The Importance of Global Citizenship to Higher Education: The Role of Short-Term Study Abroad

**Lane Perry[1*], Krystina R. Stoner[2,4], Lee Stoner[3], Daniel Wadsworth[4],
Rachel Page[4] and Michael A. Tarrant[2]**

[1]*Center for Service Learning, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC, USA.*
[2]*Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources, University of Georgia, Athens, United States
of America.*
[3]*School of Sport and Exercise, Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand.*
[4]*Institute of Food Nutrition and Human Health, Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand.*

Authors' contributions

*This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. Authors LP, KRS, LS, DW,
RP and MAT: (1) made substantial contributions to conception and design, (2) assisted in
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Short Communication

ABSTRACT

An increasing number of institutions actively promote *internationalisation* as a key strategy,
implying that the development of a "global citizenry" is an integral part of their educational
mission. To fulfil this strategy, four constructs must be addressed: (1) what is global
citizenship?, (2) why is global citizenship important? (3) how do we measure global
citizenship?, and (4) how do we foster global citizenship? (1) Although global citizenship is
a highly contested and multifaceted term, three key dimensions are commonly accepted:
social responsibility, global awareness, and civic engagement. (2) Today's graduates are
critically dependent on an interconnected world, and universities have a responsibility to
promote global mindedness, to provide greater employment opportunities for their
graduates, and to respond to political calls for enhanced national security. (3) There is a
consensus that the natural and built environment is the context in which global citizenship

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*Corresponding author: Email: laneperry@wcu.edu;

can be best understood. Utilizing the three previously consented upon tenets of global citizenship, Tarrant (2010) developed a Value-Belief-Norm model to assess global citizenship. (4) A number of nations are utilizing international education as an *en masse* mechanism for nurturing global citizenship. However, the "just do it" model may be ineffective. Conversely, short-term courses, coupled with action-oriented experiences that encourage reflection, critical analysis, and synthesis may be effective catalysts. Since short-term programs are likely to remain the only realistic option for many undergraduate students, there is a growing need to document whether short-term courses can promote higher-order outcomes and, if so under what conditions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Institutions of higher education arguably have a responsibility to develop curricula that foster "global citizens", either as a consequence of their educational mission, in response to political calls for enhanced national security and global awareness, or in strengthening the employability of their graduates within an ever-globalizing context. To fulfil this strategy, four constructs must be addressed: (1) what is global citizenship? (2) why is global citizenship important? (3) how do we measure global citizenship?, and (4) how is global citizenship fostered? In addition to discussing these questions, commentary will focus on the pivotal role short-term study abroad programs can play in fostering global citizenship.

2. WHAT IS GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP?

Although global citizenship is a highly contested and multifaceted term [1,2], three key dimensions, at least within the study abroad literature, are now commonly accepted [3,4]: (1) social responsibility (concern for others, for society at large, and for the environment), (2) global awareness (understanding and appreciation of one's self in the world and of world issues), and (3) civic engagement (active engagement with local, regional, national and global community issues). In one of the most thorough reviews of the global citizenship concept in the study abroad scholarly field, Schattle [4] proposes that it "entails being aware of responsibilities beyond one's immediate communities and making decisions to change habits and behavior patterns accordingly" (p.12).

Outside the study abroad literature, there is consensus that the natural and built environment is the context in which global citizenship can be best understood [5-8], since environmental concern not only benefits others beyond the individual, but also invokes a sense of obligation toward others. According to Dobson [7], the environment constitutes a *community of obligation* in which social responsibilities and behaviors extend, in the form of an ecological footprint. In distinguishing between a Good Samaritan (i.e., based on charity) and a Good (*Earth*) Citizen (i.e., based on obligations), Dobson argues "the idea of the ecological footprint converts relationships we had thought to be Samaritan into relationships of citizenship" (p.105). Citizens, then, are not merely global by reason of their international travel, but as a result of their pro-environmental behaviors that make a sustainable impact. Similarly, Attfield [5] suggests, "environmental responsibilities form the most obvious focus of concern for global citizens, as well as the territory where global obligations most clearly arise" (p.191). In a similar vein, Winn [8] considers the concept of global citizenship to

include "behaviors associated with the global issues of environmentalism, social justice, and civic participation" (p.124). With the ever increasing role of higher education institutions in the development of global citizens, a specific emphasis on internationally located educative experiences, coupled with critical reflection methods, and ultimately framed by relevant disciplines, the behaviors and actions of globally educated citizens can and should be developed. Moreover, it is the students' exploration and application of pro-environmental behaviors within the natural environment, the built environment, and the communities they engage.

