we are conscious of the ways power and hierarchies
affect us, they determine, to some extent, the ways in which we relate to everyone (PR).

Lawrence contributed to thoughts on experiential learning when he engaged Kolb (2015) on the balance between openness and structure:

Pre-program

I feel as though I am incapable of effective action because multiple experiences in various cultures have taught me that there is always an alternative perspective that is equally valid (i.e. Can you blame an African warlord for his crimes when he was raised as a child soldier?)…For the most part, my experiential learning has been without any structure and so my perspective has been hardened by the subjectivity of all things.

Post-program reflection

Europe helped me to transition from bathing in the uncertainty of all things to feeling a sense of empowerment through experiential education. History, philosophy, and religion provide context and with context comes clarity.

Having my experience of liminality in Cambodia be juxtaposed by the guidance and structure of SSU’s Europe semester helped me engage with Kolb’s analysis of new experiences and how they apply to my own education. Lack of certainty in the context of new experiences is a great tool for introspection, and the guidance of a structured experience is a great tool for social analysis (PR).

These examples embody students’ engagement with their learning opportunities at a conceptual level before, during and after the program. The examples encompass the range
of stimuli students were exposed to, and capture the integration of information sources emerging into new understanding and knowledge within the learning environment.

**Impact of the Group.**

Impacts of the group on learning outcomes were evident in several data sets and suggest a strong connection with safe learning spaces, which will be examined in the next section. Space for students to contribute to the learning process; how leaders conducted themselves professionally and personally; the willingness of leaders to engage in co-learning with students; and camaraderie amongst the group all contributed to the learning environment.

Substantial opportunities for student contributions to the learning environment were present in the observations data set. Knowledge students had gained prior to and during the program was welcomed by leaders whenever offered, and space was provided during formal and informal program times for students to process and articulate what they were currently learning. Leaders incorporated student knowledge into on site presentations, and it was common practice for leaders to accept both academic and practical student contributions mid-program (OB).

Several instances of formal opportunities for students to reflect and contribute meaning and understanding occurred during my two weeks with the group. Students and leaders were co-participants in sessions lasting between one and two hours. Leaders facilitated three of these occasions, which involved guiding questions or comments followed by an opportunity for the whole group to share their experience or perspective on a particular topic. My observation notes on the introduction to one occasion captured
how the leader brought the group into the session, providing an opportunity to debrief the Mauthausen concentration camp site visit:

The gathering time tonight was held in room 9 at the suggestion of some of the girls who are staying in that room as they suggested it would be a more conducive environment than if we held it in the breakfast area of the hostel where we held our last gathering time. To initiate the gathering time Walter touched on a few logistical details, then said that to help with the ability to process the Mauthausen visit, we would do a talking circle. He reminded the group that this would involve a time of silence to gather our thoughts, then someone could begin speaking when they felt enough time had passed and they were ready to share. He also said that when someone shares we don’t give them feedback at this time, we are just listening and giving them a space to share. He asked people to keep their reflections brief so that everyone had a chance to share, and said that people could pass if they wanted to, but encouraged them to consider sharing because what they said would be a gift to the rest of the group if they felt able to share (OB).

This example showed leaders’ incorporation of practical student suggestions, space for students to process and share what they had learned and experienced, and a safe, invitational environment for that to occur within.

Students identified the approachability of leaders and their effective navigation of professional and personal interactions with students as increasing the perceived value of the learning environment. These factors also encouraged students to convey previous and current learning experiences. All eleven interviewed students expressed their satisfaction with the professional/personal balance that the leadership operated out of as they
interacted with the students (IN). Valentina connected leaders’ ability to express their enjoyment of the program with students’ comfort to engage both the leadership and learning experiences:

If they were less open, then the more you feel like you’re being babysat or you’re inconveniencing someone. It makes you want to rush through museums, makes you want to rush through the trip. But if you feel like the people who you are depending on most, who are taking care of you and who you are appreciating – if you feel like they’re also really enjoying themselves and learning, then I think that has an effect (IN).

William linked the ability to connect with leaders while maintaining appropriate boundaries with mutual respect, and perceived that this contributed to resolving issues more easily. He took time to identify the different styles of leaders and pointed to the common feeling that they were all effective at building solid learning relationships:

from the student angle lots of people were very happy with being treated like adults. Not as peers, but there was a respect for each. That’s why any of the issues on the trip were easily resolved between staff and students because there was that mutual respect (IN).

Ruth noticed a healthy tension between leaders offering support and giving students space to figure things out on their own:

There were some days I remember having really bad days and did nothing and just went in my room and you gave us that space too. It wasn’t like chaperoning, weird, looming over you all the time. I feel like they were just friends that knew more about Europe than I did (IN).
Respect, approachability and establishing healthy boundaries added a dimension to the learning environment that students noticed and valued.

Students also observed leaders positioning themselves as co-learners within the learning environment, which permitted them to be engaged in knowledge exchange with students in building understanding and meaning making. Lucille identified how this approach engaged her as a learner, “since it wasn’t an us and them, then we were all learning together, so I think that was very helpful. But knowing that if I had questions or worries, I could still fall back and have their support (IN).” Wesley articulated the value of combining approachability with contributing to building understanding in a co-learner environment:

Interviewer: Why do you want the staff or faculty member to have a friendship element? Why would that hold value for you?

Wesley: Because I can give something. If they’re really knowledgeable about their field or topic, they’re still learning and I can be a part of that and we can share ideas. Approachability makes you feel like you’re not wrong before it starts. The relationship allows you to be wrong in the situation and it’s okay (IN).

David articulated this experience between co-learners as a valuable modelling of how to continually learn:

It was experiential learning and community learning too. Our trip was twenty plus students, and at the least four leaders, all learning at the same time, all these different things. The leaders knew about most of the stuff we were seeing, but there were also things we were also experiencing for the first time, so it was really
interesting having about twenty-five to thirty people all learning the exact same thing and experiencing the same things for the first time (IN).

Leaders’ importance as co-learners also appeared in the questionnaire data set where students identified field trips, on site mentoring, and traveling with familiar staff and students as significant contributors to enhancing their learning experience. When asked what characteristics of program design significantly enhanced their learning (Appendix 4), 65-75% of students indicated the highest level of influence on their learning was in these three areas, much higher than any other learning environment characteristic (QU).

Shared group experiences and openness amongst the group also shaped the learning environment. Students claimed their level of program engagement and personal transformation could not have occurred without these contributions. Chuck pointed to shared experiences and a safe environment to challenge each other in as making the program memorable for him:

being able to travel and have all these experiences with other people who are seeking to learn as well. And being able to have someone to share with, to bounce ideas back and forth with, people to explore with as well, to challenge me to go deeper and to come out of my comfort zone and likewise for me to challenge them to go out of their comfort zone (IN).

Lucille specifically linked the group to several examples of learning and engagement that she believes only occurred because of her familiarity and comfort level with them:

there were people who really understood art or really didn’t understand art, and the people who really didn’t understand art were looking to the people who really understood art to help them understand. But at the same time there were people
who don’t need to understand art to enjoy it. Seeing all of those different
dynamics helped me figure out what I feel when I see it. (IN).

Wesley identified how the learning environment was affected by the perceived value of
program content by participants, and how that perceived value could draw others toward
that content. Additionally, he articulated how pursuing your own perceived value could
increase self-awareness and enhance content integration academically (IN). Allegra’s
description of the program pointed to her understanding of the overlap between learning
experiences and the people who engage them together. Interacting with familiar people in
a range of stimulating environments helped her build stronger memories of both (IN).

Group interactions facilitated learning opportunities that would otherwise have
been missed due to the limited perspective of an individual, or a lack of confidence and
vulnerability associated with familiar settings. These interactions also bridged interests
between group members, connecting them and increasing their sense of social capital.

*Autonomous Learning.*

Within the confines of a group experience and academic program, students
identified a freedom in the learning environment to realize program goals alongside
autonomous learning. Myriad expressions of program content merged with opportunities
for students to engage learning experiences from their own perspective. Luisa focused on
the value of combining academic content with autonomous learning:

Luisa: this was exploring how you learn, not just through reading, but
through your whole person, your body and your emotions and your
relationships. It seemed like you could use everything, and I really
like using my own experience. My own feelings, my own interactions are really interesting to me.

Interviewer: Is personally led learning too subjective?

Luisa: I think that books are really important, and it is important to read, but if you’re just reading something and you’re not applying it to your life or exploring it while you live, whatever you’re reading, then it’s useless, it doesn’t mean anything. The personal kind of learning…I think we’re not taught that it’s of any value, or we’re not taught how to explore that at all.

Interviewer: Did this experience teach you how to do that?

Luisa: I think it validated me in the way I learn and gave me a stage to explore it, but I don’t think it taught me how to do it. Because that’s me, that’s how I’ve always learned best, but I always got the message that it’s too subjective or too personal (IN).

Dolores built on these sentiments when she identified the importance of acknowledging the totality of a student’s experience in the learning process: “a trip such as this is extremely helpful in enabling us to learn in whichever way works best for us, and that all our experiences can contribute to our overall learning (FJ).”

Additional Themes.

Several base themes within the Learning consolidating theme did not group easily into broader categories, including: self-awareness; new interests in art and history; a desire to learn about self and others; confidence using public transit; significance of
physical proximity to learning material; connecting with one’s European background; spiritual questing; and a willingness to fail as part of the learning process. These themes identify additional areas where students experienced significant learning.

Lawrence perceived several factors that facilitated self-awareness, which in turn enabled a healthier engagement with his learning environment as he was “more aware of my headspace and what I needed than on other travel experiences. I think this was a combination of being surrounded by my peers, having debriefs to reflect, and the length of my travels (PR).” Chuck’s self-awareness entering the program positioned him to be open to new learning experiences and set the stage for transformational learning to occur:

I am left with the question, will I allow my worldview and myself to change. I had a real conscious experience of this in Chiang Mai at the University, when Wesley was telling me about a different approach to seeing art and marketing. I asked, “Do I really want what I know and how I see to be forever changed.” This is the fundamental choice of travel and new experiences, do you allow them to form and change you, or are they just a check on your bucket list. I want to be changed and allow myself to grow more, to see beyond my own experience and be able to learn from these people (PR).

Lucille engaged in spiritual questing because of personal interest and encouragement by a fellow student, and continued that learning after completing the program:

My spiritual being was challenge[d] in a weird way in Europe and it was amazing. I thought that I needed to challenge myself by being alone but really I needed to be with people. Wesley was a HUGE part of my spiritual growth and this enhanced my experience on the trip as well. He would challenge me by asking me
questions about my faith and being open with his. I also went to mass a lot which was oddly refreshing and made me reflect on traditions and identity. I think this is one of the challenges that made Europe interesting on a personal level, and I could take home with me to explore and further my growth (PR).

Students chose personal challenges they were unlikely to succeed at, aware that they would be graded on the exercise. When reporting on how they had engaged their challenges, students gave a very honest account, even when they did not meet their goals at all. Catherine reported that she did not engage people from another culture on important topics: “because it is really hard for me to approach people and spark up a conversation. All in all, I was disappointed in myself for letting fear rule my chances of connecting with people and learning more (PR).” David aimed to spend more time journaling than in his Southeast Asia program, but:

this goal did not go so well. I definitely am not good at journaling. I think the issue is that I did not want to miss out on any experiences because of journaling, and I did not do it before going to sleep because I usually don’t start trying to go to bed until I feel tired enough to almost fall asleep (sometimes even after I start falling asleep in my chair) (PR).

It is unclear whether they believed they would receive a good grade for being honest, or if they were more interested in authentically engaging the learning process, but they willingly reported failing.

Themes and examples related to learning demonstrated that topics the students encountered were considered at a conceptual level consistently, were facilitated by the
interactions with and presence of a familiar group, and enabled students to engage their whole learning experience.

**Program structure.**

Students claimed they would not have been able to experience personal change the way they did without the group and the overall program design. Adequate planning and preparation, a balance between structure and freedom to explore, and moments that encouraged vulnerability among group members all contributed to this aspect of the learning environment. William articulated several design elements that fostered his learning experience:

Overall this Europe trip challenged me to be a more sensitive and engaging person instead of being a rush through and experience everything unhealthy seven.¹ For once I listened to my conclusion of the first paper to this one; telling myself to take the time to slow down and breathe which gave me so much more than I could have ever hoped for. The leadership, programming and planning were the backbone to that experience because it placed me in positions that allowed me to be comfortable so that I could challenge myself in other ways (PR).

Lawrence echoed the importance of program design and implementation:

the times that we came together as a group clarified the direction the school wanted the program to go in. They really laid it out in basic terms, what we

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¹ William identifies with the personality profile of a Seven, also known as the Enthusiast, in the Enneagram. Each Enneagram personality profile has healthy and unhealthy tendencies.
should be expecting, what we were going to be doing, those moments were really representative of SSU (IN).

Through the post-program questionnaire, students reported a high level of exposure to and interaction with relevant sites and content on the program, aside from interactions with locals (QU). Myrtle conveyed a total personal shift toward art as a result of these interactions: “I left Canada hating art and having no appreciation for history and came home craving art and hungry for history (FJ).”

Students felt well prepared for the program by the time they departed for Europe. Ruth recalled “the first day and being super excited. We had so much time to prepare and do the reading before so I felt prepared when I arrived (IN).” Valentina also held this viewpoint:

Valentina: it was a trip that we had prepared for heavily with reading and research that happened before we went on the trip. I think that was one of the most important parts of the trip.

Interviewer: Why would you think that?

Valentina: Because by pre-reading and preparing and discussing the grand ideas or historical events, it’s like making a little mind map for yourself, you have a context for anything new (IN).

The program provided interactions that were helpful for students to thoughtfully engage previous or emerging thoughts about their careers. Chuck suggested that it encouraged him in the direction he was going. Valentina was struck with an entrepreneurial idea while visiting local businesses in Europe. Wesley and William asserted that it allowed them to be comfortable with focusing their vocational options and
less caught up in pursuing more romanticized vocations than before the program. Ruth perceived how it would affect the way she teaches after completing her education program. Luisa claimed that the experience gave her the confidence she needed to pursue her masters’ degree. Lawrence stated that it emboldened his desire to move toward work in an international context (IN).

Students expressed appreciation for the work that had gone into designing the learning environment. A few weeks into the program, Lawrence commented without prompting:

everybody that’s organized this trip -it’s been a flawless trip. As far as a group this big can be, a flawless trip, don’t change a thing. It’s been so good…And that’s not to say there haven’t been negative experiences, but the negative experiences have contributed to the overall learning experience (OB).

Dolores pointed to the field journal and gathering times as helping her to focus: “the field notes journal helped me stay on track of my sightings and acquired experiences/thoughts. Gatherings helped me hear what others were learning and directed my thoughts in an intentional manner (FJ).”

