The negative impacts of globalization have created worldwide inequalities and communities in need. Global cooperation is required to address these problems. With a growing intentionally mobile workforce, university students and prospective employers value international work experience. International Service Learning (ISL) programs present unique opportunities to meet these desires and aid struggling communities. However, the relationship of “serving” and “being served” raises ethical dilemmas and requires robust planning, implementation, and assessment of ISL programs.

Ethics in International Service Learning

IEMG 8610A

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International service-learning (ISL) is a growing and diverse field. It began as a social work or volunteerism phenomenon within individual countries. In Germany, men and women ages 17-23 must fulfill a service obligation of 8-23 months or 12 years (CIA Factbook, 2014). This can be served in country, or working internationally. In Israel, all men and women are conscripted into compulsory military service at the age of 18. Of those conscripted, “99% report to service” and “90% would volunteer even if not drafted” (Seginer, 1999, p. 205). These statistics indicate a devotion to their country and a willingness to serve beyond the requirement.

Volunteerism also occurs on a multinational level through programs such as the United Nations Volunteers, and multinational community development organizations. Additionally, the Millennium Development Goals, promoted and supported by nations worldwide, are a clear call to action global collaboration to find locally implemented solutions to global problems. Additionally, due to negative and positive effects of globalization, the world workforce is becoming more mobile and international.

To meet these needs, third party providers dedicated to international service learning trips are growing in popularity. Additionally, many universities are creating their own programs, usually for short-term programs during school breaks. In 2011/2012, approximately 59% of study abroad students from the United States participated in short term programs (less than 8 weeks) during the academic year or during university breaks (Open Doors, 2012, Duration of U.S. Study Abroad Section). This momentum has generated a need to understand the ethics involved with American students, privileged as U.S. citizens, working in developing countries, and to determine models of best practice. Dependent on a students’ unique background, the average American student has come to expect personal attention, a seamless administrative system, easy access to the Internet, and on-demand contact with counselors, advisers, faculty,
and administrators (Ogden, 2008, p. 37). Due to socio-economic, political and cultural realities, complying with these expectations is not possible, practical or ethical in developing countries. Thus, students must be ready to leave their anticipations in the United States. One of the most difficult situations in which to manage student expectations and ethically implement an ISL program is health care assistance because students can unintentionally cause great harm to the patients they are assisting if the students are not properly trained and supervised. When ethically planned, implemented and assessed, ISL programs provide transformative experiences for students, communities, and educators.

**International Service Learning (ISL) Definition**

Before a discussion about ISL can begin, it is necessary to establish an institutionally agreed upon definition to structure the program around. According to Bringle and Hatcher, “ISL is the combination of service learning, study abroad, and international education…and draws from the strengths of each strategy.” (2011, p. 14) Therefore, ISL requires a unique definition and research to support it. The definition Bringle and Hatcher provide for ISL is robust and comprehensive:

*International Service Learning is “A structured academic experience in another country in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that addresses identified community needs; (b) learn from direct interaction and cross-cultural dialogue with others; and (c) reflect on the experience in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a deeper understanding of global and intercultural issues, a broader appreciation of the host country and the discipline, and an enhanced sense of their own responsibilities as citizens, locally and globally” (2011, p. 19).*

This definition reflects the complexity and promise of ISL programs and alludes to the major actors involved: students, community partners, and educators (higher education institutions and private ISL providers). The Code of Ethics by Forum on Education Abroad (2011) makes it clear that all of these actors who aspire to the “highest ethical and professional standards” are
responsible for ethically planning, implementing, and evaluating ISL programs (p. 1). However, they are often unaware of the underlying needs for service resulting from globalization and the goals of global citizenship.

**Globalization and Global Citizenship**

Globalization has caused both positive and negative outcomes. For students, globalization and the relative accessibility of international travel has broadened their horizons to learning about different cultures, people, and ways of living. Additionally, study abroad has evolved from a “grand tour” of Europe (visits to the famous museums, palaces, and cafes) to countless open doors in Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Middle East (Lewin, 2009, p. xiv). Open Doors Data (2012) indicates that U.S Study Abroad in Latin America increased by 11.7% between 2010/11 and 2011/12 (U.S. Study Abroad All Destinations Section). Additionally, Open Doors Data (2012) showed an 8.3% increase in Sub-Saharan Africa and a 3.8% increase in the Middle East of U.S students studying abroad. Some possible reasons students are preferring to study in these countries is the cost of living is lower and there are more opportunities for applied study abroad (like ISL and language immersion).