3. WHY IS GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP IMPORTANT?

Universities and colleges arguably have a responsibility to develop international curricula that foster a student citizenry with stronger global awareness, either as a consequence of their educational mission [1,4,9-11], in response to political calls for enhanced national security [12-14], in providing greater employment opportunities for their graduates [15], or simply in heeding the public's growing interest in the importance of promoting global mindedness among future generations [16]. Responding to these realities requires a massive increase in the global literacy of the typical college graduate.

The intensification of and access to technology has forged links between institutions, societies, cultures and individuals, and today's university graduates live and work in a world that is more accessible than ever before [17]. While the availability of modern travel and technology is not accessible to all of earth's 7 billion 'citizens', those who have access and acceptance into higher education institutions also have greater opportunities for globalized experiences. The opportunity for a student to frame their existence within a global context can promote deeper understanding of cultural differences and provide a counterpoint for juxtaposing their personal beliefs with those of others. Internationalization and globalization are fundamental components of the learning process; to live and reflect upon the experiences a student has with these phenomena can increase action and bring about transformation of perspective.

4. HOW IS GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP FOSTERED?

There is growing political interest in international education and increasing reference to globalization (and the need to prepare students as global citizens) in the missions of academic institutions [10]. Lutterman-Aguilar and Gingerich [18] argue that education abroad can effectively prepare students as responsible global citizens if programs incorporate the principles of experiential education, notably action-oriented experiences that encourage reflection, critical analysis, and synthesis. Similar conclusions are drawn by McLaughlin and Johnson [19], who propose a field-based experiential learning model for short-term study abroad programs. This model enables students to move beyond knowledge learning to application and integration, toward a real, "unbuffered" world. Indeed, there is strong evidence throughout the study abroad literature supporting the integration of experiential learning as a key medium for promoting higher-order learning [20-28].

The outcomes of study abroad experiences, students' previous experiences with the course material, the destination, and travel in general can have an influence on the potential shift in a student's worldview. McKeown [29] recognized the profound change in students' values when experiencing a new social environment that called into question their internal beliefs [30] and referred to this as the *first-time effect*. This phenomenon has also been recognized

in other learning environments where experientially based pedagogy (service-learning, problem-based learning) has been utilized and experienced for the first-time [31,32]. Valuable to the student experience, their engagement, and the likelihood of a shift in worldview are the following: faculty-student engagement, experiential learning opportunities, dialogue and group discussions focused on students' experiences, and reflection assignments connected to experiences and readings [33]. Within study abroad experiences, exposure to new places, cultures, and learning environments where a student's preconceived and established notions and beliefs are tested, may act as the catalyst or impetus to bring forth a transformative experience. Of particular importance is the creation of moments of critical reflection and discussion. In these types of environments, exposed to realties that are outside their previous understanding or comfort zones, the learner may discover a need to acquire new perspectives in order to gain a more complete and complex understanding. A deeper, more sincere understanding of reality and how their perception of reality is framed by their worldview, is the value in combining experiences with critical analysis, reflection, and abstract conceptualization [34].