Rebecca, a new faculty member to the program, reflected halfway through that students appeared to be benefiting from having a comfortable home base to return to following an engaging and exhausting day of learning. She noted that the pairing between organized program time and free time to explore and learn on their own gave students some control over their schedule (OB).

Areas where students felt the program was lacking included language learning and engaging local culture. The lack of language skills did not facilitate interaction with
locals, along with a program design that focused more on academic content than intercultural interactions. Students had a desire to engage more with locals, but were not aware of how to facilitate this for themselves (IN, FJ, QU, PR).

Several naturally vulnerable moments in the program caused emotional stretching for the group and helped them reach out to each other more and break down pre-existing social groups. Specific examples of this that were noted included war sites and gathering times. Gathering times took place approximately twice a week when the group would meet together to process and share aspects of the program from academic, intercultural, interpersonal, spiritual, and emotional perspectives. Valentina recalled a gathering time in Barcelona where the experience brought the group to the same level and created a reference point for future connections with each other:

Rosie took everyone on the trip on the beach and she had everyone share something that they were struggling with. So everyone was on the same page, vulnerable. That made it significant. I feel like we were all starting off on the same foot. We were traveling as third years too, almost fourth years, so we just had to get a little cliquish as people do, and I think that night on the beach really helped to bring everyone together. To say okay, you’re all traveling as a group, not in four or five different pods, just in one bus. That made it memorable for me, Rosie doing that, and also the leaders sharing (IN).

Reflecting on the Mauthausen concentration camp, William recalled the way the group responded to the site visit: “a place where healing was slowly happening and the preservation was holding the dignity of the victims and the truth where it needs to be. This impact was felt by the whole group which brought us closer (FJ).” William added
Fort des Dunes to the program components that facilitated group connection and vulnerability:

just natural vulnerable moments that came out – Mauthausen was a big one that gave me time to think, and if I remember correctly Fort des Dunes was pretty emotional, just because they’re both so real. They put reality right there, it’s not in a museum. There was some emotional stretching there and a willingness to meet with each other (IN).

Difficulties with program structure identified by students centered on two categories; lack of knowledge of local languages, and lack of program design to encourage interactions with locals (QU, FJ, PR). They perceived these as detracting from their ability to make strong local interactions and connections. In considering these responses, it may be relevant to note that the Europe program outcomes and syllabi do not have the same emphasis on engaging locals as the Southeast Asia program. With most students experiencing the Southeast Asia program first, personal expectations for engagement with locals appear to have not aligned with Europe program goals. Additionally, despite the program’s lack of emphasis on engaging locals, conducting interviews with locals was a component of one course, and bonus marks were given to students in that course who participated in DuoLingo language lessons.

Acknowledging students’ expressed sense of difficulty engaging locals, the data sets nonetheless revealed numerous interactions between students and locals, suggesting that the incongruence may have stemmed from students’ personal expectations rather than program design. Lucille listed examples of interactions despite language barriers:
in Germany me and some friends connected with two guys over beer and our English language, also in Spain we had experiences to connect with people who did not speak our language. Watching soccer games in the bar in Perugia, or in France and being able to celebrate the goals with the people around us. It did not matter about the language gap (PR).

Myrtle captured the personal desire to engage locals, the difficulties she encountered when she did not know the language, and how she approached that challenge:

Language barriers seem to never get easier for me. I do not get frustrated because I am not being understood but I get frustrated because I want to communicate with people and greet them properly. I do not want to come across as an ignorant tourist. This is easier in some places than others because I have had introductions to the language and I feel as though it is better to try than not to try at all…These experiences taught me that although language barriers are difficult, they do not get to determine the quality of the experience. We get to make up our own narratives this way and be as creative as we want. We get to be outsiders that have an opportunity to be in someone else’s moment, someone who does not even speak the same language as we do. We get to take part in others’ narratives. Language barriers do not just need to be hard, they can be creative, fun, and insightful (PR).

Students perceived that the program was well planned and offered adequate preparation work for the students so that they encountered meaningful content, and had the ability and freedom to engage that content through structured and unstructured
avenues. There was also space provided for emotional and vulnerable interactions with each other and program content.

_Safe space._

Safe space emerged as a consolidating theme from the data sets in three expressions: the ability to explore difference; engaging the group and new environments; and using the group as a sounding board to process experiences. Studying and traveling in a familiar group facilitated both a challenging and supportive learning environment. Articulated benefits of travelling and studying with familiar students and leadership connected directly to the research questions of this study, and to concerns in the literature review regarding community impact on program engagement. Forms of support and challenge experienced by students covered topics of: physical health, academic content, worldviews, personal spirituality, personal logistics, emotional health, interpersonal relationships, cultural understanding, intercultural interactions, and processing emerging realizations (OB, IN, FJ, PR). Valentina alluded to discussion, and more directly recognized emotional and practical supports present in the program:

I was able to devote all of my time in Europe to taking in experiences; being in a museum just focusing on the art or the people around me, and I didn’t have to worry about itineraries or schedules or tickets…I think in a general way you would get less homesick traveling with a group. If you have people there looking out for you, then if you’re someone who’s prone to any kind of emotional turmoil or anxiety, then you end up spending less time being upset and more time
engaging with what’s around you. So it’s just emotional support while you’re there. And then it’s people to bounce ideas off of, discuss with (IN).

Chuck’s earlier statement about support and challenge applies here again in the context of being pushed to think and explore further than he would on his own:

being able to travel and have all these experiences with other people who are seeking to learn as well. And being able to have someone to share with, to bounce ideas back and forth with, people to explore with as well, to challenge me to go deeper and to come out of my comfort zone and likewise for me to challenge them to go out of their comfort zone (IN).

Importantly, safety’s denotation in this context extended beyond common components of comfort and assurance to include exploration of difference. Discovering new environments and realms of learning, students processed and disagreed with each other and leaders over emerging ideas. Post dinner dialogue in Casa Monteripido’s basement refectory hall housed two such examples. In both instances a topic started the conversation; sainthood in the first, giving to the poor in the second. Students brought divergent viewpoints to the table, discussed them at length, and respected each other throughout the process. The flow of dialogue revealed an emphasis on sifting through ideas for their inherent merit, pushing the conversation forward, not forcing a resolution to pacify or comfort participants (OB). Student initiation and facilitation of these instances increased the significance of their emergence in the learning environment.

Myrtle encapsulated the contributing components to safe space in a few short lines:
Having a space which we were able to openly express ourselves, a space for creatively dealing with situations, having a voice, and having facilitators who were able to organize these spaces by assessing the groups needs was very refreshing and gave a new kind of life to the experience. We were able to openly disagree with each other, to empathize with each other, and to challenge each other in a safe environment (FJ).

Engaging the challenge component in site visits stimulated interest and academic growth for Jennifer:

a ‘contagious intellectual excitement of fellow students and faculty’. Had I done this trip on my own, I would not have spent near the amount of time in museums as I did. Walking around a modern art museum with Lawrence as he’s gawking over a piece is much more meaningful than walking with complete strangers. Having the opportunity to continuously challenge and question his thoughts as he did for me increased my interest tremendously (FJ).

Following the program, Valentina engaged in discussion with a close friend and classmate that accelerated into explosive conversation before settling into co-learning:

had a big fight the other day, which was fun. We were reading Albert Camus for Hannah’s literature class and we had entirely different interpretations of that story. We thought differently, but I guess this was a bit of an iron sharpening iron because we had the same language, we had taken the same theory with Lindsay, so we knew what we were saying to each other. Neither of us knew what Camus was trying to say, and at first she was saying things that I really disagreed with and I was just toning it down because I knew that before I might have flown off
the handle and we’d get into a debate. And I was like, ‘no, I’m just going to listen to what she has to say because maybe I can learn from what she has to say, and in any case I don’t want to start anything so I was just listening.’ And I was being so mature Kendall, you have no idea how mature I was being. And then she just kept building and building and speaking louder, she’s like ‘[Valentina], I want you to push me!’ I was like, ‘you want me to push you, then fine, I think that these are all of the wrong ideas that you have in your head.’ And then Camus just blew up in Park Hall One, and we actually did learn from each other.

Students valued honest and passionate dialogue on contested topics, and perceived these interactions as strengthening rather than threatening interpersonal relationships, building the social fabric of the group.

Engaging the group brought additional value to the program for students. Time spent together previously meant several interpersonal difficulties had been resolved prior to the program, so significant energies were not directed to interpersonal issues. Instead, students stated that the group grew closer, conversations went deeper, new friendships were established, and previous ones restored. Consistent close proximity, familiarity and learning environment worked together to foster the evolution in relationship. Marie reflected on how the safe environment opened her up to the deeper realities of her co-participants:

This trip has taught me to better communicate with people. Living in such close quarters with people that I would never necessarily hang out with otherwise, has opened me up. It has helped me see people as more than just an outer story. It
helped me look for the underneath. Everyone has something going on that they
don’t share. Everyone has things that bother them or make them happy (FJ).

Wesley identified the changing dynamic of the community, and his own movement
relationally within the community:

For those who wanted to change, the sense of community among them increased
and they felt closer to each other. I feel now like I’m not restricted to just hang out
with a group of people that I’m comfortable with, I can belong with a larger group
of people. To say they were tighter knit isn’t an adequate description – there was
room for building new relationships, and those new relationships and pre-existing
relationships had the ability to all grow closer at their own pace. Some people
grew closer by virtue of proximity, and others grew closer intentionally (IN).

Comments also acknowledged difficulties and frustrations of traveling with a group, but
they were infrequent and did not disrupt the constructive momentum of group dynamics
or learning environment. Overall, the group was viewed as indispensable for facilitating
the learning process through the factors of familiarity, proximity and environment.

Program engagement accelerated the establishment of a safe relational and
structural framework. Students recalled sharing specific knowledge to help each other,
encouraging each other to see different perspectives, and helping each other meet new
people. Naturally vulnerable moments linked to war sites and gathering times helped
facilitate these interactions. Moments like these caused emotional stretching and aided
the group in reaching out to each other and integrating social groups. An instance in
Barcelona was highlighted where Rosie asked group members to share something they
were struggling with at the time. Valentina noted the importance of leaders sharing in the
experience and how it helped everyone to be on a more level playing field and vulnerable with each other:

That night itself was a big deal, it would become important again, I’d remember it as I encountered the different people on the trip. I wasn’t always the whole trip thinking ‘oh, how is [Thomas] doing, I hope [Thomas] is okay,’ but it makes you more likely to check in with each other. It makes the times when you are checking in with each other seem more honest because there was something real to base the conversation off of, and something extra to base the memory off of…Even for people who I wasn’t particularly close to, later on maybe I’d see them, they’d be having a bad day, they’d be really grouchy, but all of a sudden it was like, oh well maybe they’re upset about something bigger than just the heat. So I think that was important, it makes you more compassionate (IN).

Statements regarding students’ initial rationale for enrolling at SSU extended their perception and expectation of it as a safe environment that precluded their actual experience of it, laying a foundation that built toward their Europe program. Many preconceived it as a small, safe learning environment that would give them the ability and freedom to explore their thoughts (QU). The community’s strengths had balancing points as well, and students identified a lack of power or control over certain circumstances and over community as causing them stress. This initially appeared incongruous with other data in the study. Further reflection caused me to hypothesize that this aberration lined up with the experience of participants from individualistic cultural backgrounds being embedded in an extended communal experience. Group and program engagement
challenged participants positively, moving them deeper into each other’s lives and into the program.

Adding to the exploration of difference and positive group and program interactions, the group was a safe place to process experiences within. Examples of expressed vulnerability appear to be contingent on an established safe learning environment. A conversation with Lawrence stood out where he unpacked a particularly impacting experience from the day before at length with me, attempting to understand what it meant for him, and how and if it might integrate into his life (OB). During interviews students connected times of sharing and processing with a levelling of relationship among the group. Allegra threaded the thoughts of pre-existing community, positive interactions in the program, and vulnerability together:

We were more able to jump into the learning experience together because we had already created those bonds and relationships, and the Europe trip furthered that, added to it. It was nice going with people you had already journeyed with, who you know and who you were friends with because there were those times too where we had the talking circles and we shared what we were learning and experiencing, and we could listen to that in a safe environment. The trip went smoother because of it compared if you went with a bunch of people you didn’t know (IN).

Vulnerability positioned the group to serve as a landing place students could fall back into to reset themselves. This aided them in managing their various insecurities and instabilities, keeping them from falling into deep cycles of potentially restrictive or destructive thinking and behaviour. Physical space played a factor as well, and Luisa
merged these thoughts together in two comments that tied her ability to manage personal anxiety to positive group dynamics and a familiar physical base to come back to:

However, the most important realization in regard to overcoming anxiety and fear while travelling had less to do with pushing myself and more to do with accepting my dependence on other people. When you are travelling, especially in a group, it becomes apparent how much you need to rely on other people and how much they rely on you…I have always been slow to admit that I need the help and support of others…In these situations pretending that we don’t need each other will cause anxieties to worsen. It was essential for me to recognize my dependence before I could comfortably exercise my independence (PR).

Luisa: During orientation, I was starting to feel that anxiety and when that happens I start to isolate myself. I remember one day feeling it so intensely, Rosie just came up to me and asked me how I was doing out of the blue…We had a conversation and she understood where I was coming from, and from that point that started making me feel more secure and safe, like I don’t have to isolate myself that way

Interviewer: What kept your anxiety at bay enough that you were able to engage?

Luisa: I think that part of it was that we were staying quite a long time in each place helped a lot…having somewhere that is shared with the people that you trust

Interviewer: Are there specific goals and expectations that you had that you felt
were realized as a result of this ability to feel secure?

Luisa: My goal was to not be anxious, and to feel secure. I was frustrated that my insecurity didn’t allow me to engage with the world, and made me isolate myself, and made me not able to take interest in art or whatever we’re learning, or my surroundings or beauty or whatever. So I felt so engaged with all of those things on this trip. Usually I find if I’m at home I can engage quite well, but if I’m anxious I can’t at all, it closes it off. On the trip I felt more capable of that than ever (IN).

Other comments regarding safe space identified the field journal and alone time as contributing factors to creating safe space. Student descriptions of the type of learning they engaged in, the structure it took place within, and the safe nature of that space have striking parallels with descriptions of liminal spaces, which will be explored further later.

Structured learning activities shaped the learning environment while allowing ample space for students to engage personally and connect program material and personal experiences to wider contexts and concepts. Personally available and co-learning leaders facilitated a program balancing freedom, structure, support and challenge. Safe spaces emerged from this foundation, making room for connections, vulnerability, and revitalization. The resulting establishment of security and social capital emboldened the group to venture out to learn instead of draw in on themselves.
**Group interactions.**

Group interactions took place under three primary expressions; amongst the community as a whole, between leaders and students, and between students.