However, many students are unprepared for the challenges globalization has brought to the countries they are visiting. Rampant inequality, donor-driven initiatives that prove ineffective, brain drain, and forced migration due to poor quality of life are just a few of the realities caused by globalization in developing countries (Lager, Mathiesen, Rodgers & Cox, 2010, p. 21). Without proper training, when students encounter these situations, they are often frustrated by feelings of futility, are too guilt driven by their own privilege to positively engage and collaborate with their communities, or fall prey to neo-colonialist “poverty tourism” (Lewin, 2009, p. xv). Ogden (2008) describes this phenomenon as the colonial student “who really wants
to be abroad and take full advantage of all the benefits studying abroad offers, but is not necessarily open to experiencing the less desirable side of being there” (p. 37). However, by giving students knowledge and tools to channel their eagerness into productive community action based projects, ISL can be an effective instrument to meet the necessities of a global and internationalized world where there is a pressing need for global civic action.

On a global development scale, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has been positively working with local populations and volunteers to “empower lives and build resilient nations” since 1966 (UNDP, 2014, About Us Section). Ethical, informed and invested global citizens are necessary to carry out global civic action. In higher education, global citizenship has been advanced as a deliberate standard since the late 1990s. While there is no agreed upon definition of global citizenship in higher education, Schattle (2009) offers

“Global citizenship as an outward awareness entails such personal qualities as understanding complex issues from multiple vantage points, recognizing sources of global interdependence and a ‘shared fate’ that implicates humanity and all life on the planet, and looking beyond distinctions, at least in one’s mind, between insiders and outsiders in order to view the human experience in more universal terms” (p. 10-11).

This concept of global citizenship also denotes global responsibility beyond national borders. It is this responsibility that has led to the creation of, and participation in, ISL programs.

**Ethical Dilemmas**

The biggest ethical dilemma between ISL learners and local community leaders and members is the learner’s inherently powerful and privileged position. The word “service” denotes an unequal relationship where one group is “serving” and the other is “being served.” Without proper training and collaboration, this inequality places the volunteers in a position of privilege that reinforces prejudice and widens the power inequality gap. To manage this privilege, volunteers must critically understand social and economic inequalities, social justice
issues and cross-cultural challenges in their own lives and in the lives of the community they are working with. When volunteers are well informed and trained, they can aid in the “cooperative development of a program that will address a mutually established vision, and where both parties will serve and be served” (Baker-Boosamra, 2006, p. 6). Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2000) offer several linguistic and mind-change attitudes for considering ISL as “doing with” instead of “doing for.” For example, public relations becomes relating to the public, campus outcomes becomes reciprocal outcomes and an add-on service becomes integral service (p. 769). The common theme is collaboration.

Another ethical dilemma that is a hindrance to cooperation is ensuring mutuality and reciprocity. According the Code of Ethics for Education Abroad from the Forum on Education Abroad (2011), an ethical relationship with a host society requires “an awareness of and efforts to minimize any negative impact on the host society and community” (p. 7). However, traditional models of service learning in higher education emphasize the education of the student participants, short term goals they can accomplish with little training, and lack a connection to the organization that is facilitating the service opportunity (Stoecker, Loving, Reddy & Bollig, 2010, p. 281). Because this model is not firstly based on the needs of the local community, from the perspective of a community partner, this framework only harms their organization and community instead of strengthening it. Best practice for ISL is mutuality and reciprocity, where the program plan for action begins with a needs assessment conducted by the community and then working with higher education institutions and study abroad providers to develop clear learning and service objectives, a strategic plan for monitoring and evaluating outcomes, and a sustainable process of improvement and growth (Plater, Jones, Bringle & Clayton, 2009, p. 491). By considering assessment and improvement in the planning and implementation stages, an ISL
program has a greater chance of becoming an integral part of the local community which leads to the creation of global villages jointly helping each other.

**Ethical ISL Planning**

There are additional ethical considerations and strategies while planning an ISL program. The most important idea for ethically planning an ISL program is capacity building. Capacity building is “enhancing the ability of everyone involved to be involved effectively and to derive and generate maximum benefit from their involvement” (Plater et al., 2009, p. 491). For partnerships, it is particularly important to anticipate problems related to leaving the community. This principle is echoed by the Code of Ethics for Education Abroad from the Forum on Education Abroad (2011) that describes an ethical relationship with a host society as “Considering and preparing for the environmental, economic, and social consequences of the presence (or departure) of the program, in both program design and management” (p. 8). An ISL partnership should not be formed unless the community has the capacity to host and train student volunteers and sustain their activities without the volunteers on-site. Additionally, the partnership and program must be supported by the institutional mission and institutional leaders must be committed to living by the principles of mutuality and equality (Gillespie et al., 2009, p. 508). If the philosophy of the program is not supported on an institutional level, then it will be impossible to foster a sustainable and ethical relationship.

