

May 2020

Reflection on the Implication of the Jesuit Apostolic Preferences on Study Abroad and International Immersions

Rene Padilla

Creighton University, renepadilla@creighton.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://epublications.regis.edu/jhe>



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [International and Comparative Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Padilla, Rene (2020) "Reflection on the Implication of the Jesuit Apostolic Preferences on Study Abroad and International Immersions," *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal*: Vol. 9: No. 1, Article 2.

Available at: <https://epublications.regis.edu/jhe/vol9/iss1/2>

This Reflection is brought to you for free and open access by the Scholarly and Peer-Reviewed Journals at ePublications at Regis University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal by an authorized administrator of ePublications at Regis University. For more information, please contact epublications@regis.edu.

Reflection on the Implication of the Jesuit Apostolic Preferences on Study Abroad and International Immersions

René Padilla
Vice Provost for Global Engagement
Creighton University
renepadilla@creighton.edu

Abstract

The benefit of study abroad and international immersion programs on students has been well documented, but the impact on destination communities that students visit has received significantly less attention. Many of the potential negative economic, social and cultural impacts of foreign visitors highlighted in the literature on tourism are likely to apply to students engaged in study abroad or immersive global programs. The excessive focus on the benefits for students raises the question if study abroad and international global immersions are simply self-serving activities for many. The Jesuit Apostolic Preferences can serve as a discernment tool in the planning and assessment of global experiences that ultimately can serve to join our institutions in mission across the world.

Introduction

Student benefits of study abroad and global immersions of various types have been well documented in the higher education literature. A simple search in relevant literature databases reveals hundreds of articles related to terms such as “study abroad,” “international immersion,” “research,” and “outcomes” published since the year 2000. A significant majority of these studies have clear limitations from a research standpoint (i.e., focus on only one institution, have small sample sizes, do not include comparison groups, or focus only on participants of one specific program in one particular year), but in aggregate suggest a clearer tendency toward positive effect. For example, the research points to strong evidence that students who study abroad or participate in international immersions develop sensitivity to cultural differences, awareness of sociohistorical cultural contexts, adaptability and flexibility to view cultural differences and contextual circumstances through an informed ethno-relative lens, and the empathy to seek deeper understanding while withholding judgment.¹ Published research also provides evidence that study abroad and international immersions positively affect second language acquisition, increase a participant’s likelihood of graduating in four years and perseverance toward graduation of minority students, and influences long-term behavior related to civic engagement and social entrepreneurship well into mid-career.²

The impact of study abroad and international immersion programs on the destination communities students visit has received significantly less attention. Although such considerations should be central to service-learning programs, available research on outcomes is nearly universally focused on students’ cultural and disciplinary competence.³ Interestingly, when community outcomes of programs are reported, they tend to be single case studies or anecdotal descriptions of benefit rather than observable measures of lasting change.⁴

Concerns over the impact of study abroad or international immersion programs on the destination communities likewise are not explicitly articulated as standards for best practice or recommendations for mitigating the effects of study abroad on local communities. For example, the most recent edition of the Forum on Education Abroad’s *Standards of Good Practice for Education Abroad* suggests only that the organization sending students “respect the cultures and values of the countries in which it operates.”⁵ Likewise, other sources focus on ethical standards for participants and researchers in international service-learning, but do not include a requirement of assurance of a measurable benefit to the community.⁶

Many of the potential negative economic, social, and cultural impacts of foreign visitors highlighted in the literature on tourism are likely to apply to

students engaged in study abroad or immersive global programs.⁷ For example, in May 2019 the Cuban government announced rationing of certain food items such as chicken eggs, rice, and beans due to an economic crisis worsened by U.S. sanctions, but hotels that cater to tourists were expected to be unaffected due to Cuban government policies.⁸ While tourism contributed to the economy, it was also expected to reduce availability of staple foods for the local population and promote economic inequality in the community. It is not difficult to imagine that if our students who participate in study abroad program are well-fed, that their well-being comes at hunger cost for the local population.