**Community.**

Interactions with community largely fell into two categories; experiencing the program with a familiar group, and experiences in community before and after the program. Benefits of accompanying a familiar group outweighed difficulties in students’ perspective, and included supports, challenges and on-site mentoring. Luisa recalled that the: “sense of community gave me the feeling of security I needed in order to focus on interacting with the experience and learning all I could from it (QU).” Valentina noticed the group’s cumulative experiences and interests, and how sharing them expanded and bridged everyone’s perspectives:

there were groups, established relationships, those were more apparent in Europe. So I think it definitely came out with saying “these few friends are going to go hit up this spot, and these few friends are going to go some place entirely different.” So I think there was more opportunity for the groups coming back and telling each other where they’ve been, but also there were defined patterns in each city we’d go to…I know I really enjoyed hearing from other people about the buildings or museums, or concerts or experiences they’d had that I didn’t get to. That was really valuable. Keeps you from thinking about any city in just one way (IN).
Valentina also articulated the process of community contributing to common vernacular, and accelerating the emergence of new ideas:

we have a common vernacular because we’re reading the same authors, and studying the same books…So it’s nice when you’re reflecting and trying to process these new ideas in Europe, having someone that you can tell the whole story to at once and not just having to process a piece of my experience with this one person who will understand it, and processing another piece with this other friend who will understand part of my new idea. But I can just sit down and unload all of the thoughts in my mind to almost anyone on the trip and they’ll be able to follow along (IN).

Camaraderie is part of what Valentina referred to in her recollections on shared vernacular. This camaraderie also facilitated interactions outside the group. Crystal noted that “as an introvert, I love having friends who are extroverts because I am super awkward about starting conversations but in groups it is a lot easier and I don’t have to be the one talking all the time. There are other people there to fill the awkward silences” (FJ).

The absence of working through new interpersonal difficulties associated with unfamiliar participants, combined with the ability to convey emerging thoughts, insecurities, physical, social and emotional hurdles via journaling and within the group both created and encouraged a stronger sense of community. Lawrence had a personally significant experience at Mauthausen that had a space to culminate in during the subsequent gathering time:
I learned today that I numb myself when confronted with evil of this magnitude. I didn’t have an emotional reaction until our group gathering this evening. I was overwhelmed with anger when I really started processing the day and, as a result, my experience three months ago that I now realize I had never processed very fully. The economic gains and incentive behind the concentration camp helped realize the similarities between my culture and the Nazi regime. Real people in real places are dying today as they mine for the materials for my Ipad, our phones and computers. Real women and their children are trapped in inhumane conditions to make my shirts and pants and shoes. We justify it by distancing ourselves from it. Our propaganda machine is working (OB).

Lawrence’s sharing of personally impacting experiences with the group and Valentina’s experience of camaraderie through common vernacular reveal instances of liminal space and communitas in community interactions.

As group interactions have capacity to cloud perspective and lead to insular emphases, students also acknowledged the importance of separating from the group to have effective cultural interactions and process experiences. While expressing earlier the importance of safe spaces facilitated by the group, Myrtle also:

found that the experiences that I learnt the most from were the experiences I had alone, whether they were conversations with strangers, encounters with art, getting lost and finding my way home or lying in a field and not worrying about anything except the bees pollinating the flowers. I experienced a lot of self discovery as well as learning of class content by being able to connect with it in my own way (FJ).
Marie echoed the need to re-establish perspective, recalling that: “Crystal, Lawrence and I went on quite a few walks in France to get away from the group to kind of debrief from what we did that day (FJ).” Chuck conveyed benefits and struggles that stemmed from interactions with community: “Personally, I grew a lot by struggling with, interacting with others, my weaknesses, travelling with a sister and life in community (FJ).”

Interactions and integration with community progressed well for most of the group, though one student had difficulties as revealed in the Questionnaire and SCI-2 data sets. The SCI-2 recorded their sense of community dropping by two out of a possible four levels in one sixth of their responses, and by one level in seventeen of the remaining eighteen responses, results incomparable with other students.

This student had been excited about the program, coming to SSU because of friends’ reports regarding the emphasis on community at SSU. They had experience living in intentional community, but none in living abroad or education abroad. Over half of their free time during the program was spent on the internet, and twenty percent of it alone, much higher levels than any other student. Stresses during the program were highest in cultural isolation, power and control, and community, the highest scores for any student. On site experiences provided little enhancement to their learning, and traveling with familiar staff and students did not enhance their learning at all (QU).

One person they knew well before the program accompanied them during program times, disconnecting this student from the rest of the group as a result (PR). Academically the student did well, and appreciated most of the program content. These factors and my field observations caused me to hypothesize that this student had access to community but was hesitant to reach out to it, preferring to remain close to the person
they felt safe around (OB). Amidst mostly positive responses, this example served to remind that not everyone desires or is ready for community, or particular expressions of it.

Community interactions before and after the program again focused on positive aspects, and captured an evolution of encounters that spoke of expanded thinking and safe space. Most students came to SSU because of hearing about the education abroad programming and the sense of community. They perceived it as being a small, safe learning environment that gave them the ability to explore intellectually (QU). During and after the program, those who had participated in the Southeast Asia program referenced how those learning experiences influenced learning in the Europe program (OB, FJ, PR).

Returning to studies in the fall, students recounted the importance of having a space to interact with the community and continue sharing and processing their experiences with each other, the leaders, and students, staff and faculty who had not participated in the program (IN). Lucille asserted that the post-program experience back in the SSU community solidified personal gains from the program, especially her ability to integrate into and rely on the community:

It made me think that the community now is always going to be there no matter where I’m at in the world, or even if I just am in Cape Breton. It’s always a place, there’s always people who I can always be connecting with. It made me less nervous going over to Carol and Walter’s to play games or to go to dinner at their house. The other day I asked Joy to go out for coffee, but I don’t think I would
necessarily have done that before the Europe trip…Seeing people out of this context made me appreciate when we’re here in this context (IN).

Lucille’s quote highlights a specific relationship between education abroad programming and community at SSU and its perceived benefits to community participants, including its ability to create new social bridges. Students in their fourth year of studies recounted how they continued to appreciate the sense of community at SSU after their Europe education abroad program, and how those interactions differed from when they had first enrolled.

Lawrence commented on the development of community and social capital after returning to it:

Lawrence: If you have a disposition toward not getting along with a certain personality type, and you meet that personality type at SSU, you can start by not liking them or agreeing with them, or thinking that that’s not who you would get along with. That makes it so that an inch of love for that person is worth more than a mile for someone that you would naturally get along with.

Interviewer: You say you can shift in your thinking toward someone, is there also a shift in time spent with different people?

Lawrence: It definitely changes in the context of first, second, third or fourth year. In fourth year now, feeling like an older student, it’s more appropriate for me to assume that I’ll spend more time with first years than if I was a third year because of the idea of guidance or leadership and having that being an engrained part of the community. I remember when I was in my first year, really
appreciating the fourth years spending time with me, teaching me, showing me around town, so I’ve taken what I appreciated about that experience and tried to replicate it. Sometimes that’s not even intentional, it’s just kind of how things go naturally (IN).

William saw reintegration from a bit of a different perspective, one where he focused his efforts into those he had already built relationship with:

> It gave me an appreciation, Europe brought us together in some ways, also it also drove us apart, which I think is fairly normal looking back now from when I was in first year. I’m still engaged with the community but I’m stepping back for sure. Part of that is living off campus, and part of that is being a fourth year, and part of that is Europe. But definitely just a more independent and maybe a more intentional focus on not putting time into everyone but putting time into some (IN).

A more focused and prioritized sense of how they engaged the community during their final year pervaded students’ comments. They wanted students in subsequent years to experience the positive aspects of community as well, but they also wanted to continue to build the important relationships they had formed along the way, significantly shaped by the education abroad programs (IN, FJ). Additionally, students articulated what they would pursue once they graduated, whether in the form of continuing education or employment (IN).

> Accomplished via the education abroad terms, time in community at SSU, or the natural process of maturing, students conveyed that they were prepared for their lives after completing their education, especially socially and vocationally. Community
interactions built off and contributed to safe spaces and the building of social capital, and provided students with confidence and security to engage the program and the group, expanding their exposure and engagement with program content and relationship with the group. Interactions continued following the program, strengthening these outcomes further.

**Leaders.**

Comments regarding intentionality and availability within the learning environment comprised the majority of students’ reflections on interactions with leaders. Acknowledgements of efforts expended to create the learning environment were recounted in the Impact of the Group and Program Structure subsections above. Resoundingly positive impressions of leaders by students stood out. Making quick and delicate decisions in situ inevitably inconvenience and frustrate participants at some level. Despite this, and the close proximity students and leaders operated within, students had only positive comments and reflections regarding leaders, even when assured of confidentiality.

Establishment of a learning environment occurs both intentionally and unintentionally simultaneously. Students noticed several intentional elements initiated by leaders, creating space for student input having the strongest representation. Areas for student input included; presentations on works of art and material history, gathering times to reflect on specific topics, acceptance of student contributions during professors’ presentations, and encouragement to share ideas for non-program times (OB). Proximity
and availability of leaders reinforced these and provided space for informal opportunities for students to engage and contribute to the learning process.

Availability summarizes the manner in which students perceived the leadership conducting themselves within the learning environment. Leaders alternated between being: academic, cultural and logistical guides; companions; and confidants. Students identified their ability to discern and uphold personal and professional boundaries while moving back and forth between those roles. Lawrence captured this crossing between roles and the importance of it being done well:

I was very pleasantly surprised with the leaders that I thought were going to be too hierarchical were some of the most friendly relationships that I had with leaders. The ones I thought were going to be too friendly, people filled their roles very well on this trip, and I think that speaks more about the individuals than it does about the structure of the trip. Having the mix of professors and chaperone leaders was a good thing, because it gave options for seeking advice, friendship, or academic advice. I think that all of the leaders were really open (IN).

Lucille noted the dynamics of the leadership team and their facilitation of a group approach to learning:

It didn’t seem like there was one leader, it was a team effort, and they were working together. You could tell by the way that they would act with us that everything they were doing was to make our trip good. Even though they’ve been to Europe before they didn’t expect anything from us. They just kind of let it happen. It didn’t really seem like us and them, it was just all of us (IN).
Leaders accomplished this partly through being open to student input as outlined above, and partly through physical proximity. Students being able to contribute to the conversation placed leaders into a position of co-learners. Asked whether it bothered them that periodically students knew something the leaders did not, students replied instead that they drew comfort knowing that professors were also learning, and that students were contributors to building understanding (IN). The leaders also consistently placed themselves in spaces with the students. Leaders joined students during meals, interspersing themselves throughout the group rather than remaining separate. During non-program time, leaders often spent time with students at accommodations, or accompanied them to optional activities (OB). Thomas noted that

we interacted with them like you would with really close family. We’d share tricks on how to prepare certain foods. On one occasion Walter and Carol assisted me with finding some rubbing charcoal so that I could take rubbings of several tiles on a street that had been designed by a famous architect (IN).

Leaders were also available for personal conversations, connecting often with students, especially when they were having personal difficulties. William recalled struggling with trying to take in too much and losing focus, and how that:

was something that I conquered with a leader named Rosalie. She also has that same problem and I think that she knows that she helped me with it. Hell I didn’t know until just now. She took the time out of her day and spent the quality moments with me that I think neither of us realized were as valuable to me as they were looking back. The small, blunt conversations affected the way that I viewed the sites we visited (PR).
During gathering times where students reflected academically and personally, leaders also shared openly, as noted in Valentina’s previous recollections regarding the gathering time in Barcelona when people shared what they were struggling with at that point in the program.

Intentionality in providing space for student contributions and being available physically and emotionally characterized student perceptions of interactions with leaders during the program and built bridges between leaders and students.

**Students.**

Support and challenge were the strongest themes regarding student interactions within the group. Not restricted to established relationships, these themes extended beyond existing social boundaries and contributed to a constructive, evolving social framework. In turn, this created additional safe space within the learning environment for students to engage each other with openness and vulnerability.

Education abroad programs involve new experiences outside of existing life rhythms, expanding individuals’ need for assistance. Needs for support ranged across aspects of daily living; transporting luggage, acquiring forgotten or depleted supplies, navigating public transit, locating laundry facilities, translating conversations, interpreting art pieces, temporary cash shortages, getting debit cards reinstated, processing difficult news from home, companionship on sick days, getting space when overwhelmed, and navigating identity within the group (OB). New to the leadership team, Rebecca was struck by students’ assistance to each other, noting them working together, carrying each other’s luggage, making meals, and being positive through
adversity (OB). Lucille articulated how the group helped her find her place in the group and in life, and how this continued to affect her six months after the program:

My view of myself academically, my thoughts have been shifted a whole lot because I felt like they started to matter to other people on the trip. That made me start to understand what being academic was. I didn’t know there was a difference before. I saw that change in Europe and became more academic. That’s a huge challenge for me now because I’m not sure if I like it. I saw Cape Breton [Lucille] disappearing a bit for academic [Lucille] and I’m not sure if I like it…The more academic I get the more privileged I’ll be, I’m afraid I won’t be able to connect with people who don’t have that kind of privilege (IN).

Support for each other and the group stood out during the twelve-hour bus ride between Perugia and Vienna. When the drive took longer than anticipated, the designated grocery store was switched on short notice, and groups were given thirty minutes instead of an hour to shop for food for the next few days. Groups quickly split up tasks, muddled through shopping in German for the first time, and finished before the allotted thirty minutes. Walter and Carol searched for supper options nearby, but had to resort to offering sandwiches and carrots from the grocery store. Students made and ate their meal on the side of the road, used the washroom, and had a cigarette break before completing the remaining two-hour drive to Vienna. Throughout the scenario no one complained, choosing instead to work over, around and with each other to shop, pack supplies into a full bus, and prepare and clean up their roadside dinner. A few even claimed enjoying the craziness of the meal and the long trek of the day, comparing it to a family road trip (OB). While an insignificant moment in isolation, in the context of a safe learning
environment this example highlighted a group’s capacity for positive responses to challenging moments and the building social capital among the group. Barring the foundation of a safe learning environment, the moment could easily have become a source of unnecessary drama, building negative space through pitting blame toward each other and leaders, distracting and detracting from the learning potential of the program.

Students offered support outside previously established friendships, laying ground for new and restored friendships. Preparing the group for Verdi’s MacBeth in Vienna, Crystal became visibly nervous as she began her presentation. Ruth, who was not part of Crystal’s social circle, jokingly offered to do the presentation for her, putting Crystal visibly at ease and enabling her to proceed (OB). Lawrence noted the significant role interpersonal relationships played within the learning experience:

- the intense relational connections within the group are what motivates [the] traveller to learn personable skills. Each skill that Bennet mentions is learned in relation to others in the group as they move as a unit. In Europe, we had to be relationally attentive in order to have a positive experience. To empathize, listen, resolve conflict, and manage anxiety was to maintain relationships in order to have a cohesive group. Understanding each other’s strengths and weaknesses helped us to use each other as resources. I don’t listen to instructions very well but I always knew I could ask [Ruth] about the schedule. Even seemingly independent tasks turn out be relational such as gathering information (PR).

