

THE PERCEIVED IMPACT OF STUDY ABROAD ACTIVITIES FOR GRADUATE  
COUNSELING STUDENTS

A Dissertation

by

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This dissertation meets the standards for scope and quality of  
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and is hereby approved.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the perceived impact of study abroad activities for graduate counseling students. The following research questions directed the qualitative study: What are the experiences of graduate counseling students who study abroad? How do counselors-in-training perceive the impact of experiences while participating in a study abroad course? How do graduate counseling students perceive the impact of a study abroad course on their understanding of multiculturalism? How do graduate counseling students perceive the impact of a study abroad course on their development as counselors?

Participants were comprised of eight master's-level counseling students from a university in the southwestern region of the United States. The participants were enrolled in a course offered by the counselor education department. The course was comprised of a weeklong study abroad experience in Costa Rica.

A phenomenological design was used in order to answer the research questions. The data collected included participants' reflections of this experience via individual interviews, individual journal responses, and focus group responses. Initial coding was done before the focus group was conducted in order to develop questions to clarify the themes that had emerged. After the focus group was completed and transcribed, focused coding was used to organize the units of data into significant categories. Trustworthiness was established by bracketing experiences of the researcher, utilizing multiple sources of data, member checking, and a clear audit trail of how the themes were developed.

From the data collected, three distinct themes emerged: (1) adaptability and personal growth, containing the sub-themes of learning from hands-on experiences, lack of preparation, negative emotions, dealing with discomfort, communication, and personal growth; (2) becoming

aware of diversity, which includes the sub-themes of experiences with cultural immersion, spirituality, respect for country and way of life; and (3) group process, which includes the sub-theme of learning from group diversity.

Implications for practice and future research recommendations are provided. Study abroad programs give counseling students the opportunity to develop their multicultural skills. More research is needed on counselors-in-training who study abroad to further support these findings.

## DEDICATION

To the students and educators willing to get out of their comfort zones in order to become citizens of the world, my hope is that study abroad opportunities become more available to students across the world.

“Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one’s lifetime.”

- Mark Twain, *Innocents Abroad*

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I am extremely thankful to the eight wonderful women who were my participants. I learned so much from every single one of them. I am grateful I had the opportunity to share the study abroad experience with each of them.

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## CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Because of the growing diversification in the United States, multicultural counseling is becoming an integral part of counselor education and supervision. Counselors must gain a better understanding of different cultural components in order to collaborate in our diverse and ever-changing world. Consequently, it is critical for counselors to develop an appreciation for other cultures in order to better help their clients and students. Leung (2003) stated that our culturally bound nature of practice could promote the idea that there is little we can learn from people in other countries due to a sense of superiority. However, students can learn about families and counseling practices globally in order to gain a better understanding of how culture influences relationships and behaviors (McDowell, Goessling, & Melendez, 2012). Traditional learning is often confined to a classroom, yet offering cultural experiences through a study abroad program can offer a great educational advantage to counseling students. By experiencing new cultures, counselors are able to better understand how cultural backgrounds affect the daily lives of the people with whom they work and counsel.

Study abroad programs consist of different experiential learning activities. These activities, plus exposure to a new culture, provide students with an opportunity to learn about other cultures while also learning about themselves. The standards set forth by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) state that part of the core curriculum experience for students includes developing an understanding of the cultural context of relationships, issues, and trends in a multicultural society. This includes experiential learning activities that foster an understanding of self and diverse clients (CACREP, 2009). This understanding is required for all students in CACREP accredited programs. Some programs do not have study abroad experiences but take advantage of cultural activities in class and the local community. These activities can provide similar experiences for the students who are unable to

study abroad. By understanding which activities impact students the most during a study abroad program, educators can tailor activities that foster multicultural learning not only while studying abroad but in the classroom as well.