5. HOW IS GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP MEASURED?

There is a consensus that the natural and built environment is the context in which global citizenship can be best understood. Utilizing this context, Tarrant [30] developed a Value-Belief-Norm model to assess global citizenship and the "added value" of study abroad (Fig. 1). In Tarrant's [30] conceptualization of a framework for exploring the role of studies abroad education and global citizenship development, he posited a frame based on Stern's [35] Values-Beliefs-Norm theory (VBN). In this, Tarrant identifies two components based on (1) an awareness/belief that specific environmental conditions threaten or have adverse consequences for the things the learner values and (2) an awareness/belief that the individual/learner can act to reduce the specific threat(s) [30,35]. These components and the extent to which an individual learner aligns with these two beliefs are critical to the conceptual framework Tarrant puts forth.
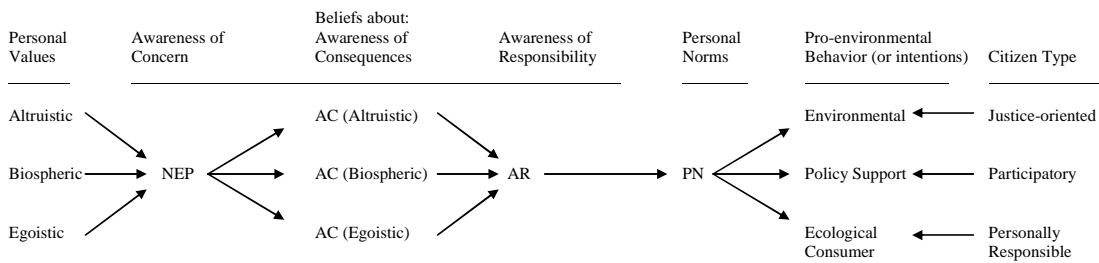

Fig. 1. Adapted value-beliefs-norms theory of global citizenship [30]

The recognition of critical reflection as an integral component of the conceptual framework offered by Tarrant [30] is evident in Westheimer and Kahne's [36] "citizen-type" and Dobson's [7] "Earth Citizen". For example, Westheimer and Kahne [36] argue that a justice-oriented citizen is one who is concerned with asking questions about issues she or he sees in their community (local and global) and then acting upon the answers they find. This is in sharp contrast to a personally responsible citizen who is typically concerned with acting responsibly or volunteering in times of crisis. Interestingly, it seems that a clear difference between these two citizen types is found in the citizen's concern with or interest in critical reflection upon their observations and experiences. Justice-oriented citizens seem to be

more concerned with asking the more complex questions versus accepting the simpler answers. By asking more complex questions, it is assumed that justice-oriented citizens are analyzing, considering, and reconsidering their perspectives and beliefs in light of new information and experiences. This is primarily a function of critical thinking and reflection. That is, being prepared to ask and answer the complex questions that emerge from our continually evolving and complex society [28]. Doing this may promote and nurture "change in environmentally oriented values, norms, and behaviors" [30]. This observation is demonstrated further by Dobson's view of an Earth Citizen. With an Earth Citizen there tends to be less emphasis on volunteerism as ends unto itself, and a greater emphasis placed on questioning what is observed or has come to be known and then this is acted upon in order to ameliorate the causes of observed injustices. Overall, the conceptual framework "proposes that values and worldviews act as filters for new information in the development and formation of congruent beliefs and attitudes which in turn predispose behavioral intentions and ultimately pro-environmental behaviors" [30].

The two components Tarrant identified (the connection between environmental conditions and the threats on a learner's values and the belief that the learner can reduce the threats), which underpin Fig. 1, have a common denominator. That denominator is a learner's values and what they are willing to do about those values. The measurement of value identification or awareness is a complex, but important endeavor. One particular theory that has been operationalized and empirically tested to measure a person's values is the Shwartz norm-activation theory. Norm-activation theory states that "pro-environmental actions occur in response to personal moral norms about such actions and that these are activated in individuals who believe that environmental conditions pose threats to other people, other species, or the biosphere and that actions they initiate could avert those consequences" [37]. One salient, empirical study measured the values associated with social movements particularly in context of pro-environmental actions. In the Stern et al. [37] study, which was designed to measure two variables from Shwartz's norm-activation theory (personal norms and awareness of consequences), resulted in findings that were strongly consistent with the VBN theory. Essentially, it was determined that personal norms were strongly associated with the behaviors of all three types of nonactivist environmentalism, provided the strongest predictor of consumer behavior and willingness to sacrifice, and was the only variable in their study to have a direct effect on all three types of movement support.