Acknowledging the factors of practical support, physical proximity and relational connections referenced above, Chuck articulated the translation into deeper relationships:
Conversations went deeper as well, you were able to go beyond what was going on today to ask a lot more questions in the study abroad trip, with that both happening in Asia as well as Europe…[There was] a deeper and more shared community life in Europe, feeling a closer connection to the other students compared to in St. Stephen (IN).

Wesley’s previous comment in the Safe space subsection applied again, moving Chuck’s articulation of relationship building one step further:

For those who wanted to change, the sense of community among them increased and they felt closer to each other. I feel now like I’m not restricted to just hang out with a group of people that I’m comfortable with, I can belong with a larger group of people. To say they were tighter knit isn’t an adequate description – there was room for building new relationships, and those new relationships and pre-existing relationships had the ability to all grow closer at their own pace. Some people grew closer by virtue of proximity, and others grew closer intentionally (IN).

Support among students bridged a multitude of topics impacting daily life, aided each other in program engagement, extended beyond existing social groups, and facilitated deeper and new relationships.

Challenges between students occurred across components of the program and daily living. Insightful questions were posed during each other’s presentations (OB). Small group conversations engaged an idea or concept that challenged each other’s perspectives (OB). Invitations to new encounters brought freedom and confidence to engage their learning environment. William invited the group to a craft beer store after dinner one evening to connect and try some local beers. Several students who would not
have felt comfortable venturing their on their own took William’s invitation, expanded their social experiences and learned about craft beer (OB). Valentina referenced the ability of familiar travel partners to aid in navigating romantic ideations healthily:

Life can’t stop just because you’re traveling, everyone still has ideas from home that they’re processing. [Lawrence] hadn’t finished processing Cambodia.

Another thing is that I think people who travel alone - I watched *Under the Tuscan Sun* last night – people are more prone to make rash decisions if they’re traveling alone in different countries. I’m not just saying they’re going to go out and party, not necessarily that kind of rash decision. But more like “I’m going to change my life in these ways,” and then they come back home and maybe they make those changes or they don’t. But either way they’ve changed their life significantly, or else they feel guilty for not living up to these new standards that they had set for themselves while they were abroad. I think bringing people with you who really know you can really ground you while you are away. If you’re like “I’m going to buy an Italian villa,” and you have three friends there to say “But okay, you know you’re not, right? Or these are the considerations you should have in mind when you buy it.” People to keep you grounded and remind you that you’re still yourself (IN).

Highlighting the inherent challenges of navigating social situations, Luisa identified both the help she received, and that she attempted to offer within the group:

for the most part I believe I was able to be very honest with myself about where my thoughts and feelings were coming from and use them to learn from. I felt less plagued by anxiety than I expected which helped immensely in overcoming some
of the other struggles of travelling. I largely owe this to the fact that I was able to accept, and come to love, my dependence on my friends who I was travelling with. I hope I was able to support them in a way that made them experience the same security (PR).

Personal care and development joined the challenges sphere as students conversed with each other about taking personal space and down time to be able to continue engaging the program and group (OB, IN, FJ). The questionnaire also referenced taking personal space, as students recounted spending most non-program time with the group, followed by time alone, and then time on the internet (QU). High levels of group interaction followed by personal space facilitated the level of support and challenge students offered each other.

The group drew closer together, shared deep relation interactions, engaged the program together, and bridged new connections among participants. These happened in part from the support and challenge that they offered each other, the environment that the leaders created and participated in, and the cumulative experience of community that brought with it a sense of camaraderie and living through previous learning experiences together.

Outside ourselves.

Building on Learning Environment and Group Interactions, this section focused on interactions and influences with less overt factors that exhibit either how the group reached outside of themselves, or were prepared to reach outside of themselves.
Liminality was the largest factor, with the program identified as an in between space where participants involved each other in making sense of life. Engaging locals and the other, opportunities and benefits of reflection, and spiritual questing comprised other manifestations of the group existing outside themselves.

**Liminality.**

Liminality as a state was identified repeatedly in four expressions: big questions, middle making, altered relationships, and safety, several examples of which have already been noted above. Big questions reflected students challenging their established identities. Topics of conversation and thinking spanned numerous facets of life with a willingness to exchange previous traditions of knowing for new ones. Program content provided a catalyst to bring evolving thoughts and questions to the fore. Chuck noted several of these factors and the common space they created:

> Going into Europe we’re living together, studying together, we’re eating together, it gave room for a lot more encounters together…More of a desire to learn, seeing in other people on the road a greater interest being generated in travel, and being able to share ideas and thoughts in a more free way in a travel semester with more time together, and all sorts of other experiences that you’re able to connect so many different things. And you’re sharing the same classes as well…so you can relate on more things, on a common language (IN).

Allegra connected community interactions with her own expanded perspectives:

> It’s been good because there’s been people from different backgrounds and they’ve had different perspectives of things and helped open my eyes to a few
things too, and I appreciate the ways in which they think. We’ve all learned so much together and been on this big journey together. We’re a tight knit community, we see each other every day (IN).

Field journal entries became a space to pose big questions, blogs highlighted the coming together of knowledge and experience, and preparation reading assignments captured shifts in cultural perception, internal and external awareness, and the ability to see alternative viewpoints. Crystal connected seeing alternative viewpoints with gathering times:

I realize that every experience that we have had as a group, every person has a different experience and understanding for it. They see things in different ways, we all do. This is one of the reasons that I really liked our gathering times. It gave us a chance to share these different experiences and possibly learn more or see things differently by hearing a way that someone else had experienced something (PR).

Middle making refers to the processes involved in removing barriers between participants, such as social status, to facilitate interactions between them. Leaders’ ability to diminish hierarchy and remain open and available to students stood out as significant to facilitating liminal space and building social capital. References largely addressed leaders’ decisions to diminish hierarchical structures within the group. Allegra commented on the balance that was struck:

think it was too hierarchical because they’re professors, but at the same time kind of like friends and companions on the journey. There’s always going to be a slight
unbalance because they are professors and they’re educating us, but I think there was a good balance in those things (IN).

Still perceived as leaders by the students, their spatial, conversational, emotional, understanding building, and meaning making availability caused students to view them as integrated, accessible and contributing members of the group. William commented on the combination of these factors and the positive influence on him:

the leadership gave me the information and know how to enter those places with some context and comfortability which was great because it was not babying but rather like a friend offering advice to a friend and that was huge for me and I assume many others (PR).

Altered relationships illustrated the group being in the experience together, building bridges and relying on each other to traverse the liminal space, and reaffirming the assertion that they embodied a liminal space. Several references pointed to the breaking down of previous social structures within the group, allowing new connections to emerge, and alluded to the emergence of communitas. Allegra acknowledged the challenge and value of expanding prior social structures:

it's sometimes easy to stick to my own little group of people that I already know and not talk as much or get to know as much the other people. But while on the trip, through sharing rooms with different people, and going on outings with them I built strong relationships and made some good memories with them. So I think now I see the value more of getting out and being a bit more sociable and getting to know those that I don’t already know. I did before, but now it’s more of like I want to. I think travel helps us to come together and form stronger bonds (IN).
Students made references to the “unique” relationships that people form while at SSU, comments that allude to the presence of communitas and building social capital when examined. Riding the train from Perugia to Florence, a group discussed how friendships frequently form unexpectedly at SSU between people appearing to have little in common initially (OB). Valentina commented that after a mountain climb together, she felt like she got an old friend back (IN). Lucille noted a new level of friendship with two other students, and that “we got really close in Europe, it’s been a huge support for me now” (IN). Potentially viewed as comments students make in a plethora of social and educational settings, I suggest something different has occurred here. Eight students experienced another form of post-secondary education previously (QU), so their comments were not isolated in their SSU experience. Seven had lived in other intentional communities previously (QU), bringing multiple perspectives to their comments regarding unique relationships formed in this environment. David described SSU as “one of the most different communities I’ve been in because it’s the one I’ve been most able to open up to” (IN).

Safety emerged within liminality as a trait of both the program and group, given space to develop through the program structure and leadership. Combined with the familiarity of fellow participants, safety helped create a landing place students could sink back into when needed. Rebecca’s earlier observation acknowledged this, but a specific quote highlights it even more

Having a home base that they feel comfortable in each place is really helping people feel like even if they’re exhausted, they can come home at night and have
somewhere to settle in, that they can make their own for the time period that we’re there and I think that’s been helpful (OB).

Seven months after the program, Luisa conveyed what helped keep her anxiety at bay during the program “We were staying quite a long time in each place, and staying together, and there was a safe space you could return to and be in” (IN). In an unfamiliar environment the group became a safe space to cocoon within and regain perspective and energy. Knowing she could talk with another student who struggled with anxiety helped Luisa manage her own (IN).

Viewing the group as a trustworthy venue to share insecurities and personal struggles with in the midst of engaging big questions, discovering new cultures and being away from their home environment set the stage for liminal encounters and the emergence of communitas and social capital. Big questions, middle making, altered relationships, and safety all combined to illustrate liminality’s presence and impact on the group.

**Locals.**

Interactions with locals presented a point of dissatisfaction with the program by students. Data sets revealed that lack of target language knowledge and lack of facilitated interactions with locals were perceived negatively by students with relation to program effectiveness (QU, FJ, PR). Program participation as a group also detracted from individuals’ perceived ability to engage locals. Myrtle noted that “I thought that I would get to know more locals than I did and that I would learn more about the everyday grind”
Students had expectation regarding interactions with locals that the program did not deliver.

Examining data sets for instances of student interaction with locals revealed that observations, blogs and field journals contained meaningful interactions with locals, much more than student perceptions suggested. Dolores described utilizing existing language skills and challenging herself to interact with locals:

Even though I have been in French Immersion for nearly 13 years I still had to push myself to speak French with the locals. It made my experience more challenging but greatly rewarding… I made an intentional effort to engage with the locals, and to ask a lot of questions (PR).

Valentina had a significant encounter that will be explored in the next section on Other. Crystal recalled “it is amazing how easy it is to connect with people you don’t know. How the simple things like asking for a lighter can start a forty-five minute conversation” (FJ). Luisa recalled an interaction where she connected with an older gentleman in a restaurant in Paris:

the other night we talked to an eighty-year-old man at a restaurant, John Nettinger. Half Swiss, half Canadian, living in Paris. He spoke poetically about love, loss, loneliness and career. He was funny. “Deflated without dismissing.” He talked a lot. I don’t like to be the soundboard for someone speaking dishonestly, lying to me and to themselves, but he spoke truly and so I wanted to listen. I need to listen. And I was present to him, he let me react and responded to my reacting. He did not live in a dramatic space, or in self-pity, nor in a space of denial. He was just being in what is, but without nihilism (FJ).
Incongruence between student perceptions and student accounts was supported by my observations while with the group, exemplified by a field note almost a week into my time with the group:

Have observed Ruth engaging in conversations with locals on her own. I saw her talking to an artist on the street in Florence yesterday, then with a girl about her age in one of the main squares in Perugia today. Valentina has also been engaged in several conversations with locals. This is part of their course for Walter, but they seem to be engaging quite naturally. As Ruth’s conversation continued, I saw Valentina, Roy, Thomas, David, and Lawrence join the group. Valentina continued to hold the conversation after Ruth pulled away for a bit. Crystal and Lucille also joined the conversation with the girl.

Turns out the girl’s name is Charlotte and Valentina met her outside the foreign university for studying Italian culture and language. Valentina said she found Charlotte crying on the steps and offered her some water. She found out that Charlotte’s boyfriend had just left her to return to Germany. Valentina chose to hang out with her for the day and invited her to join our group for supper, paying for her meal (OB).

Expectations for interactions with locals exceeded program design, and did not reflect the quantity and quality of interactions with locals during the program.

Other.

Attempting to understand and connect with “the other” was significantly represented within the Outside ourselves grouping, highlighting the perspective frowned
which students engaged the program. The questionnaire indicated they entered the program with their strongest goal being the desire to learn about themselves and others (QU). Lucille showed this when she reflected on Zemach-Bersin’s (2008) discussion of privilege before the program began:

this is somewhat taught to us before we go into the country. We are told what it might feel like, and we are able to take time out of our travels to discuss what we are feeling. For Bersin I think the mistake was having these expectations for change, and not being aware that being a minority might change your experience completely…So perhaps on noticing the differences, one should find commonalities in order to connect with the local people, we must understand our privilege, the effects we have on the people who pass us on the streets and then we must forget about that and find a connection (PR).

Students attempted to place themselves cognitively into the shoes of “the other” as they encountered sites and presentations during the program. Engaging “the other” through visits to war sites, they attempted to understand perspectives of both victims and captors, wrestling with human capacity to commit violence against themselves (OB). The gathering time after visiting Mauthausen portrayed this, when almost every participant articulated a response seeking to enter the situation of “the other” (OB). Jennifer recalled her experience of attempting to comprehend the conditions prisoners endured:

went down to the…memorial. My mom’s maiden name and my grandma’s were in there – sorry. I’m one of those people who can’t talk when they’re crying. At the beginning I felt really heavy with the numbers, just like, 200,000, this many deaths. And then I tried to picture it in one person, and then I saw the names on
the board. Then I walked up and down the death stairs twice. The first time I walked down I was just focusing on the steps themselves, they were so uneven and tilted up, and I could not imagine – I was carrying my water bottle that seemed like a nuisance. There was so much focus on not falling down the whole time, ‘cause they were just awful the way they were built. The path leading up to me kind of reminded me of some of the roads in Italy. They looked nice but they were so uneven that your foot can’t even be flat, and that was what it was the whole time. And then on the way up, for a second I put my water bottle over my shoulder and I got hit with this – imagine this was a hundred pound stone, and right now I’m forty pounds over their – I’m so healthy compared to anyone here. It seemed like a struggle without the stone, just being one person going up and down that. Imagining doing that fifteen times – I was tired after doing it twice and I wasn’t carrying anything and I’m healthy. So then picturing someone, like a family member, having done that – I was doing that by myself, and they are each individuals going through that. I don’t really know what I think about that yet, but that just really struck me (OB).

Field journal entries contained a strong theme of openness to otherness. Olivia recounted an unexpected experience of being open:

When we visited the Sikh temple in London none of it made much sense and I had dismissed it as just another Islamic religion. As it was explained I came to change my response and there was part of me more open to dialogue because of their openness to sharing with us (FJ).
Despite the difficulties referenced earlier regarding language barriers, students continually expressed their desire to engage others outside the group. Valentina recalled an encounter at a hostel where she connected with a few other travellers who met “the other” in each other:

I sat up from midnight to 3:30am talking to three of the guys at the hostel: Joseph, Matjaz, and Pierre-Loup. The next night, we did the same thing. We talked about almost everything under the sun, where we came from and politics and funny anecdotes etc. But we started talking about SSU, which led us to talk about religion. We realised that of the four of us, every one of us was a Baptised Christian— but we all had incredibly different backgrounds and beliefs.