Authors have reported on the “demonstration effect” of tourists bringing high-end travel gear, clothes, and spending money easily on restaurants and gifts, which may create resentment in locals, foster the perception of Americans as wealthy consumers, or the desire in local people (especially youth) to leave the community so they can make money to buy similar goods.⁹ While tourism is often touted as a way out of poverty for developing countries and as a way of creating health and well-being, often the opposite is the case.¹⁰ Criticism of international volunteerism is growing because it appears to thrive on the notion that global poverty and its consequences can be remedied by well-meaning people who often lack needed skills and experience.¹¹ Despite the much publicized criminal activities around orphanage tourism, the commercialization of volunteering seems undeterred.¹² Strong ethical concerns have long been raised about medical volunteerism as well, because although these participants may have professional knowledge, they are often culturally insensitive, disrupt existing systems with their mere presence, and frequently waste resources by applying learned procedures inappropriately.¹³

The excessive focus on the benefits for students raises the question if study abroad and international global immersions for many are simply self-serving activities. Our main interest as academic institutions clearly does lie in educational aspects, in sourcing and organizing learning placements, and in the safety of students and faculty. But our ethical responsibility goes further and includes protecting local communities from harm. As the senior international officer of a

Jesuit institution that shares in that Society of Jesus’s mission and Universal Apostolic Preferences, I have an obligation to consider much more in my planning of global opportunities for our students than solely their or my institution’s benefit. These Preferences “give a horizon, a point of reference to the whole Society of Jesus. They capture our imaginations and awaken our desires. They unite us in our mission.”¹⁴ There is a set of questions I have been asking myself more lately as I consider whether our study abroad and international immersion efforts truly build the Jesuit mission and Jesuit distinction of educating students *for* the world in the context of the Apostolic Preferences:

Showing the Way to God Through the Spiritual Exercises and Discernment

- Do our international experiences have the fundamental purpose of putting our participants in touch with their true selves, or are they only one more way in which students are bombarded with images and options that drown out their sense of true vocation?
- Do we engage students in a process of discernment that goes beyond their disciplinary studies, or do we stop after reinforcing some notion that an international experience gives them stature, builds their career résumé, and makes them more competitive?
- Does the discernment about participation in study abroad include seeking a deep sense of calling to that location and anticipation that something greater than a cross-cultural experience is in store? How do we help participants integrate the international experience into their spiritual journey?
- Do the opportunities we plan for our students intentionally “open up spaces for the complex dimensions of human freedom, especially religious freedom?”¹⁵ Do we intentionally structure international opportunities to allow—and explicitly invite—participants to ask profound questions and experience belonging to an ecclesial community so they may better know what it means to freely adopt a Christian lifestyle in social, economic, cultural, and political spheres?

- Do our international education and immersion leaders make regular use of spiritual conversation and discernment in the implementation of global experiences? Are they prepared to reinforce dialogue, reconciliation, and bonds of community with all cultures and thus nurture a testimony to hope regardless of academic subject matter?

Walking with the Excluded: Walk with the Poor, the Outcasts of the World, Those Whose Dignity Has Been Violated, in a Mission of Reconciliation and Justice

- Are considerations of the Jesuit mission of reconciliation and justice as modeled by Jesus part of the very planning of all international opportunities from the outset? Do such considerations shape these experiences or are they only afterthoughts used to justify them, but not transform them? Are all international opportunities designed to help us better understand human peripheries, to adopt a style of life and work appropriate to those situations, and to engender credible accompaniment?
- Do our international programs promote economic inequality? Do foreigners or economic elites own the hotels our students occupy? Do poorer local people receive any economic benefit from “home stays,” or are those reserved for middle-class homes? Do local prices go up due to our student visits? Do our visits contribute to economic dependence on outsiders, becoming oriented on pleasing wealthy foreigners rather than on local needs?
- Are local people excluded from any of the areas where students are encouraged or allowed to go? Do any of our “safety precautions” isolate our students unnecessarily and unintentionally confirm our privilege?
- Do our programs impose any hardship on local people, such as food or water shortages? Do students’ patterns of consumption contribute to problems in the community (i.e., how do we consider garbage disposal, added use of costly electrical supply for students to charge their devices, and so on)?