A challenge in reaching this capacity for community partners, ISL educators and students is managing how capacity building is seen in other cultures. For example, a hurdle to capacity building is traditional gender roles. In many societies, men are expected to be assertive, competitive, and tough, while women are the designated care takers (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 117). Therefore, it would be difficult to involve female volunteers and community members in
projects that are seen as more masculine without first empowering the women of the community. Because the definition of a strong, community-driven organization varies in and among different cultures, it is important for ISL educators and community partners to consider capacity building as encompassing adequate (safe from a risk management perspective) infrastructure, a jointly agreed upon strategic plan, a clear idea of where learners fit into the community organization, clear learning outcomes and a plan for sustaining program activities after the volunteers leave the community.

Decisions about capacity should be made by professionals with on-site experience. To ethically plan and implement an ISL program, key stakeholders should have extensive knowledge of the country and already have some established relationships. Creating relationships and building trust takes time. It is important not to rush planning a new program until a transparent agreement with community partners has been reached, country specific information important for logistics and orienting students has been gathered, and potential learning experiences have been assessed (Lager, Mathiesen, Rodgers & Cox, 2010, p. 83). By participating in capacity building discussions before sending students to work with an organization, ISL educators and community partners will have a stronger and more ethical relationship and students will be able to reach the mutually agreed upon learning outcomes and be supported by the local community.

**Ethical ISL Implementation**

While planning an ISL experience, educators should determine the best instructional tools to use while the program is being implemented. Case studies discussed throughout this paper (such as Berry College, Child Family Health International and Medical Ministry International) reveal that having undergraduate students conduct research that is directly related to their studies
and the community they are working with is an effective learning mechanism and within the scope of the students’ abilities. Streitwieser (2009) suggests that incorporating research into international study can include “gathering data and performing analysis for a major class assignment” (p. 407). One of the most effective research tools to engage students with their community and promote the development of intercultural sensitivity is having students conduct ethnographic interviews. This interview method is somewhat conversational, but emphasizes listening and deepening a discussion without inserting personal bias and commentary. It typically begins with two simple questions, “Where were you born? What was it like?” These questions can lead to a rich discussion where the student will begin to understand socio/cultural problems in the communities they are joining forces with and eventually using that research to develop and assess approaches to solving some of the problems present in the communities and bring about constructive change (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 9).

Berry College presents a case study of incorporating ethnographic research into a two-week ISL program in Jamaica. To facilitate the students’ achievement of the learning outcomes and not harm the community welcoming volunteers from Berry College, the institution created eleven strategies, six are centered on ethnographic research and three involve purposeful reflection (Smith-Paríolá & Gökê-Paríolá, 2006, p. 78-79). By allowing students active academic, personal, and professional study and reflection of their ISL experience, students are able to quickly gain an appreciation of the local community and continuously confront and seek solutions to problems caused by inequality.

Before a program is implemented, ISL educators and community partners should review a list of facilitating factors to maintain their successful relationship as well as barriers to implementing the program before beginning marketing and recruiting efforts. According to
Lager, Mathiesen, Rodgers and Cox (2010), the top ranked facilitating factors for sustaining international partnerships are “mutual goal setting,” “direct and timely communication,” “flexible attitudes,” “personal relationships,” and “appreciation and recognition of diversity” (p. 111). All of these topics must be addressed during program planning and be taken into account for orienting new ISL learners to the program.

To successfully prepare students, conscientious individual and group advising is essential to ensuring that students are knowledgeable about the region, community organization, and social justice issues they will encounter during their ISL experience. Students who are not well prepared are likely to experience extreme culture shock, lack cross-cultural communication skills, run into situations they are uncomfortable with, and unqualified for, and not meet learning outcomes (NAFSA, 2013, p. 13). Just as ISL educators and community partners must be interculturally competent while communicating with each other and with learners, students must enter the experience flexible and open-minded, with an attitude of learning and experiencing instead of changing and doing. If the organizers and students follow the principles of the five facilitating factors and adhere to ethical best practice, everyone involved will reciprocally learn, grow, and implement sustainable change.