I held up the protestant flag on my own.

Matjaz was raised Catholic and is still a firm believer of the Gospel, but has since been exploring a broader definition of those values. He is interested in the unprogrammed worship of Quaker congregations, is reading about new age philosophies and is about 80% convinced of reincarnation.

Joseph was raised Catholic in Lebanon, and has had a more traditional faith. Within the last year or so, however, he feels that his faith has been shaken by judgmental attitudes that he has seen in the church. He is struggling to reconcile his more liberal/universalist theology with the Church’s official doctrine.

Pierre-Loup was baptised as a baby, but I can’t remember if he was later confirmed. Anyhow, he was emphatic that neither he nor anyone in his family is religious at all. He enjoys politics, art and human history, and has an optimistic
view of the future. Religious freedom is very important to him. Of all of us, I found him to be the most respectful of religious difference. (Maybe you can’t feel defensive about something that you don’t feel is “yours” to begin with?)

This variety in belief, though not unusual to find in life, was incredible from the perspective that under different circumstances, we might all say that we shared the same religion. It is the clearest example, in my personal life, of the material in Joel Mason’s lectures on Derrida, Différence, and deconstruction.

And, in the midst of all of that difference, Joseph made us a big pot of spaghetti and we sat in a circle, and ate, and listened to each other, and made a little fun of Matjaz’s haircut, and watched the soccer game, and became friends (FJ).

Evidence of students’ ability to understand “the other” presented itself in their; awareness of their relationship to their surroundings, awareness of how people can have vastly different experiences of the same situation, and references to shifts in cultural perception and growth in their ability to see different viewpoints (PR, FJ). Olivia recalled coming to a new realization when students her own age made a presentation to the group: “the other encounter that changed my response was the presentation from the class in Barcelona about street sellers. These encounters gave me more information about what I was encountering and helped me to see the humanity of the other (PR).” Reflecting on viewpoints that she was working on becoming more open-minded about, Luisa noted that I have noticed this trend in myself in other areas as well, I exclude that which excludes. If I am going to strive to be a truly inclusive person I need to learn to
value both the excluded and the excluder in the ways that they offer goodness and truth and not only live in reaction (PR).

Chuck noted the intentionality that he took toward breaking down pre-existing thoughts when he stated that

I know that in traveling I had to daily come to grips with my weaknesses and failings, how I wasn’t experiencing things as I wanted to. However, I do feel that I had a fairly open and seeking heartset as we explored and learned about European peoples, history and culture. Indeed, I tried to approach things with an attitude of curiosity and questioning to help come to a deeper knowledge and appreciation of the other (PR).

An attitude of openness, a desire to understand, and preparation for what they would encounter positioned students to have meaningful interactions with and break down their preconceptions of “the other.”

Reflection.

Reflection and its contribution to the student experience was strongly tied to the catalysts of gathering times and the field journal. Students acknowledged the importance and benefit of reflection, especially guided reflection (OB). An invitation after a site visit to participate in a brief liturgical reading outside facilitated one example. Fourteen students and all of the leaders chose to participate in shared readings together that led into silence. Intrigued by the degree of participation, I remained to observe. Over seventy minutes the silence remained, with people sitting, lying down or journaling. Participants dispersed gradually, respecting the silence as they left (OB). The value of reflection
within the group, and the willingness to give each other freedom and space to engage such an experience were evident.

Blog entries displayed the fruits of reflection. Lawrence utilized his blog to relay an experience of reflection he had while engaged with a piece of art:

In The Vatican, I was herded from one room to the next amongst the droves of tourists. I felt like a cow being led to my slaughter. The paintings themselves reflected the chaos as scenes of war, heaven, hell, and history were packed full with the characters of stories and legends. It was in this atmosphere of chaos that I found one piece that stood out and amazed me beyond understanding and expectation. It was one of those contemporary pieces that many, including myself, struggle to understand the reason for their place in the halls of fame; one that many may deem to be too simple to be beautiful. A black canvas with an imperfect thin, white circle stood amongst the likes of Chagall, Dali, and Picasso. For the first time, I was able to draw incredible meaning from an abstract piece that I would otherwise struggle to understand. It was exactly its imperfection and simplicity that captivated me. My original thoughts were simple, mere observations. White on black. White circle and perfection. Then I thought of the imperfection of the white circle and my thoughts grew deeper. Is this representation of purity more true to the reality of purity; something that is less than the expectation? I began to compare my understanding of its commentary on purity to its place in the Vatican (BL).

The importance of processing through conversations, alone time, journaling and especially gathering times came through in assignments and interviews. David referenced
the time in Arras at the end of the program as having an emphasis on reflection: “I think for most of us this was a place to mostly relax, and reflect on the trip before heading home. This is even more evident by the entire day of debriefing and talking about the entire trip (FJ).” Asked if there was an experience that captured his education abroad program, Thomas pointed to the time in Arras, recalling time to unwind, talk through their experience of the program, and prepare for the next stage of their journeys. He remembered encouraging fellow students to reflect on their time together, and valued the collective experience of that moment (IN). Lawrence referred to an optional program component, asserting “a hike like this encourages reflection, spiritual growth in nature, and general health (FJ).” Commenting on the course containing the field journals, he claimed it “helped to highlight the importance of being present to the learning experiences through journaling and reflecting. It assisted in the impact of the trip’s themes and subject matter through contemplating their meaning in the present moment (FJ).” Valentina stepped back further, pointing to the program as a whole: “there were ample opportunities to discuss and reflect with fellow students, and occasionally with professors as well, during the trip. Trains and busses, roommates and Gatherings made total reclusion impossible. Predictable itineraries and non-program days encouraged solitude and exploration (FJ).” Chuck pointed to the field notes exercise itself as essential to facilitating reflection:

the journal was huge for me, and it required a bit more thought to be more academic. However, I really needed this space to process and decompress with my thoughts. Personally, I found that I also needed to orally share major thoughts and ideas, which can include feedback, so that I could process what I was seeing,
thinking and feeling. Moreover, it has been very good looking at my observations and see how my thoughts or attitudes towards different experiences and have changed (PR).

Initiated largely through gathering times and field journals by the leaders, students reflected frequently throughout the program and conveyed the resulting academic and personal benefits.

_Spirituality_.

Self described as a liberal arts university supported by a Christian community, leaders needed to ensure they did not impose Christianity as a required lens for students to experience the program through, while still providing space for spiritual questing. People were free to speak about their spiritual journey during conversations or gathering times, but there was no expectation for how or if students’ pursued spirituality. Group conversations displayed respectful disagreement on topics of faith, as referenced in the section on Safe Space above (OB). Blogs exhibited spiritual questing, and interviews contained student recollections from their spiritual journeys. Questioning, openness and self-awareness illustrate students’ healthy spiritual questing.

Unfamiliar spaces are a form of interruption that facilitate the experiential and transformational learning processes, and those interruptions can generate questions. Birthplace of the Renaissance, Reformation and Counter-Reformation, Europe contains an abundance of architecture and art North American students would rarely be exposed to. Aesthetics and narratives served as interruptions that in turn generated questions. Lucille demonstrated her own spiritual questing in a blog entry exploring uncertainty:
Nymphéas Bleus – Monet

What is it like to be entering the unknown, spending time with uncertainty. Your hands are where your feet should be, your eyes are where your ears should be and your heart is not even inside of you, instead it is on the other side of the room beating on the floor. You cannot be certain of your senses, just as you cannot be certain that your idea of God is the right one because the person sitting beside you probably has a slightly different idea of God. Or we cannot be certain of why Monet painted water lilies, why he chose the colours he did. However, we need to think we can have certainty: up is up, down is down and blue is a colour and that colour is sadness. We need this to feel grounded, to have meaning. But really all it takes for us to be certain of something is if two or more people can agree upon it (BL).

Luisa continued the theme of uncertainty with her own questions about what her view of spirituality was. She wrestled between her openness to spirituality and her resistance to how others choose to live out their faith journey:

At Montserrat I was overwhelmed by the presence of something very spiritual and welcomed the possibility of coming to appreciate more of Christian practice and belief. In Italy and France however, I became bitter and defensive once again. I did not want to acknowledge the potential freedom available through religious practice and couldn’t understand how others would. Now that I am back home my thoughts have synthesized into accepting both parts of myself; the me that is critical of religion and the me that feels deeply drawn to it (PR).
Students also displayed a demeanour of openness to new possibilities. Olivia and Ruth both cited separate site visits that challenged pre-existing understandings of their experience of faith and assisted them in acquiring a wider perspective. Previously unaware of how their faith stance impacted their view of those around them, they grew more accepting of the differences in faith expressions and in their own group.

Reflecting on the impact of the course *Responses to Religious Difference, Past and Present*, Lawrence wove academic, personal and global spiritual considerations into one conversation touching on identity and violence:

[W]e looked at a spectrum of constructive and destructive reactions to spiritual perspectives that have shaped our society’s religious practices. In the pre-trip assignments, I researched and wrote about the mainly Christian history of religious difference in Europe, while fully immersed in the Buddhist culture of Cambodia. I was able to apply Europe’s spiritual fragmentation to how I understood and appreciated Buddhist customs. I saw value in Buddhism’s claim to be a philosophical tool as well as its warning against dogmas that command one to fight, kill, and die for their existence.

On the trip, I mostly critiqued religious institutions and their responses to difference. I grew in my understanding of Sikhism and its fabulously practical embrace of otherness. I sneered at golden crosses in Catholic churches that were paid for by indulgences and plunder. I applauded the boat church in its mission to help refugees. I pondered the use of Masonic imagery in Christian paintings. I wept over the simplicity of St. Francis and his humbly challenging example. What I took away most from this course was that difference is a myth that is created by
defining one’s identity. Violence is used to defend identity and the breaking of bread inevitably deconstructs identity (FJ).

Exploring spirituality open-handed, students brought their own preconceived notions and others’ spiritual journeys to the table to examine, compare and reflect, in pursuit of clarity, acceptance, and understanding.

Breaking through established social statuses to engage each other as participants, and through preconceptions of “the other” to see them as human, the group disrupted current knowledge systems, making room for new understandings and meaning. Aided by leader prompts and program design, students utilized reflection to better integrate and understand their experiences. Personal spirituality was challenged and stretched through engaging “the other,” and encountering situations where preconceived notions of faith did not reconcile.

**Summary of Results**

This study sought to identify what forms of learning students engaged in during their Europe education abroad program, and what impact community had on learning opportunities and outcomes. Several data sets provided vantage points to gain perspective and insight into content, structures and interactions within the program. Examples emerging from the data focused on both what students learned, and what contributed to that learning.

**Learning environment.**

Rooted in a philosophy that views all participants as co-constructors of knowledge, understanding and meaning, the leaders designed and carried out a program
with room for student input, self-exploration and autonomous learning. Students learned both facts and concepts about European history, politics, culture and art from program content. Weaving facts and concepts into prior learning, preparation assignments, time abroad, and follow up assignments, students held loosely and challenged their previous knowledge. They accomplished this by analyzing and questioning the personal experiences and perspectives they brought to each situation, both individually and as a group. Gathering times and field journals offered safe space for leaders and students to authentically share, appreciate, connect, and reflect on their own and each other’s experiences.

**Group interactions.**

Alongside and facilitating learning in the program stood the influence of a previous experience of community. Familiarity amongst group members brought safety, security and stability to students, enabling them to be themselves, explore with confidence, and maintain a consistent pattern and pace of engagement with the program. Students processed their experiences and growing knowledge within the group, learning more about and building bridges between each other and the perspectives they came from and were moving through during the program. Beyond perspectives, students shared, learned about, and supported each other’s joys, successes, anxieties and personal struggles, resulting in both restored and new relationships among group members, enhancing their social capital. Not satisfied with focusing intently at each other, the group allowed the sharing to transform how they saw the world around them and sought to identify with the people contained in the presentations of history, politics, faith and
culture. Returning to the community to complete their studies enabled them to continue processing and integrating their experiences with program participants and the SSU community at large.

**Outside ourselves.**

Having vulnerability modelled, respected and fostered in private, group and public environments laid a foundation for instances of liminality and communitas. In these instances, organizational and social hierarchies were deconstructed, freeing participants to engage each other in big questions that challenged and disrupted prior conceptions of reality, self, society, spirituality and other. Emerging from these exhilarating yet disruptive queries, participants moved back and forth between liminal spaces and the rhythms of the community that cycled through iterations of encouragement, comfort and challenge, absorbing and integrating their songs and sorrows. Reflecting on and working out their growing knowledge and understanding while acquiring the skill of academic journaling, students cycled through these experiences continually, descending through layers of experiential learning.

Acknowledging the struggles of shared life in new and constantly changing learning environments, students demonstrated and articulated their engagement in an experience that transformed them into better thinkers, friends, community members and global citizens. Learning outcomes revealed in assignments and interviews blended program goals and personal interests, digging beyond surface level interactions. Preparing to depart the community soon after completing the surveys, questionnaires and
interviews, students were positioned to complete their studies and transition into careers and further studies as thoughtful, considerate, engaged and open-minded contributors to their communities and world.

CHAPTER FIVE-DISCUSSION

Research Questions, Methods of inquiry, Overview of Results

Addressing the larger question of what impact community can have on learning in an education abroad program, four research questions were pursued in a case study focused on a social constructivist approach. The research questions asked what students were learning, what kinds of relationships and interactions occurred within the group, what impact community had on students’ interactions in new cultural contexts, and what role SSU’s stance as a faith community had on students’ academic engagement.

Examining SSU’s Europe education abroad program, I looked for evidence of student learning through observations, questionnaires, indexes, assignments and interviews.

Significant learning occurred in academic, social, intercultural, intrapersonal and spiritual regards. Satisfied with the results of the research question regarding learning, the discussion section will focus on what generated that learning. Major findings emerging from the data were: the importance of leaders in both setting the learning environment, and being available to meet students’ needs and direct their learning in situ; the potential for preparation efforts to position students to engage the program academically, and to engage and connect “the other” both inside and outside of the group; the role the learning environment and interactions with familiar group members had on creating safe spaces
for student engagement; and how liminality, reflection and a healthy pursuit of spirituality built off of the other findings and assisted students in reaching outside of themselves to engage the world around them.