- Do we seek to mitigate locally the carbon pollution we generate through our travel?

Journeying with Youth: Accompany Young People in the Creation of a Hope Filled Future

- Do our international opportunities have a purpose to help our students find meaning in their lives, draw closer to God and engender hope? Do we limit these opportunities to academic dimensions and set more fundamental questions about human existence aside?
- Do we prepare students to understand the lives of their counterparts in the destination community? Does our planning intentionally seek opportunities for our students to gain insight into the lives of local young people, the challenges they face? Do we specifically seek to understand the hopes of the younger members of the local community who carry in them the future of their society?
- Do our students demonstrate forms of privilege during their visit, such as eating “our” food, playing “our” music, dressing in a way that is inappropriate for the local culture? Do they smoke, drink or consume drugs, thus being poor role models for local youth? Does anything about our students’ presence reinforce a negative self-image for local people and risk alienating local youth from their families and communities?

Caring for Our Common Home: Collaborate, with Gospel Depth, for the Protection and Renewal of God’s Creation

- Have our institutions developed sustainability initiatives that take into account the carbon footprint created by our international travel? Do our institutions’ sustainability initiatives include consciousness-raising and discernment regarding our carbon footprint, potential environmental harm, and, consequently, impact on the most vulnerable of the world?
- As part of programming of Jesuit institutions, do our international experiences fundamentally seek to find a spiritually based answer to the question: “What is our relation to nature?”

- *Laudato Si'* reminds us that “the rejection of every form of self-centeredness and self-absorption, are essential if we truly wish to care for our brothers and sisters and for the natural environment. These attitudes also attune us to the moral imperative of assessing the impact of our every action and personal decision on the world around us.”¹⁶ Are students invited into a conversation about shared stewardship of natural resources or do we instead reinforce a consumer perspective that places their benefit above that of others? Are considerations of our shared responsibility to pass on the resources God gives us and to recognize the intrinsic value of Creation as part of the design of international experiences?
- Do we include environmental or compensatory mitigation in the planning of

international programs to offset impacts of our travel?

Study abroad and international immersion programs raise a number of ethical concerns, and none of our programs should be beyond scrutiny against moral and ethical requirements to demonstrate in practice and outcomes that our presence helps local communities or, at minimum, does not cause harm. The Apostolic Preferences have implications that call for careful discernment about every aspect of global programming. They require that we justify and validate outcomes of our global programs. Otherwise, not only may time, energy and money be wasted, but the putting of personal agendas above the destination community’s disappointment or even exploitation can continue unchallenged. The Preferences can give a horizon to our global planning and capture our imagination. Ultimately, they can help us unite in a hopeful mission across the world. 

Notes

¹ Philip Anderson, Leigh Lawton, Richard Rexeisen and Ann Hubbard. “Short-Term Study Abroad and Intercultural Sensitivity: A Pilot Study,” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 30, no 4 (2006): 457-469, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2005.10.004>; Thyron Black and David Duhon, “Assessing the Impact of Business Study Abroad Programs on Cultural Awareness and Personal Development,” *Journal of Education for Business* 81, no. 3 (2006): 140-144, <https://doi.org/10.3200/JOEB.81.3.140-144>; Irvine Clarke, III, Theresa Flaherty, Newell Wright and Robert McMillen, “Student Intercultural Proficiency from Study Abroad Programs,” *Journal of Marketing Education* 31, no. 2 (2009): 173-181, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0273475309335583>; Pat Dorsett, Stephen Lamar and Julie Clark, “Transformative Intercultural Learning: A Short-Term International Study Tour,” *Journal of Social Work Education* 55, no. 3 (2019): 565-578, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2018.1548984>; Victor Harris, Muthusami Kumaran, Heidi Harris, Daniel Moen and Brian Visconti, “Assessing Multicultural Competence, Knowledge and Awareness in Study Abroad Experiences,” *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 49, no 3 (2019): 430-452, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2017.1421901>; Paula Pedersen, “Teaching Towards an Ethnorelative Worldview Through Psychology Study Abroad,” *Intercultural Education* 20, no. 1 (2009): 73-86, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14675980903370896>; Tracy Williams, “Exploring the Impact of Study Abroad on Students’ Intercultural Communication Skills: Adaptability and Sensitivity,” *Journal of Studies in International Education* 9, no. 4 (2005): 356-371, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315305277681>.