A national review conducted by Rybalkina and Dybem (2013) presented a rationale for experiential learning abroad. In their research, best practices along with challenges and opportunities were described. The researchers surveyed faculty members at fifty-five universities. Thirty-four participants reported that their programs offered a study abroad opportunity. The variations of the programs were investigated. The duration of the trips ranged from seven to thirty days with twelve programs being offered in the summer and the rest offered throughout the year. Learning activities varied, though the majority of the programs utilized on-site visits in the country abroad, which included schools, mental health facilities, treatment programs, and family programs. Also common throughout the programs were cultural immersion activities, sightseeing, and lectures led by host country members. Some programs participated in leading group therapy, administering play therapy, and teaching while studying abroad (Rybalkina & Dyben, 2013).

Developing multicultural awareness is considered a professional obligation as well as an opportunity, as it can facilitate the ability of adequately trained counselors to help their clients (Lee, 1997; Roysircar, 2003). Multicultural awareness can increase a counselor's ability to make well-rounded/holistic decisions by considering the various ways that culture influences one's perceptions (Pederson, 2000). Also, professional counselors, as well as counselor educators, can benefit from an awareness of their own stereotypes and worldviews. If counselors are able to recognize how cultural factors influence their own lives, they may better understand how clients' lives and problems are influenced by their sociopolitical context.

Individuals can learn about diversity through books, lectures, and classroom activities but an improved means is by observing members of other cultures in their daily activities. Many counseling programs educate students on multiculturalism and the culture-bound nature of the counseling profession (Sue & Sue, 2008). When developing a multicultural class for graduate counseling students, educators should encourage exposure to different cultural groups so that students can advance learning gained from books and lectures. Individuals living and working in an unfamiliar culture are more likely to increase their multicultural awareness of alternative values, habits, customs, and lifestyles (Pederson, 2000). For that reason, study abroad programs are an effective and immersive means of increasing multicultural awareness. While studying abroad, students have the opportunity to learn about a new country while living in its cultural surroundings.

Culturally focused community-centered service (CFCCS) learning can be an enriching study abroad experience for graduate students. CFCCS experiences include working in a foreign community, which exposes students to the social, political, cultural, and environmental aspects of the community (Burnett, Hamel, & Long, 2004). CFCCS-learning encourages students to interact with different cultures in ways they would not normally in their home country. Important to the immersion experience is the participation in the customs and daily routines of work, recreation, and socialization to expose students to cultural traditions, languages, and nuances of the host country (Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010).

Study abroad opportunities have become more common in graduate counseling programs in the United States, although the course activities vary greatly. Graduate counseling programs support international coursework because it is a method of building multicultural sensitivity, cultural competence, international relationships, and global awareness (Fang, McDowell, &

Holland, 2006; Leong & Ponterotto, 2003; Leung, 2003; McDowell & Cohen, 2012). More research is needed to examine the outcome of international education experiences for counseling students and the impact of visiting different areas of the world (McDowell & Cohen, 2012).

### **Statement of Problem**

Understanding diversity is critical for counselors, as they work with clients from a variety of backgrounds and cultures. Exposure to multiple cultures can encourage counselors-in-training to become aware of their biases and assumptions, thus expanding their repertoire of therapeutic approaches (Pedersen & Leong, 1997). Studying abroad is one method to expand students' multicultural awareness. There is a lack of research focusing on the experiences of counseling graduate students participating in multicultural immersion activities. The number of counseling programs offering study abroad programs is growing; yet, there has been a minimal amount of research describing these international educational experiences (McDowell, Goessling, & Melendez, 2012).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the study abroad experiences of graduate counseling students. The study was informative regarding experiences of students who participated in a course that included service-learning and cultural immersion activities. The purpose of the study was to gain students' perceptions of experiences that contributed to their learning. Information found in this study can benefit educators planning for study abroad activities and students interested in participating in similar programs.

### **Research Questions**

This qualitative study concentrated on two expansive research questions: What are the experiences of graduate counseling students who study abroad? How do counselors-in-training

perceive the impact of experiences while participating in a study abroad course? Sub-questions that were addressed included: How do graduate counseling students (a) perceive the impact of a study abroad course on their understanding of multiculturalism? and (b) perceive the impact of a study abroad course on their development as counselors?