**Safe Space**

Not being judged or marginalized for who we are, what we have said or how we have said it are deep human longings. People have and will continue to look for safe opportunities to express and process emotions and ideas, especially on sensitive topics. Kurt Lewin desired to alleviate social conflict by making space for and addressing problems experienced by minority and disadvantages groups (Burnes, 2004). His work in social psychology led to the development of sensitivity training (T-groups) that used honest feedback to increase self-awareness and identify personal biases among group members in an effort to address issues of racism and religious prejudice (Adelman, 1993). Manifested under Carl Rogers as encounter groups, these groups established an environment of trust to aid members in “examining one's behaviour and values, learning about people in general, becoming more successful in interpersonal relationships, and developing conflict resolution skills” (Hunter, 2009). Later adopted by women’s movements and the LGBTQIA2S+ community (Antipode, 2014; Kenney, 2001), the use and definition of the term continues to evolve and has made inroads into social work and education. The ability of these spaces to aid participants in navigating uncertainty and change is highlighted in the constructive engagement with the inherent resulting discomfort of facing that uncertainty with others (Antipode, 2014; Kisfalvi & Oliver, 2015; Redmond, 2010; Zembylas, 2015). Henri Nouwen suggests that these kinds of
learning spaces contain “mutual trust in which those who teach and those who want to learn can become present to each other, not as opponents, but as those who share in the same struggle and search for the same truth” (Nouwen, 1986, pp.85-6). For the purpose of this discussion, safe space will be defined as an environment of trust that allows for personal and group transformation through open and honest dialogue.

Safe space stands out as the most significant finding in this study, enabling students to be authentic to themselves and the group with their suppositions, emotions, insecurities and beliefs. Safe spaces serve as the nexus between information and experiences the students encounter, and the outcomes of liminality, communitas, engaging the other, reflection, and healthy spirituality conveyed in Outside Ourselves. Leader disposition and program content within the learning environment merge with the familiarity of the group to establish these safe spaces where authenticity emerges.

Contrary to concerns of this creating a coddling atmosphere that reinforces paradigms and protects students from real world interactions, these safe spaces encourage vulnerable sharing and building social bridges, intellectual disagreement within the group, and open-minded engagement with the world.

Education abroad addresses physical safety in risk management and orientation practices, but has been slow to ensure the implementation of safe spaces to support and enhance the student learning process. This is despite contributions from the field of experiential learning stating that engaging in effective reflection and meaning making requires a psychological safe space (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Disorienting and unfamiliar, education abroad spaces are potentially unsafe spaces by nature, challenging and stretching students significantly, clearly identifying the need to establish safe spaces for...
students to engage in effective experiential education (Hawe & Dixon, 2016, Ripamorti et al, 2018). Whether because of logistical limitations, an overemphasis on intercultural and linguistic competence as a quantifiable outcome, or the perceived impossibility of creating these spaces consistently, little research has been directed toward this aspect of education abroad until recently (Anderson, Lorenz, & White, 2016), raising the question of how much attention is given to the topic in implementation. Without the provision of safe space, students set out on resource intensive educational initiatives without the ability to reap the benefits of those experiences.

Understanding what constitutes safe spaces in an education abroad setting specifically, and knowing how to establish these spaces will be an important step toward expanding learning possibilities for education abroad students. This study’s contribution to the effort identifies components that facilitated safe spaces in this case study: an environment that encourages questioning and challenging; familiarity among participants; trust among participants; invitations to share vulnerably; and an environment of support. Potential concerns that these components may be too resource intensive to implement can be addressed by looking to examples in this study. Incorporating activities into existing pre-departure, orientation and assignment components of education abroad programming can significantly increase the development of safe spaces for students. Key to implementing these activities is the presence of facilitators with an aim to develop safe spaces.
Leaders

Leaders were acknowledged as the most significant factor in establishing safe spaces, and fostering the subsequent outcomes identified in the Outside Ourselves section. Students willingly participated in the program, drawing from and adding value to their interactions with each other, which were enhanced due to their familiarity and pre-established level of trust with each other. However, it is improbable that they would have engaged in the nature, number, and depth of activities with program content and each other without intentional leader facilitation. Leaders designed and facilitated a learning environment that prepared students to engage academic and cultural content from a perspective of curiosity and openness to dialoguing with difference. Ample space and time were provided for program engagement, autonomous learning, reflection, group interactions and logistics, and rest. They positioned themselves as co-learners and co-creators of knowledge, understanding and meaning, making room for student input in the learning experience. And they connected with students intentionally and consistently, making themselves available for academic and personal needs. Students perceived the leadership as approachable and available, describing them as caring companions on the learning journey.

Effective leadership’s impact on student learning and engagement is well established in education abroad. Contributions in recent years emphasize the necessity of program facilitators to interact with participants consistently, prompting them with questions and cultural guidance that foster intellectual curiosity and participant initiative. Momentum from these initiatives enable participants to engage learning opportunities and generate long term and substantial learning outcomes (Anderson, Lorenz, & White, 2016;
Engle & Engle, 2012; Knight-Grofe, J., & Rauh, K., 2016; Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2003; Nam, 2011; Ripamonti et al, 2018; Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, & Paige, 2009). Outside education abroad, the concept of intentional, personalized interactions between instructors and students is also well established. Grünzweig & Rinehart (2013) acknowledge Buber’s dialogical principle of education as ideal for education abroad learning environments, where Buber states:

> What is important is not just searching for information and providing information, not just questions and answers back and forth, but a truly reciprocal, interactive conversation which teachers must lead and control but into which they also must enter with their own person, directly and candidly.

Extending beyond the concept of regular and frequent interactions, Buber and Grünzweig & Rinehart advocate for personalized, vulnerable interactions between facilitators and participants, akin to the findings from this study. Stepping into the personal, emotional and social aspects of students’ lives as they engage program components outside of their established frames of reference provides opportunities for transformative learning (Anderson, Lorenz, & White, 2016; Kisfalvi & Oliver, 2015; Freire, 1970; Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2003; Naude, van den Bergh, & Kruger, 2014; Nouwen, 1986; Ritz, 2011; Rogers, 1969; Smith & Knapp, 2011). Approaching education from this vantage point parallels with constructivist theory, viewing the learning experience as multi-faceted and holistic, incorporating all aspects of the participant that interact with their learning experiences (Dewey, 1963; Naude, van den Bergh, & Kruger, 2014; Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Kolb 2015).
Combining academic, personal and situational learning in a challenging and supportive environment lays a foundation for safe spaces where participants can open up and share, becoming more vulnerable with each other, expanding the range and depth of topics they engage with, forming and participating in community. Engaging in these activities themselves, leaders in this study chose to include themselves in the community environment they helped to develop, becoming co-participants, co-learners, co-meaning makers, sharing their own thoughts and lives in the process of learning and living together. Student responses expressed appreciation for this approach, stating that it made them more comfortable and confident in their environment, and contributed to the building of social capital in the group. While not stated specifically by the students, I suggest a correlation also existed between the approach the leaders modelled, and the care, challenge and support students identified occurring among themselves. Contrary to concerns of this descending into hug sessions and an apathy to rigorous academic inquiry, this study and research point to the opposite. Mutual respect and care, levelling of hierarchies through choice and shared experience, and continuing curiosity fuelled by a freedom to question and challenge bring forth deep conversations on topics integral to the human lived experience in an environment full of creative conflict and care (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004; Brown, 2016; Carlsson-Page, N., & Lantieri, L., 2005; Junker, 2013; Kohn, 2006; Noddings, 2005; Palmer, 1987; Wenger, 2009).

Extending opportunities for interaction, leaders brought the group together once or twice a week to share their learning experiences together. These gathering times afforded all participants voice to express their personal and educational barriers and breakthroughs. Simultaneously, perspective was gained on the personal state and
experiences of the whole group, both humanizing each other collectively and open sourcing their collectively gained knowledge and understanding, continuing the building of bridges between them. Social learning emerges from these gathering times, drawing on both the safety of the established space, and the collective interaction with each other’s thoughts and experiences (Buber, 1958; Freire, 1970; Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2003; Naude, van den Bergh, & Kruger, 2014; Shrewsbury, 1997; Sloman & Fernback; Smith & Knapp, 2011; Vygotsky, 1978; Wenger; 2009).

Leaders are pivotal to establishing safe space within the learning environment, engaging and guiding participants’ learning experience, and connecting with participants to draw out collective learning and connection. The importance of identifying and equipping facilitators to realize these outcomes cannot be overlooked if organizations seek and claim to provide education abroad opportunities that have the potential to provide transformational learning. CBIE’s 2016 report, *A World of Learning – Canada’s Performance and Potential in International Education*, identifies that this is not currently a priority for Canadian universities (Knight-Grofe & Rauh, 2016).

**Outside Ourselves**

Safe spaces initiated by leaders who immersed themselves in the learning experience with students set the stage for transformational learning in this study. Engaging in reflection individually and collectively provided opportunities to build self-awareness, challenge pre-existing knowledge and paradigms, and weave new knowledge into participants’ lives. These positioned students to reach outside themselves and step into liminality together, engaging the other, and exploring spirituality. Transformational
learning occurred as they grappled with disruptions to previous ways of knowing and entered into deep learning that changed their thinking, beliefs and behaviours.

Intentional reflection was essential to transformational learning, bridging leaders’ efforts to create safe spaces to engage in dialogue and meaning making with emerging realizations, aha moments, and changed perspectives of students. Identified above, group gathering times facilitated this collectively, while individually students engaged in this process in smaller conversations with leaders and fellow students, and especially in their field notes journal assignment. Designed to capture the building of understanding and meaning making in process, journal entries were added three times a week. Reflection is understood as essential to bring meaning making out of experience, and a lack of reflection exacting little to no change on the participant (Dewey, 1998; Dirkx, Mezirow, & Cranton, 2006; Engle & Engle, 2003; Freire, 1970; Kolb, 2015; Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2003; Mezirow, J., 2000, 2003). Despite this acknowledgement, education abroad programs frequently espouse the value of these practices without adequately developing and integrating them into program and practice (Breunig, 2005; Savicki & Price, 2015, Ripamonti et al, 2018), driving the call going forward to be more about reporting on specific implementation strategies and their effect in education abroad, rather than reflection’s general acknowledged benefit. Students in this study consistently articulated the personal and academic value of reflecting individually and collectively.

Chuck pointed to the practice of reflection and its impact on his program experience:

The journal was huge for me, and it required a bit more thought to be more academic. However, I really needed this space to process and decompress with my thoughts. Personally, I found that I also needed to orally share major thoughts
and ideas, which can include feedback, so that I could process what I was seeing, thinking and feeling. Moreover, it has been very good looking at my observations and seeing how my thoughts or attitudes towards different experiences have changed (PR).

Liminality and communitas emerged in this study repeatedly through a leveling of hierarchy, a presence of camaraderie, and an exploration of big questions, all within a learning environment that disoriented participants by removing them from regular rhythms and responsibilities of life. These factors, combined with safe spaces and guided reflection, permitted participants to dive deep into meaning making as an ongoing exercise throughout the program. In experiencing liminality, participants simultaneously reached inside and outside themselves to grapple with the disorienting cognitive, emotional, social, spiritual, and cultural jolts inherent in education abroad. Self-examination, questioning societal constructs, and placement in an in between context that diminishes social status within a familiar social context all work together to situate the SSU Europe program as a liminal space with the potential to experience communitas and build social capital (McWhinney & Markos, 2003; Turner, 1969; Szakolczai, A., 2009; Thomassen, 2009). Extending beyond traditional concepts of liminality focusing on major events, intentional settings, and interruptive moments, the study also revealed instances of liminality outside formal moments that weave in and out of the everyday, in line with emerging thoughts on possibilities for how liminality can manifest (Howard-Grenville, Golden-Biddle, Irwin, & Mao, 2011). Reflection, openness to new realities and new possibilities during and after the program, increased confidence, and a deepened sense of connection with co-participants were all effects of experiencing liminality and
communitas together. Virtually untouched as subjects in education abroad, liminality and communitas embody such immense crossover with processes and claimed outcomes in the field that they beg further exploration, particularly with regard to critical examination, meaning making, and connecting participants.

Primed through experiences of safe space, reflection and liminality, students were prepared to reach outside themselves and engage the other, both within and without the group. Engaging the other within the group was identified as an ongoing process of discovery and relationship among participants who had already spent considerable time together. Though not described as an easy process, many group members were already familiar with it from previous experience together in community and education abroad. Without the group, engagement occurred physically and cognitively, both of which were identified in assignments and interviews. Not engaging without the group to the extent they desired, students still engaged effectively cross-culturally when they did. They evidenced progress toward understanding and accepting the other, breaking down presumptions and prejudices by approaching from a position of curiosity, interest and inquiry. Education abroad carries by its nature and history tendencies to consume, sensationalize and discredit the other, and caution is essential to avoid continued colonizing of any foreign culture (Anderson, Lorenz, & White, 2016; Ellwood, 2011; Peters & Tukeo, 2010). Preparing students to engage the other occurs to some extent in education abroad offerings, though more focus needs to be extended to educating participants about their own colonial tendencies.

Spiritual questing followed suit with liminality as participants reached both inside and outside themselves simultaneously. Efforts directed internally examined pre-existing
notions of personal spirituality against new knowledge and experiences. External efforts sought to understand spirituality as expressed through history, within the group, and in local contexts. Still recovering from Christianity’s stranglehold on life in North America, higher education distanced itself from the study of spirituality and the responsibility of forming spirituality in students as part of the educational process. Recent research suggests a resurgence in interest and importance of incorporating spirituality into higher education (Astin, Astin & Lindholm, 2011; Astin & Schroeder, 2003; Duerr, Zajonc, & Dana, 2003). Astin, Astin & Lindholm (2011) point to education abroad as one of the facets of higher education that can facilitate spiritual questing in students. Wolcott & Motyka (2013) advocate borrowing spiritual language and practices for use in education abroad programming, especially reflection, so that students’ “short-term displacement to an uncharted territory, to the domain of the Other, may be a useful trigger for a personal/spiritual transformation that might eventually lead to self-knowledge and self-acceptance in the complex multicultural political realm of postmodernity” (p.39).

Acknowledging the expanding interest in spirituality in North America and the significant incorporation of spirituality in cultures education abroad participants visit, education abroad needs to explore the benefits and responsibilities of preparing participants to engage spirituality in themselves and their destinations.

LIMITATIONS

While the findings in this study are encouraging, significant, and applicable to the wider field of education abroad, they are limited to one case without comparable data from other SSU programs or studies on other comparable programs. I recommend that
SSU embark on a longitudinal study on both of its education abroad programs to refine its own programming and glean insights to engage the education abroad community.

CONCLUSION

Education abroad needs to remain focused on its primary objective, bringing about transformational change in its participants. Absorbed in ancillary activities of recruiting, reporting, language and intercultural learning outcomes, securing funding, managing partnerships and risk, and coordinating logistics for organizations and students, the field runs the risk of ignoring two key contributions established nearly a century ago: meaningful and lasting change are facilitated by deep social engagement in safe spaces, and intentional reflection on experiences. In an industry advocating itself as one of the premiere vehicles for facilitating transformational change while positioning itself to expand exponentially, re-examining base assumptions about what brings about change in its participants and establishing infrastructure and programming to support that change are critical. If education abroad seeks to avoid the perils of accidentally reinforcing simplistic nationalist sentiments among its participants, it needs to invest in preparing facilitators who maintain an emphasis on incorporating safe space and intentional reflection into their programming. Additional research on the role and impact of facilitators in fostering safe spaces and reflective activity among participants is necessary to guide next steps effectively. Moreover, liminality, communitas and spirituality’s potential role in education abroad programming and learning warrant significant and prompt exploration to keep pace with other fields and offer participants the learning experience promised them.
REFERENCES


Lang.