A limitation of Tarrant's model is that it directly focuses on environmental awareness and does not directly address the concepts of social justice or civic engagement, i.e., the key dimensions of global citizenship [3,4]. Although, it should be noted that in Tarrant's conceptual framework, there is indirect or ancillary inclusion of personal values and awareness of responsibility (civic engagement) and the citizen type (social justice orientation) an individual could align. Even though Tarrant clearly is addressing the conceptualization of "pro-environmental behavior" from an environmental perspective, it is inextricably connected to other important elements to be considered when attempting to understanding global citizenship. In addition, the use of Shwartz's norm-activation theory to operationalize and measure global citizenship is an important avenue to consider.

6. WHAT ROLE CAN SHORT-TERM STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS PLAY?

The past 25 years have witnessed growing numbers of students, particularly in the United States (U.S.), participating in study abroad programs of varying durations, locations, and academic foci. These growing numbers, contextualized and sourced from the U.S. higher education student body, have led to the literature being skewed in context of the U.S. This

particular growth and respective body of literature ultimately reflects a U.S. centric perspective on research into the influence of short-term study abroad. This is due to the limited number of empirical studies investigating non-U.S. students studying abroad Curthoys [38]. With this, Europe and Australasia could be considered emerging markets for future generations of students beginning to study abroad. Further investigation into these emerging markets and the influence of study abroad on participants is necessary.

In the U.S., most recent estimates indicate that of the approximately 270,000 U.S. students who studied abroad for academic credit in 2009/10 (compared to 75,000 students in 1990), the majority (57%) were short-term (summer or 8 weeks or less) [39]. While short-term programs have been criticized for being academically light [29], they appeal to large numbers of undergraduates without prior international travel experience and/or who lack the funds or time for extensive education abroad opportunities [40-43]. Short-term programs thereby may provide a springboard for future, more in-depth travel [44], a pathway for those studying abroad for the first-time [29], and perhaps "the only realistic alternative in terms of the demands of your degree studies and economic resources" [39]. As such, short-term programs may be viewed as crucial for achieving broad and more egalitarian access to study abroad for U.S. undergraduates.

Skepticism has been voiced about whether the short-term study abroad format can offer students a sufficiently profound experience to transform the fundamental values and beliefs that underlie global citizenship. Recent evidence suggests that the duration of the international experience may be only weakly related to student learning outcomes. The large scale Georgia Learning Outcomes of Students Studying Abroad Initiative (GLOSSARI) [45] found a general advantage for study abroad at any duration over no study abroad in terms of graduation rates, although moderate duration (4-8 weeks) exceeded both shorter and longer programs on this variable. In their study of over 6,000 alumni from 20 institutions, Paige et al. [3] suggests no difference in global engagement between students who had studied abroad for shorter versus longer durations. Their findings from the University of Minnesota's Study Abroad for Global Engagement project revealed that students in short-term programs (of 4 weeks or less) were just as likely to be globally engaged as those who studied abroad for several months or longer. Similarly, McKeown [29] posited that, "students who had been abroad for as little as two weeks showed patterns of intellectual development more similar to peers who had been abroad for months or years than to those who had not been abroad at all" (p.6). The conclusion is that spending at least some time abroad is probably better than no time at all, though the extent to which the "just do it" analogy [46] holds true for study abroad (i.e., relative to home campus) remains relatively unsubstantiated [29,47]. Meaning, whether studying abroad for a short, moderate, or long-term period, there needs to be some level of consideration for appropriate measures to be implemented that will help students make connections from and sense of their new experiences.

Short-term study abroad, when coupled with an adequate pedagogical framework, could serve as an educative opportunity for fostering transformative learning environments where new experiences and perspective may be developed. It is that critical moment where learners have engaged with something novel, whether it is physical or psychological, that is when reflection and critical reflection become imperative to the learning process. The shift from physical experience to meaning making can be different, but it is imperative for perspective transformation and ultimately behavior adaptation to occur. Though it should be noted that prior to the exposure to something novel, abstract conceptualization can have occurred. Meaning, preparation and study for future experiences related to a student's involvement in a course is also valuable to their learning. These connections between

experience and reflection, content and experience, and reflection and content are ones that have long been theoretically [14,34,48] and practically [31] established.