### **Significance of the Study**

Counselors have an obligation to develop their multicultural awareness in order to improve their client services (Arredondo & Arciniega, 2001; Lee, 1997; Roysircar, 2003). Knowledge and appreciation of other cultures can help counselors be more aware of their biases and assumptions, and will enhance their skills through utilization of new perspectives and ways of life (McDowell, Goessling, & Melendez, 2012). With the growing diversity in the United States, it is imperative that counselor educators foster multicultural awareness in graduate programs. The study adds to the body of knowledge on multicultural education. Counselor educators can draw on these findings to develop multicultural courses and study abroad programs.

Counselor educators continue to explore the most effective methods of teaching multicultural counseling competencies. Multicultural counseling competency is important in the counseling profession due to the increasing number of diverse individuals being served by counselors. The American Counseling Association and other governing bodies have recognized and emphasized a need for more culturally-responsive services for diverse and underserved populations (Dunn, Smith, & Montoya, 2006).

### **Population and Sample**

The purpose of this study was to further understand the experiences of graduate counseling students who study abroad. Participants included master's level graduate students in a

counseling program located in the southwest region of the United States who participated in a study abroad program. The eight participants were master's students who registered in a summer course taking place in Costa Rica during the second summer session during July and early August. All students studying abroad in the summer program were asked to volunteer in the current study.

### **Context**

The primary setting for the study abroad course was an education and research center in the Northern region of Costa Rica, located on the edge of a rainforest. The facility provides dormitories, classrooms, and computer labs to support research, education, and outreach for various universities. The facility and staff assist in the internationalization of education, research, and outreach programs that support the university goals. The center is utilized by these universities for research and study abroad experiences and is used as the main hub for students, although they participate in daily cultural excursions and service-learning projects in nearby communities. These excursions and projects will be described fully in Chapter 3.

### **Procedure and Data Collection**

There were a number of steps necessary to complete the current study. First, permission was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Next, permission to conduct the research was obtained by the head of the counselor education department and the provost of the study abroad program. Third, participating students were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could drop out at any time while the study was being conducted. Students who agreed to participate were given an informed consent form from the researcher.

The design of this study was phenomenological because the purpose was to describe and understand the experiences of study abroad on the participants. During the seven days the

participants studied in Costa Rica, they participated in various cultural immersion and service-learning activities. The activities were planned by the program director and the professors teaching the course abroad. The planned cultural activities for the students included taking nature hikes, visiting a local health clinic, attending a church service, visiting an organic farm, and sightseeing in the town of La Fortuna. Students also had the opportunity to participate in the local celebration for the *Virgen de los Angeles*, which is a celebration of the patron saint of Costa Rica. One day was dedicated to a service-learning project in a local high school and elementary school where study abroad students interacted with teachers and students. Also included in the study abroad itinerary was a visit to a special needs school where the study abroad students volunteered and worked with the teachers and students.

While in Costa Rica, the researcher documented observations of the participants in a journal. The principal researcher attended all activities listed above, as well as classes with the participants in order to become fully immersed in the study. Especially important were the observations during the class discussions at the end of each day when the students processed all activities and experiences. Processing and debriefing experiences with students as they occur can transform each moment into a learning experience (McCallon & Homes, 2010). Observations and quotes from participants were used for the study.

Journal entries are an integral part of the study abroad course and were submitted as graded coursework. All journal entries were based on a series of questions designed by their professor to stimulate reflection about their experiences. Students were given time to write in journals after classes while in Costa Rica. They turned in a copy of their journals as a class assignment to their professor. Under a pseudonym, a copy was given to the researcher by the professor. In order to maintain confidentiality, the researcher did not see the copy with the

student's name and personal information. The journals were kept at the researcher's home office in a locked file cabinet.

After the students returned to their home country, they were asked to schedule interviews with the researcher. Interviews were conducted by the researcher and lasted approximately one hour. Before interviews began, participants were asked to fill out a demographic sheet and place it in an envelope. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed by the researcher. The participants' names were not used during interviews and were not shared with the professor of the course. When not being transcribed, the audiotapes were kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home. Audiotapes were destroyed once transcription was completed. The researcher kept the final transcripts electronically for two years after the publication of the research.

A focus group was scheduled with willing participants. The prompts for the focus group were determined after the first round of coding was concluded, and initial themes identified by the researcher were discussed in the focus group in order to verify accuracy. The duration of the focus group was approximately one hour at the home of the researcher.