Ethical ISL Assessment

When a program is designed, an assessment plan to measure learning outcomes and improve the program should also be developed and carried out. A common goal of ISL programs and study abroad in general is the development of global citizens. According to Darla Deardorff (2009), challenges that must be met before developing an assessment of global citizenship are greater clarity around definitions, specific focus, adequate preparation of students, statement of realistic learning outcomes, and alignment and integration of global citizenship throughout an
institution's curriculum (p. 351). Because of the challenges and reality that global citizenship is a lifelong process, two measurable outcomes that speak to the ethics of the program are the process of intercultural sensitivity and local community feedback.

A proven tool to assess students’ level of intercultural sensitivity both before and after they complete an international program is the Intercultural Development Index (IDI). The four stages measured by IDI are Denial/Defense, Reversal, Minimization, Acceptance/Adaptation, and Encapsulated Marginality (Westrick, 2004, p. 279). According to Westrick (2004), students must first intentionally experience difference and create meaning from that process (p. 292). This is easily accomplished during ISL programs because students will naturally come into contact with people who are economically, socially, ethnically, and/or culturally different from themselves. During these interactions, students must actively reflect on their place in relation to the local community in order to move from a state of ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism. An effective ISL program will discover that students begin their journey on the denial or reversal scale and by the end of the program are working towards acceptance/adaptation. This is very difficult to accomplish on a short-term program, but can be achieved through thoughtfully planned orientations, meaningful reflection during and post program, and with the support and constant communication of community partners.

The perspectives of community partners must be analyzed to ensure that when the program is implemented, it is mutually beneficial. Often, community partners are very grateful for the partnership and aid from the students and their only commentary is “student groups provided needed assistance and, in some cases, a significant revenue stream for their projects” (Schroeder, Wood, Galiardi, & Koehn, 2009, p. 144). This, however, does not speak to the equity of the partnership. To examine the cooperation in greater detail, Lager, Mathiesen, Rodgers and
Cox (2010) offer the top ranked barriers to international partnerships to measure the effectiveness of the program for both partners: “inadequate financial support and aid, lack of faculty time and interest to build relationships, liability issues, timing, and lack of coordinated efforts” (p. 11). If any of these factors are present, then it will be impossible to generate accurate feedback from community partners or maintain a sustainable relationship. Therefore, it is of paramount importance that community partners are informed from the beginning that their candid input, advice, and needs will be asked for and considered to improve the program. By involving community partners in each phase of an ISL program (planning, implementation and assessment), both parties and students will derive maximum benefit from an ethically well organized, well run, and well assessed program.

**Case Study: Ethical Planning, Implementation and Assessment of a Medical ISL program**

Child Family Health International (CFHI) is an ISL provider that focuses on global health and healthcare. When they plan their programs, they are firmly aware that students who are not properly advised and have expectations contradictorily to their skill level can unintentionally cause harm. In particular, CFHI finds that many students who join their programs have the intention of saving the world (Schmidbauer, 2013, p. 28). To avoid the scenario of a helpful undergraduate inappropriately delivering a baby, suturing a wound, and/or performing a pap smear in developing countries, CFHI focuses their programs on learning instead of doing and ensures each student’s expectations are aligned with the type of program they will be participating in (Schmidbauer, 2013, p. 28).

CFHI’s program implementation is successful because there is much to learn from observing instead of doing. In a webinar on February 11, 2014, Jessica Evert, Executive Director of CFHI and a Clinical Faculty Member of the Department of Family and Community Medicine
at the University of California, San Francisco, stated a CFHI student mantra, “Don’t do something, just stand there!” This philosophy is meant to redirect the students’ attention to issues and ethics of global health such as humility, solidarity, social justice and introspection. Additionally, students need to recognize their own limitations in order to calmly gain knowledge and first hand observation instead of hands-on experience. Furthermore, an excellent resource for students to prepare for their experience and use as a resource throughout their program is the University of Minnesota’s Global Ambassadors for Patient Safety free online workshop (University of Minnesota, 2012, Health Careers Center). This workshop echoes the goals of CFHI and places the emphasis on patient safety instead of student limitations. Through this course, students will be empowered observers and use their knowledge to communicate the challenges of global health until they are ready to perform as doctors themselves.