7. DISCUSSION AND DIRECTION

Over the past decade there have been increasing calls to develop the capacity of higher education students, particularly in the U.S., to think and act globally [11]. One method of encouraging the civic of global citizenship is through study abroad [30]. To date, the academic response to calls for greater global learning has focused primarily on increasing quantity (i.e., "just do it"). The number of students participating in education abroad is often the primary indicator of an institution's success in achieving globalization aims [44, 49]. Clearly, a major driver of such efforts should also address quality – the added value and outcomes of studying abroad as indexed by measures more informative than traditional course evaluation responses. As resources become available for study abroad development, funds should be targeted toward programs that promote demonstrable and specific learning outcomes.

Short-term, faculty-led, field-based programs can have an important role in fostering some of the outcomes considered critical to national security, globalization and global competitiveness, and social norms [11,50]. Though not all education programs should be similarly structured, we concur with Lutterman-Aguilar and Gingerich [18] that, "study abroad and experiential education are natural partners because they share the common goal of empowering students and preparing them to become responsible global citizens" (p.46). Accordingly, we encourage faculty to incorporate field-based learning experiences into study abroad curricula and to consider their role as facilitators of citizen activism [1], promoting opportunities for civic engagement, responsibility, and global awareness. The challenge, clearly, is to develop programs in a measured and effective way. Such programs must be attractive to students (especially for those traveling abroad for the first-time), yet must not turn the travel experience into a token service program of consumerism with little value beyond the tourism dollars it generates [2,51]. Since short-term programs are likely to remain the only realistic option for many undergraduate students and potentially the least expensive medium for democratizing study abroad, achieving such strategies will be critical. In moving toward more robust evidence of the value of education abroad, particularly with respect to globalization, we need to design research that can clearly demonstrate whether studying abroad (relative to home campus) can promote higher-order outcomes (such as global citizenship) and, if so, under what conditions.

Essentially, the literature to date is primarily focused on U.S. students studying abroad [38]. Comparative groups of students are needed to determine the influence study abroad experiences might have on non-U.S. counterparts who are from different geographical and cultural backgrounds. Moreover, this lack of research can be attributed to the emerging market and associated pedagogy of study abroad and international education in countries like New Zealand, Australia, and the United Kingdom.

8. CONCLUSIONS

There is a consensus that the natural and built environment is the context in which global citizenship can be best understood. Utilizing this context, Tarrant [30] developed a Value-Belief-Norm model to assess global citizenship and the "added value" of study abroad. A number of nations, including the U.S., have witnessed growing political pressure to utilize

international education as an *en masse* mechanism for nurturing global citizenship. However, the extent to which the "just do it" analogy holds true for study abroad remains relatively unsubstantiated. Education abroad can effectively prepare students as responsible global citizens, but only if coupled with action-oriented experiences that encourage reflection, critical analysis, and synthesis. Since short-term programs are likely to remain the only realistic option for many undergraduate students, there is a growing requisite to document whether short duration programs can promote higher-order outcomes (such as global citizenship) and, if so, under what conditions. In particular, there is a lack of demonstrable evidence of the *transformational change* attributable to participation in field-based/experiential study abroad programs, relative to (a) other study abroad programs lacking a structured experiential component and/or (b) home campus (i.e., traditional classroom) courses and/or (c) comparisons of the experiences and learning outcomes of students from different countries and cultures.

Although global citizenship is a highly contested and multifaceted term, three key dimensions are commonly accepted: social responsibility, global awareness, and civic engagement. This particular observation lends itself well to the perspective that global citizenship, at its core, is focused on connections – a person's connections with the products they choose to use, the environment they believe they influence, and the groups of people who they directly and indirectly associate with. Whether or not those connections (with products, environments, and people) are recognized and reflected upon is what fundamentally separates those who consciously assume their role as a global citizen from those who do not.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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