² Don DeGraaf, Cynthia Slagter, Kelly Larsen and Elisa Ditta, “The Long-Term Personal and Professional Impacts of Participating in a Study Abroad Program,” *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad* 23, no. 1 (2013): 42-59; Lilli Engle and John Engle, “Assessing Language Acquisition and Intercultural Sensitivity Development in Relation to Study Abroad Program Design,” *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad* 10, no 2 (2004): 219–236; Mitchell Fryer and Peter Roger, “Transformations in the L2 Self: Changing Motivations in a Study Abroad Context,” *System* 78 (2018): 159-172, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2018.08.005>; Theresa Schenker, “Making Short-Term Study Abroad Count – Effects on German Language Skills,” *Foreign Language Annals* 51, no. 2 (2018): 411-429, <https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12339>; Jodi Malmgren and James Galvin, “Effects of Study Abroad Participation on Student Graduation Rates: A Study of Three Incoming Freshman Cohorts at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities,” *NACADA Journal* 28, no. 1 (2008): 29-42; Sarah Johnson and Frances Stage, “Academic Engagement and Student Success: Do High-Impact Practices Mean Higher Graduation Rates?” *Journal of Higher Education* 89, no. 5 (2018): 753-781, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2018.1441107>; Alissa Ruth, Alexandra Brewis, Drew Blasco and Amber Wutich, “Long-Term Benefits of Short-Term Research-Integrated Study Abroad,” *Journal of Studies in International Education* 23, no. 2 (2019): 265-280, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315318786448>; Don DeGraaf, Cynthia Slagter, Kelly Larsen and Elisa Ditta, “The Long-Term Personal and Professional Impacts of Participating in a Study Abroad Program,” *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad* 23, no. 1 (2013): 42-59; Dianna Murphy, Narek Sahakyan, Doua Yong-Yi and Sally Sieloff Magnan, “The

Impact of Study Abroad on the Global Engagement of University Graduates,” *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 24, no. 2 (2014): 1-24; Ruth, Brevis, Blasco and Wutich, “Long-Term Benefits of Short-Term Research-Integrated Study Abroad.”

³ Patti Clayton, Robert Bringle and Julie Hatcher, eds., *Research on Service Learning: Conceptual Frameworks and Assessments: Communities, Institutions, and Partnerships* (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2012); Erika Yamamura and Kent Koth, *Place-Based Community Engagement: A Strategy to Transform Universities and Communities* (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2018); Robert Bringle, Julie Hatcher and Steven Jones, *International Service Learning: Conceptual Frameworks and Research*, (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2011); Roxanne Amerson, “The Influence of International Service-Learning on Transcultural Self-Efficacy in Baccalaureate Nursing Graduates and Their Subsequent Practice,” *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* 1, no. 1 (2012): 6–15, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ977178.pdf>; Roxanne Amerson, “Research-Based Recommendations for Implementing International Service-Learning,” *Journal of Professional Nursing* 39, no. 2 (2014): 175-179, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.profnurs.2013.09.006>; Celia Pechak and Mary Thompson, “Going Global in Physical Therapy Education: International Service-Learning in US-Based Programmes,” *Physiotherapy Research International* 16, no. 4 (2011): 225-236, <https://doi.org/10.1002/pri.501>.