Meaning, Context, and Process of Transformative Learning: A Dialogue Between


Smith, T. E., & Knapp, C. (Eds.). (2011). *Sourcebook of Experiential Education: Key*


APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Letter to Educational Authority
(To be printed on University of New Brunswick Letterhead.)

Project Title: How does community impact the education abroad learning experience?

Principal Investigator: Kendall Kadatz, Graduate Student, Faculty of Education, 506-321-9665, r3w27@unb.ca

UNB Contact: Dr. Alan Sears, Professor, Faculty of Education, University of New Brunswick, 506-453-5178, asears@unb.ca

Dear Sir/Madam: The purpose of this letter is to request your permission to conduct a research project with students participating in St. Stephen’s University’s (SSU) 2016 Europe education abroad program. This research aims to explore the relationship between post-secondary students’ experiences of being in an intentional academic community and their subsequent learning in an education abroad program.

Research Procedures: I would like to interview all 20 students enrolled in the program. By participating in an intentional academic community and then engaging in an education abroad program with the same community, these students comprise the target population for this study. While all 20 students will be invited to participate in the research, their participation is voluntary and they can withdraw at any time during the research process up to one month after the completion of the interviews.

The research will be done through interviews, which will simply involve a discussion about the students’ experience of the SSU academic community and their personal reflections on how they believe that impacted their learning experience in their 2016 Europe education abroad program. Students will be asked to participate in one interview lasting between 30 to 45 minutes, and this will take place after the requirements for their academic term have been completed. The interviews will be audio-recorded. Students will also complete a short questionnaire form and the Sense of Community Index-2 (SCI-2). They will also be asked to use their pre-program questionnaire, pre-program SCI-2 and their assignments from the course International Studies 3091 for research purposes.

Confidentiality: Students’ identities will be kept strictly confidential. All participants will be given a code number and pseudonyms will appear in any research documents, including transcriptions of interviews. All documents will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. Students will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study.
I have enclosed the following material to better explain the work:

1. A one page outline of the research;
2. Samples of the information and consent form that will be provided to students.
3. A Certificate of Ethics Review from the University of New Brunswick Research Ethics Board;

**Contact for concerns about the rights of research subjects:** This project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board of the University of New Brunswick and is on file as REB 2016-052. This research is part of the requirements for my M.Ed. degree. I am working under the supervision of Dr. Alan Sears of the Faculty of Education who can be contacted at 506-453-5178 or asears@unb.ca. If you wish to contact someone not associated with this study to ask questions or raise concerns please contact Dr. David Wagner, Associate Dean, Faculty of Education, UNB, dwagner@unb.ca, 506-447-3294.

With your approval, I would like to begin the process of securing the participation of the students enrolled in the SSU 2016 Europe education abroad program and request permission to use the pre-program questionnaires and pre-program SCI-2s for my research. I would, of course, be pleased to provide further information or answer any questions you might have about the work. I can be contacted at the phone number or email listed above.

Yours sincerely,

Kendall Kadatz

Graduate Student
Appendix 2

Letter to Students
(To be printed on University of New Brunswick letterhead.)

Dear Student:

The purpose of this letter is to invite you to provide your consent for your participation in an important research study. The focus of the work is on the relationship between post-secondary students’ experiences of being in an intentional academic community and their subsequent learning in an education abroad program.

The research will be done through interviews, which will simply involve a discussion about your experience of the St. Stephen’s University (SSU) academic community and your personal reflections on how you believe that impacted your learning experience in SSU’s 2016 Europe education abroad program. You will be asked to participate in one interview lasting between 30 to 45 minutes. The interviews will be audio-recorded. You will also complete a short questionnaire form and the Sense of Community Index-2 (SCI-2). You will also be asked to use your pre-program questionnaire, pre-program SCI-2 and your assignments from the course International Studies 3091 for research purposes. The information I collect will be for research purposes only. You will not be identified by name when information is analyzed or in any findings that come from the study. Your participation is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the research, and to withdraw any information you have provided, without penalty, up to one month after the interview has taken place.

I have attached an information sheet that answers some of the questions that you might have. If you have any further questions about this work, you may call me, Kendall Kadatz, at the phone number listed below, or you can contact me by email: r3w27@unb.ca. This project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board of the University of New Brunswick and is on file as REB 2016-052. This research is part of the requirements for my M.Ed. degree. I am working under the supervision of Dr. Alan Sears of the Faculty of Education who can be contacted at 506-453-5178 or asears@unb.ca. If you wish to contact someone not associated with this study to ask questions or raise concerns please contact Dr. David Wagner, Associate Dean, Faculty of Education, UNB, dwagner@unb.ca, 506-447-3294.

I trust that I can look forward to your cooperation and hope you might find it an interesting experience.

Yours sincerely,

Kendall Kadatz

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SOME QUESTIONS THAT YOU MIGHT HAVE ABOUT THE STUDY

Q. **Why was I selected for the study?**
A. I need to study students who have participated in an intentional academic community and then engaged in an education abroad program with the same community. Your participation in SSU’s 2016 Europe education abroad program means that you meet these criteria.

Q. **Do I have to participate?**
A. No, and you may withdraw from the study up to one month after the completion of the interviews if you do decide to participate.

Q. **What exactly is involved?**
A. You will participate in an interview with me asking you several semi-structured questions about your experiences of community at SSU and the impact of them on your learning experiences while participating in the 2016 Europe education abroad program. You will also complete a questionnaire and an index on community.

Q. **How long will it take?**
A. The interview will take between 30 – 45 minutes. The questionnaire and index should take between 20 – 30 minutes.

Q. **What are the benefits of participating in the study?**
A. The study is an opportunity for you to contribute to a major investigation which aims to better understand the impact that participation in an intentional academic community can have on a students’ subsequent learning experience in an education abroad program with the familiar people from the academic community. By discovering insights about this relationship, teachers and curriculum planners will be able to design more effective programs to help students increase their capacity for learning when participating in education abroad programs.

Q. **What are the risks?**
A. There are no real risks. People involved in the work generally find it interesting.

Q. **Will my information be kept confidential?**
A. Yes. The information collected will be for research purposes only. You will not be identified by name when information is analyzed or in any findings from the
study.

Q. Have the school authorities approved this?
A. Yes. But remember, whether you participate is entirely a matter for you to decide.

If you have any further questions about this work, you may call me, Kendall Kadatz, at the phone number listed below, or you can contact me by email: r3w27@unb.ca. The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and certified by the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee and the University Research Ethics Board at the University of New Brunswick. This research is part of the requirements for my M.Ed. degree. I am working under the supervision of Dr. Alan Sears of the Faculty of Education who can be contacted at 506-453-5178 or asears@unb.ca. If you wish to contact someone not associated with this study to ask questions or raise concerns please contact Dr. David Wagner, Associate Dean, Faculty of Education, UNB, dwagner@unb.ca, 506-447-3294.

A FINAL NOTE: Thank you for helping me with this important work!

CONSENT/ASSENT FORM – STUDENT

Title of Project: How does community impact the education abroad learning experience?

Researcher: Kendall Kadatz, Graduate Student, Faculty of Education, University of New Brunswick

CONSENT:

I, ________________________________, agree to participate in this study.

(please print your name)

Your signature: __________________________ Date: __________________________

Participant Signature: Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you and that any questions have been satisfactorily answered. It has been made clear that your participation is completely voluntary and that you may withdraw from the project up to one month after the completion of the interviews. No personal identifying information will be reported at any time to ensure your privacy and confidentiality throughout and beyond the life of the project.

If you would like a summary of the results of this research, please provide your mailing address below:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
This project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board of the University of New Brunswick and is on file as REB 2016-052.
Thank you very much. Please return this signed form to Kendall Kadatz.
Appendix 3

One Page Summary
(To be printed on UNB letterhead)

How Does Community Impact the Education Abroad Learning Experience?

Principal Investigator: Kendall Kadatz, Graduate Student, University of New Brunswick
Supervisors: Dr. Alan Sears, University of New Brunswick
Dr. Craig Harding, University of New Brunswick

Study Background: This research aims to explore the relationship between post-secondary students’ experiences of being in an intentional academic community and their subsequent learning in an education abroad program. I believe this is an important area of research given the rapid increase in participation in education abroad programs globally, and the existing knowledge regarding the kind of learning that can take place in community based environments engaging in activities outside the regular rhythm of society. A lack of analysis between these two factors that both exhibit the capacity to significantly enhance learning enhances the case for pursuing this topic.

Procedures: All 20 post-secondary students enrolled full time in the St. Stephen’s University 2016 Europe education abroad program will be invited to participate in short, individual interview after their program requirements have been completed. In the interviews students will talk about their understanding of how their experience of being in an intentional academic community before participating in an education abroad program with familiar members of the academic community impacted their learning experience in the education abroad program. Semi-structured questions related to the topics of education abroad and learning in community will be used in the interview. Students’ ideas about these topics and how they have seen them interacting and relating in their own learning experience will be elicited during the interviews by asking such questions as: What are some ways that you noticed your previous experiences of an intentional academic community impacting your education abroad experience? How would you describe the relationship of staff and faculty toward students in the education abroad program? Can you identify any examples of group dynamics during the education abroad program that were impacted by previous experiences as a learning community? The interviews will last approximately 30 – 45 minutes. Interviews will be digitally audio-recorded. Each participant will also complete a short questionnaire form and the Sense of Community Index-2 (SCI-2). They will also be asked to use their pre-program questionnaire, pre-program SCI-2 and their assignments from the course International Studies 3091 for research purposes.

Confidentiality: Students’ identities will be kept strictly confidential. All participants will be given a code number and pseudonyms will appear in any research documents, including transcriptions of interviews. All documents will be kept in a locked filing
cabinet. Students will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study.

Appendix 4

Post-Program Questionnaire
(To be printed on UNB letterhead)

1. Name:
2. What is your gender? ☐ Male ☐ Female
3. How old are you?
4. What is your ethnic background? (Korean-American, Jewish-German, etc.)

5. What is your school year?
6. What is your major? What is your minor?
7. Where did you primarily live during your formative years to age 18?
8. What is your native language/mother tongue?
9. Before participating in this program (use as much space as you need):
   • Did you have any previous international travel experience? ☐ Yes ☐ No
     o If yes, state which location(s), how long, and reason for travel.

   • Did you have any previous experience living in another culture? ☐ Yes ☐ No
     o If yes, state which culture(s) and for how long.

   • Did you have any previous education abroad experiences? ☐ Yes ☐ No
     o If yes, state which location(s), how long, and reason for study abroad.

   • Did you have any previous experience living in intentional communities (a group
     of people that voluntarily and intentionally share several aspects of life together)?
     ☐ Yes ☐ No
     o If yes, state which community(s) and for how long.

10. To what degree did your education abroad experience give you opportunity to see,
    experience, and/or interact with:

    |                          | None | Little | Some | A lot |
    |--------------------------|------|--------|------|-------|
    | Different national cultures (food, lifestyle, language) |      |        |      |       |
    | Sites of historical interest                                  |      |        |      |       |
    | Sites of artistic or cultural interest                        |      |        |      |       |
    | Political environments different different from NA           |      |        |      |       |

and/or each other
• Diverse geography and its effect on culture ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
• Local individuals and groups in their daily lives ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
• Local individuals and groups in their professional/work lives ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

11. Assign percentages for the following choices for how you spent your free time on the program (not including attending or completing academic responsibilities). Interactions can include face-to-face, phone, email, instant messaging, etc. Totals need to equal 100%

10 With people from the program
10 With people from North America (not from the program)
10 With people from the host countries, including:
10 With foreigners from outside the host countries (expats, immigrants, travellers, refugees, etc.)
10 Alone - not including time on the phone or internet
10 On the internet (entertainment, gathering non-academic information, etc.)

12. How likely or unlikely are you to do the following in the future?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very unlikely</th>
<th>Unlikely</th>
<th>Likely</th>
<th>Very likely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
• Pursue an international studies major ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
• Pursue graduate education ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
• Study abroad ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
• Travel abroad ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
• Work abroad ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
• Live in another country ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
• Work with international colleagues ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
• Learn another language(s) ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
• Try international food ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
• Make international friends ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
• Enter a significant relationship with someone from another culture ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

13. Did your education abroad experience influence any of your answers above? ☐
   Yes ☐ No
• If yes, to what degree?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Little</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>A lot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
• Pursue an international studies major ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
• Pursue graduate education ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
• Study abroad ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
• Travel abroad ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
- Work abroad
- Live in another country
- Work with international colleagues
- Learn another language(s)
- Try international food
- Make international friends
- Enter a significant relationship with someone from another culture

14. To what degree did you experience stress related to the following during your program?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Least Stressful</th>
<th>Most Stressful</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Cultural Differences
  The level of stress you felt due to the cultural difference between your own culture and the host culture

- Ethnocentrism
  - The level of stress you felt due to your initial ethnocentrism
  - The level of stress you felt due to the ethnocentrism of European people

- Language
  The level of stress you felt due to the lack of language skills

- Cultural Immersion
  The level of stress you felt due to your cultural immersion in the host country

- Cultural Isolation
  The level of stress you felt due to being separated from your own culture

- Prior Intercultural Experience
  The level of stress you felt due to your lack of prior intercultural experience

- Expectations
  The level of stress you felt based on your initial expectations toward the host culture (whether they were met or not.)

- Visibility / Invisibility
  The level of stress you felt from
  - Being visible (e.g., physically different from members of the host culture)
o Being invisible (e.g., your identity, religion, or sexual orientation is invisible to host culture or concealed because it is not accepted in the host culture)

- Status
  - The level of stress you felt from
    - Not getting the respect you feel you deserve OR,
    - Feeling you are receiving unearned recognition

- Power and Control
  - The level of stress you felt from loss of power/control over events compared to what you possessed at home

- Community
  - The level of stress you felt from interactions with
    - Program leadership
    - Co-participants

15. What characteristics of program design significantly enhanced your learning?

- Duration of program
  - Please check only one box below
  - None
  - Little
  - Some
  - A lot

- If the program were longer, I could have learned more
- The program length was about right
- The duration of program was not a significant factor for my learning

- Amount of knowledge of target language
- Amount of knowledge of target culture
- Nature of course design
- Nature of course assignment
- Type of housing
- Previous experience living in another culture
- Previous education abroad experience
- Pre-departure orientation
- Opportunity for cultural/experiential learning from field trips
- On-site mentoring from faculty/program staff
- Traveling with familiar staff and students

16. What suggestions do you have to improve your education abroad learning experience?
Appendix 5

Basic Interview Protocol
(To be printed on UNB letterhead)

(The following interview questions are semi-structured, and formed only as a guideline. They may be modified or certain questions can be emphasized over others depending on each participant’s unique experience and context in the real interview setting).