In order to assess the effectiveness of a program like CFHI on providing health services and instructing students about issues of global health, it is necessary to ask the patients how they view the student’s role. In a study conducted by Medical Ministry International in Haiti, patients were very positive about their interactions with students. Although the language barrier was difficult, many patients appreciated the enthusiasm, genuine concern, and respect showed by the student volunteers towards them. The patients were confident in the care they were receiving because the students were not performing any tasks beyond their education level. Furthermore, if the students had any questions, they always asked their supervisor, who was the primary caregiver and always present (DeCamp, Enumah, O’Neill & Sugarman, 2014, p. 10). This type of community assessment is vital to ethically address the needs of the local community and the best approaches for mutually and sustainably working together.
Conclusion

Because of inequality, world politics, and greater mobility caused by globalization, there is a pressing need for global collaboration with local solutions to solve global problems. If universities want to claim putting their students on the path to global citizenship, both words must be given equal weight and importance. “Global” involves the whole world and its peoples. “Citizenship” includes civic action, community responsibility, and “evokes the rights, powers, and privileges that are afforded to members of a community” (Zemach-Berson, 2009, p. 316). As international educators, students, and aspiring global citizens, it is important to recognize that American students are inherently more powerful and privileged than their counterparts in developing countries and often enjoy more freedom and rights. However, by becoming enlightened about their privilege, they can leave behind a colonial or tourist mindset and collaborate with communities on projects that will sustainably solve local problems and generate global solutions. To achieve this attitude and action, it is necessary to prepare student participants for the cultural, socio/economic, social, and ethnic issues they will encounter while collaborating with a local community in developing countries. ISL programs that are ethically planned with a focus on responsibility, mutuality, reciprocity, and sustainability are a small part of educating students in the U.S. how to collaborate with community partners and empowering communities to develop culturally, economically, politically, and locally viable solutions to global problems. Above all, ISL educators need to change the conversation of ISL from “serving others” to “working together” to build a global village.
Appendix: Tools for Developing Intercultural Sensitivity

*Adapted from a course instructed by Professors Nükhet Kardam, Andrea Olsen and John Elder.

**Self-Awareness:** This activity will be done twice; once to accustom students to the exercise, and once to use the exercise in context. The first time around students will watch the trainer model the activity and then practice with a partner. It starts with a simple statement, “I am aware of…” The students will take three-five minutes to identify any feelings, imaginations, thoughts or sensations that they are aware of sitting in their chair. The second round the facilitator will have students close their eyes and imagine themselves participating in their ISL project. Students will then complete the exercise again in their new imagined surroundings. The facilitator should ask students to share what they are aware of the second time to see if any similar themes emerge to help frame the program.

**Seeing the World through Five Lenses:** This activity works well to frame the program in context. First, students will be asked to visualize the two components of their program, academic work and volunteering, and discuss what they see through a geological lens (fossils, ecology), a biological lens (plants and animals), a cultural lens (people and their habits), a familial lens (relating scene to family history or events) and a personal lens (a student’s own biases and experiences). The facilitator will help students understand the meaning and value of each lens to frame the program in terms of the students’ participation, local community, diversity, social justice, and human compassion.

**The Three Verbs of Language:** This activity teaches students humility and helps them understand how someone who does not speak English as their first language feels when trying to communicate. Perhaps this activity can motivate students to learn some of the local language spoken by the community they will interact with. Even knowing a few key phrases can show respect and cultural interest. To participate, students will work with a partner. One partner starts
to describe an experience from his or her day and the other partner quietly listens. Every time the speaker says a verb, the verb must be followed by three additional verbs. For example, “Today I rode, took, transported my bike to school. There was, happened to be, existed, a lot of traffic…” After speaking for a minute the partners trade places. At the end of the activity, the facilitator asks how each experience felt. Typically, students feel the exercise is frustrating, difficult, interesting, enlightening, thoughtful, etc. This leads into strategies for communicating with people whose first language is not English. Students will be asked to speak slowly, not to use colloquialisms or idioms (i.e. hit the nail on the head), and to attentively and patiently listen.

**Ethnographic Interviewing**: This interview method is somewhat conversational, but emphasizes listening and deepening a discussion without inserting personal bias and commentary. It typically begins with two simple questions, “Where were you born? What was it like?” This will lead to a rich conversation about an individual’s background, interests, life work and beliefs. These interviews may be conducted somewhat casually, but the interviewees must be told by the students that they want to interview them for twenty minutes or longer (whatever they have time for and for as long as they want to share). While asking questions, the students must only ask questions directly related to the last thing the interviewee said or making connections between their discourses. The students will practice ethnographic interviewing with a partner for 20 minutes each as many times as they need to feel comfortable with the technique.
References