⁴ Janice McMillan and Timothy Stanton, “Learning Service’ in International Contexts: Partnership-Based Service Learning and Research in Cape Town, South Africa,” *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* 20, no.1 (2014): 64-78, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.3239521.0021.106>; Maureen Porter and Kathia Monard, “Ayni in the Global Village: Building Relationships of Reciprocity Through International Service-Learning,” *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* 8, no. 1 (2001): 5-17, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.3239521.0008.101>; Margaret Sherraden, Benjamin Lough and Amanda McBride, “Effects of International Volunteering and Service: Individual and Institutional Predictors,” *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 19, no. 4 (2008): 395-421.

⁵ The Forum on Education Abroad, *Standards of Good Practice for Education Abroad*, 5th ed. (Carlisle, PA: Author, 2015).

⁶ Carole Wells, Judith Warchal, Ana Ruiz and Andrea Chapdelaine, “Ethical Issues in Research on International Service Learning,” in *International Service Learning: Conceptual Frameworks and Research*, eds. Robert Bringle and Steven Jones (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2011), 319-343.

⁷ Brian Archer, Chris Cooper and Lisa Ruhanen, “The Positive and Negative Impacts of Tourism,” in *Global Tourism*,

ed. William Theobald (New York: Elsevier, 2005), 79–102; Deborah McLaren, *Rethinking Tourism and Ecotourism* (Bloomfield, Connecticut: Kumarian Press, 2006).

⁸ Associated Press, “Cuba Rations Staple Foods and Soap in Face of Economic Crisis,” *New York Times* (May 11, 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/11/world/americas/cuba-rationing-sanctions.html>.

⁹ McLaren, *Rethinking Tourism and Ecotourism*.

¹⁰ Irmgard Bauer, “The Health Impact of Tourism on Local and Indigenous Populations in Resource-Poor Countries,” *Travel Medicine and Infectious Disease* 6, no. 5 (2008): 276–291, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmaid.2008.05.005>; Irmgard Bauer, “Improving Global Health – Is Tourism’s Role in Poverty Elimination Perpetuating Poverty, Powerlessness and ‘Ill-Being?’” *Global Public Health* 12, no. 1 (2017): 45-64, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2015.1094109>.

¹¹ Angela Benson and Stephen Wearing, “Volunteer Tourism: Commodified Trend or New Phenomenon?” in *Controversies in Tourism*, ed. Omar Moufakkir and Peter Burns (Wallingford, UK: CABI, 2012), 242–254; Daniel Guttentag, “The Possible Negative Impact of Volunteer Tourism,” *International Journal of Tourism Research* 11, no. 3 (2009): 537–551, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.727>; Daniel Guttentag, “Volunteer Tourism: As Good as It Seems?” *Tourism Recreation Research* 36, no.1 (2011): 69–74, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2011.11081661>.

¹² Tess Guiney and Mary Mostafanezhad, “The Political Economy of Orphanage Tourism in Cambodia,” *Tourist Studies* 15, no. 2 (2014): 1-24, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468797614563387>.

¹³ Maya Roberts, “Duffle Bag Medicine,” *JAMA*, 295, no. 13 (2006): 1491–1492, [doi:10.1001/jama.295.13.1491](https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.295.13.1491); Sural Sha and Tianshi Wu, “The Medical Student Global Health Experience: Professionalism and Ethical Implications,” *Journal of Medical Ethics* 34, no. 5 (2008): 375–378, [doi: 10.1136/jme.2006.019265](https://doi.org/10.1136/jme.2006.019265); Jon Crump and Jeremy Sugarman, “Ethical Considerations for Short-Term Experiences by Trainees in Global Health,” *JAMA* 300, no. 12 (2008):1456–1458. [doi:10.1001/jama.300.12.1456](https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.300.12.1456).

¹⁴ Society of Jesus, *Universal Apostolic Preferences*, accessed November, 2019, <https://jesuits.global/en/about-us/universal-apostolic-preferences>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, Encyclical Letter (Vatican City, Italy: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015) accessed November 5, 2019, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.