1. Participants’ expectations and goals before and after the short-term study abroad:
   - How well did your short-term study abroad experience meet your goals and expectations?
   - Could you give me one example or experience that best captures your study abroad experience?
   - Could you describe an experience abroad that you feel has had an important impact on you and your life after return? (Please be specific)
   - How would you characterize your program? What were the specific characteristics of your study abroad program?
   - What do you think made your study abroad experience most memorable? (e.g., field trip, cultural event attended, faculty, because I’ve struggled so much, etc.)
   - What do you think is the most important thing you have learned during study abroad?
   - What was the most rewarding experience you had during your short-term study abroad?
   - What was the most challenging experience you had during your short-term study abroad?

2. Any influence on participants’ career plan from short-term study abroad experience?
   - What are your future career plans and has your short-term study abroad affect your decision?
   - What are your current educational plans and has your short-term study abroad experience affected your decision?
   - How has the short-term study abroad experience affected your future educational plan (graduate school, choice of major, another study abroad or work abroad plan, etc.), if it has?
   - What impact, if any, has your short-term study abroad experience has on what you are currently doing (recycling, using public transportation, shopping habits, etc)?

3. Any influence on participants’ personal life from short-term study abroad experience?
   - Are there any direct influences on you from your study abroad experience? (e.g., your decision to choosing course work next semester, your worldview changed, you have learned and realized more about your own culture, etc.)

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• What aspect of your life do you think may have the most impact from your short-term study abroad experience?
• What is your perception of how the short-term study abroad affected on you? Do you think the study abroad experience affected your personality, philosophy of life, or worldview in any way?
• Are there any changes in your life as a result of short-term study abroad?

4. Direct impact of previous community experience on study abroad experience?
• How did your previous experiences in an intentional academic community impact your education abroad experience?
• How would you describe the interactions and the nature of the relationships of staff and faculty with students in the education abroad program?
• Are there specific examples where the group dynamics during the education abroad program were impacted by previous experiences as a learning community? If so how?

5. How to improve:
• What could have been better?
• Do you plan to go on another study abroad (or work abroad) program in the future?
• If you study abroad again, what would you like to do differently?

6. Closing
• Are there other thoughts or suggestions that you would like to share to help us better understand your experience with short-term study abroad?
• Are there other thoughts that you would like to share which were not covered in this interview?
Appendix 6

Pre-Program Questionnaire

Name (first, last): __________________________

1. Do you have any previous international travel experience?  ○ Yes  ○ No

If yes, please describe the location, length of stay (how many months total), and reason for travel (i.e. vacation, volunteering, work).

_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

2. Do you have any previous experience living in another culture?  ○ Yes  ○ No

If yes, how much experience have you had living in another culture (how many months total)?

_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

3. Do you have any previous study abroad experience?  ○ Yes  ○ No

If yes, please describe the location, length of stay (how many months total), and reason for study abroad.

_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

4. Did you have any previous experience living in intentional communities?  ○ Yes  ○ No
If yes, please state which communities you have lived in and how much experience you had living in those communities (how many months total)?

___________________________________________

___________________________________________

5. Why have you chosen to study abroad now?

___________________________________________

___________________________________________

6. What are your expectations and goals for this short-term study abroad experience?

___________________________________________

___________________________________________

7. How much did study abroad impact your decision to attend SSU?

None  Little  Some  A lot

If you chose “Some” or “A lot,” can you state whether the Southeast Asia or Europe program was a larger draw for you, or if they were equal?

___________________________________________

8. How much did intentional community impact your decision to attend SSU?

None  Little  Some  A lot

If you chose “Some” or “A lot,” can you briefly describe why you selected that option?

___________________________________________

___________________________________________

___________________________________________

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9. How likely or unlikely are you to do the following in the future?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very unlikely</th>
<th>Unlikely</th>
<th>Likely</th>
<th>Very likely</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Take (more) courses</td>
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<tr>
<td>related to international affairs</td>
<td>○</td>
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<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>2) Learn (more) languages</td>
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<tr>
<td>3) Pursue a major related to international affairs</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>4) Pursue a career in the international field</td>
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<td>5) Pursue graduate study in Canada</td>
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<tr>
<td>6) Pursue graduate study abroad</td>
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<td>7) Work abroad in the future</td>
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<td>8) Travel abroad</td>
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<tr>
<td>9) Study abroad</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Make international friends</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Date someone from a different culture</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Marry someone from a different culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Participate in intentional communities</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Live in another country</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Try international food</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Work with international colleagues</td>
<td>○</td>
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Appendix 7

Sense of Community Index

SENSE OF COMMUNITY INDEX II

The following questions about community refer to: [insert community name].

How important is it to you to feel a sense of community with other community members?

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Prefer Not to be Part of This Community

Not at All | Somewhat | Mostly | Completely
---|---|---|---
Not Very Important | Important | Very Important

How well do each of the following statements represent how you feel about this community?

1. I get important needs of mine met because I am part of this community.

2. Community members and I value the same things.

3. This community has been successful in getting the needs of its members met.

4. Being a member of this community makes me feel good.

5. When I have a problem, I can talk about it with members of this community.
6. People in this community have similar needs, priorities, and goals.

7. I can trust people in this community.

8. I can recognize most of the members of this community.

9. Most community members know me.

10. This community has symbols and expressions of membership such as clothes, signs, art, architecture, logos, landmarks, and flags that people can recognize.

11. I put a lot of time and effort into being part of this community.

12. Being a member of this community is a part of my identity.

13. Fitting into this community is important to me.

14. This community can influence other communities.

15. I care about what other community members think of me.

16. I have influence over what this community is like.

17. If there is a problem in this community, members can get it solved.

18. This community has good leaders.

19. It is very important to me to be a part of this community.

20. I am with other community members a lot and enjoy being with them.

21. I expect to be a part of this community for a long time.

22. Members of this community have shared important events together, such as holidays, celebrations, or disasters.

23. I feel hopeful about the future of this community.

24. Members of this community care about each other.
Appendix 8

International Studies 3091: Engaging Contemporary Europe

International Studies 3091

Engaging Contemporary Europe

3 credit hours

St. Stephen’s University

Spring/Summer 2016

Kendall Kadatz (Lecturer/Teaching Assistant) kendall@ssu.ca

Dr. Walter Thiessen (Supervising professor) walter@nb.sympatico.ca

Overview

This course serves as a connecting point for the other courses in this program. It will help students take all of their experiences throughout the program, whether or not they are associated with specific syllabi, and articulate those experiences in reference to the learning objectives for the overall program. Although students encounter a plethora of experiences during this program, they will need to cultivate an attitude of engagement in order to facilitate the best learning possible.

Objectives

- to build awareness of European life and culture and reflect on these in relation to contemporary humanitarian and political issues
- to make interdisciplinary connections across topics of European history, politics, religion, literature, psychology and philosophy
- to continually compare and contrast North American, European and Southeast Asian societies, drawing on previous travel and education abroad programs
- to provide structures for personalized reflection where the student articulates connections between experiential learning opportunities and academic study
- to introduce students to various learning frameworks as they relate to intercultural interactions
- to help students better understand how they learn and where their interests lie
Texts (only purchase *Travel as a Political Act*, other readings will be provided)


Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, xiii-64.


Requirements
Travel Preparation Readings - Mar 15/Aug 5 15%
Identification List - May 6 10%
Travel as a Political Act - May 6/Aug 12 10%
Blog Entries - Scheduled, Aug 8 5%
Field Notes - July 29 60%

Travel Preparation Readings (10 hours) 15%

Read the sources provided, identify one or two quotes per source that engage you as you read, and articulate the connection in 100-200 words. You only need to read 5 of the 8, so read McWhinney, either Beard/Yershova or Bennet/Kolb, and then two of the remaining three sources (excluding Travel as a Political Act). The sources cover topics of learning styles, modes of learning and intercultural interactions, so connections might include: a memory; a key point; a realization about yourself; your style of learning; one of your learning experiences to date; an opinion you have about the reading, etc.

Due: March 15

After finishing the program, review the quotes you identified and your responses to them and state whether your responses are the same or have changed. Whether or not your responses have changed, attempt to identify why they did or did not change. Due: August 5

Identification List (Appendix I) (8 hours) 10%

This list of items will help to prepare you to encounter aspects of the program not explicitly covered in other courses, and make connections to the content of other courses. As you research the items, identify them in your own words and provide at least 3 significant details about each, including a connection to contemporary European issues or the program theme where possible. Each response should be about 4 sentences long and based on several pages of reading. Two references are required per entry, but only in simple form: website url, or author/title/year for a book or article. Due: May 6

Travel as a Political Act (6 hours) 10%

Read the introduction and chapters 1,2,3,5,6,7 and 9. Steves issues challenges to travel well, to strive to understand areas where you will be travelling and to recognize and think through cultural strengths and weaknesses. Reflecting on the text and your previous travel experiences, identify 5 challenges to travel well that you will take on as personal goals for this program, stating why you believe they are relevant challenges for you personally. For each challenge, articulate one or two practical responses to that challenge.
during your program. This assignment does not require an introduction or conclusion; just present your challenges and responses. (1000 words)  

Due: May 6

When you return home, review the challenges you identified and reflect on each one with questions such as:

- were they realistic
- were they adjusted or replaced with new challenges as the program progressed
- did you partially, fully or not at all complete the challenges
- whether pursuing the challenge enhanced, restricted, focused, or distracted you from your program experience

Due: August 12

Blog Posts (2 hours) 5%

Blog posts are one focused way of sharing what you are learning with a broader community. You will need an avatar (Gravatar is an excellent option). You will complete 2 blog entries over the course of the program, one during the program, and one after you return. Each one should focus around one main idea or incident and your personal interaction with it. Adjusting content from your Field Notes assignment is often an excellent starting point. Blog entries should be as specific as possible. (150-250 words each)

Excellent previous entries include http://www.ssu.ca/traveltheworld/2014/06/28/belvedearest/  
http://www.ssu.ca/traveltheworld/2014/06/11/jenne-parle-pas-francais/  
http://www.ssu.ca/traveltheworld/2010/07/20/he-restores-my-soul/  
http://www.ssu.ca/traveltheworld/2010/07/17/1557/  
http://www.ssu.ca/traveltheworld/2014/08/27/is-your-life-worth-more-than-mine/  

Due: You will be given a deadline before departing for your first blog post, and the second one will be due August 8. Entries with no avatar or poor spelling/grammar will be docked marks.

Field Notes (20 hours) 60%
This assignment will serve as a record of your trip and an opportunity to integrate your experiences by tying them to: thoughts from your other courses; previous thought patterns; cultural practices; beliefs, etc. You will intentionally track your learning experiences and connect the dots with your academic studies. A key aspect is capturing moments of learning as you encounter them, then articulating them further and integrating them with program content. Pay attention to and record themes that you see developing through lectures, presentations or your personal learning experiences.

- **Note**: While this assignment will be based on your personal experiences, it is not a personal journal. You will be gathering and synthesizing information related to your learning experiences. Processing your feelings regarding your participation in the program can be carefully integrated into the process, but is not the focus of the exercise.

- You will need a notepad small enough to carry with you at all times for collecting and capturing thoughts, quotes, ideas, memorabilia, questions, etc. You will be encountering so many unique stimuli that many significant thoughts could pass through your mind on any given day. Waiting for an hour, or days before jotting those thoughts down will result in being able to recall tangible content.

- For your main entries, you will need something to write in that is large enough to allow you to include other material (i.e. photographs, memorabilia, sketches, brochures, postcards, etc.) that you may use to add context to your entries. If you want to include other types of writing in the same book as this assignment like a personal journal, miscellaneous reflections, poetry, art, etc. (see Paige, p.120-3) make sure the book is large enough to accommodate everything you want to include in it.

**Format**

- Each entry should contain:
  - Date, location, relevant weather/geographical features and a brief summary of the day.
  - Your observations, questions, connections, etc. (see below in “Elements”) engaging with tangible elements of your program, such as:
    - historical and cultural facts, events, galleries, food, geographical points of interest, museums, personal contacts, libraries, distinctive architecture, interviews, leisure activities, comparisons with home or previous travel, etc.
  - Elements that will be looked for include:
    - *Observations* - capture what interests you, confuses you, frustrates you
• **Questions** - question “facts,” express curiosity, personal doubts, academic queries

• **Speculation** - wonder “what if,” ponder events, issues, facts, readings, patterns, interpretations, problems, and solutions

• **Synthesis** - put ideas together, find relationships, connect experiences that cut across time/space among cultures, connect experiences with academics

• **Awareness** - be conscious of yourself as a learner, thinker, writer

• **Dialogue** - talk to your instructors through your entries

• **Information** - comment on factual data that relates to learning objectives

• **Revision** - re-think, perhaps change your thinking about previous entries

• Entries will total a minimum of 700-1000 words per week, with at least 3 entries/week. Entries do not need to be chronological.

• At two points in the program a leader will review your progress and provide feedback. Identify two entries you would like feedback on for each of these times.

• Before submitting your Field Notes assignment, which should include your notepad, add one final entry where you recount your learning experiences. Referring to the Learning Objectives in the Program Syllabus, this syllabus, and the other course syllabi, articulate how your learning experiences lined up or fell short of the program objectives (750-1000 words).

  • You may find it helpful to describe some learning experiences as being: academic, interpersonal, intercultural, practical, communal, etc.

  • Identify learning experiences you had that are not stated Learning Objectives

  • Include any suggestions you have for future programs.

• Before submitting, ensure that you have included: (a) page numbers, (b) title for each entry, (c) table of contents.

**Due: Submit or postmark (mailed) by July 29**

**Academic Honesty:** Access to source material online makes it easy to be dishonest about the use of other authors’ work. Plagiarism is an offence and has serious consequences. To find out more, review the **SSU Academic Policies**.
Late Assignments: The first day past assignment deadlines, the mark will be reduced by 10%. Every additional late day will equal a reduction of 5%.

Appendix I

General
International cities of refuge network (ICORN)
Post-multiculturalism

England
Christianity and pagan holidays/traditions
British Museum’s accumulation of artefacts
Commonwealth influence on British cuisine (what kinds of foods have become part of British food culture)

Spain
Catalonia/Catalunya
Pablo Picasso
Siesta/evening meal
Saint George (specific to Spain)

Italy
Espresso history
Banking history
Roma
Francis of Assisi

Austria
Habsburgs and classical music
Schnapps

France
Marianne
Bastille day
Montmartre

**Belgium**

Language divisions

Brussels - reason for choice as EU capital
CURRICULUM VITAE

Candidate’s full name: Kendall Lloyd Kadatz

Universities attended:

Rocky Mountain College, 1996-2000, Bachelor of Arts in Religion

St. Stephen’s University, 2005-06, Bachelor of Arts, History

University of New Brunswick, 2006-08, Bachelor of Education

Publications: N/A

Conference Presentations: N/A