### **Data Analysis**

Data was collected from multiple sources including the researcher's field notes, participants' journal entries, individual interviews, and a focus group. After all data was transcribed and coded, grounded theory methods were used to analyze the data (Smith, 2007). Data analysis methods followed the works of Saldana (2013). Initial coding was utilized to find meaning within the data via line-by-line analysis. The various sources of data were closely examined to find categories and connections that could be identified. Data analysis for this study is outlined in Chapter 3, and Chapter 4 presents the themes that emerged from the data.

### **Basic Assumptions**

Before beginning the study, I assumed that the study abroad experiences would impact the study participants to some degree. I also assumed that participants would be willing to participate in the planned activities while in Costa Rica. I believed that the activities planned for the study abroad program would foster personal and professional development among the participants. Finally, I presumed that the experiences during the study abroad course would further the multicultural competencies of participants as indicated by the literature (Diaz-Lazaro & Cohen, 2001; McDowell, Goessling, & Melendez, 2012; Platt, 2012).

### **Researcher Bias**

Studying abroad has been an important component of my development, both personally and professionally. As a student, I have learned about people, culture, and language around the world. While studying abroad in Costa Rica as a doctoral supervisor for counselors-in-training, I was able to teach, translate, and supervise master's-level counseling students during their studies abroad. I helped supervisees understand how their cultures and backgrounds affect their interactions with clients. As a researcher and participant of the study abroad course, I personally associated with the participants, making it difficult to achieve complete objectivity. A journal was kept to document my observations and reactions in order to monitor my personal experiences throughout the process of the study. More information regarding this topic is given in Chapter 3.

### **Limitations**

There are a number of limitations that must be considered when interpreting the results of the current study. Participants in the study were from one university and lived in the same community. Also, students were aware that they were being observed and therefore may have

acted in atypical ways, instead of being their authentic selves. Variables that could impact the results of the study included the individual professor, exposure to language differences, other multicultural experiences, and student demographics. Results cannot be generalized to other populations with different levels of education, different graduate tracks, different ages, and demographic locations. Finally, the researcher was also a doctoral student, and this may have affected the participants' behavior and answers to questions.

### **Definitions**

The following terms and abbreviations were used throughout the current study:

- The **American Counseling Association (ACA)** is a nonprofit professional, educational, and advocacy organization comprised of almost 48,000 members. It seeks to advance ethical and accreditation standards, the professional growth, and national recognition of its counselors.
- The **Arenal Volcano** is an active volcano in the northwestern region of Costa Rica in the district of La Fortuna. It was formed 7,000 years ago and its largest eruption was in 1968. Arenal Volcano is said to still be active although visitors have not seen lava flow or ash since 2010.
- **Core curriculum** is the course of study that is essential, central, and mandatory for students to complete successfully before they are permitted to graduate.
- **Cross-cultural contact** is interaction between people of culturally different groups (Diaz-Lazaro & Cohen, 2001).
- **Culture** is a quintessence of worldview, a multifaceted system of values, beliefs, and consequential practices that outline the way individuals make interpretations of the world (APA, 2003).

- **Cultural immersion training** is an experiential opportunity that allows participants to directly interact with people from a different culture while engaging individuals in order to develop cultural understanding and empathy (Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010).
- A **Culturally skilled counselor** is one who is actively engaged in the process of becoming aware of his or her own assumptions about human behavior, values, biases, preconceived notions, and personal limitations (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992).
- **Hot Springs** are naturally heated pools surrounding areas such as La Fortuna. The geothermal activity under the Arenal volcano has made many hot springs possible in the area surrounding it.
- **La Virgen de los Angeles Festival** is a celebration for the patron saint of Costa Rica known as the *Virgen de los Angeles* (the virgin of the angels), or *La Negrita* (the small black woman). In the story of *La Virgen de los Angeles*, *La Negrita* is a small statue that was found on August 2, 1635 by a native Costa Rican woman who took the statue to her house. It later reappeared in the original spot. A shrine was built in the spot where the statue appeared and on August 2 of each year people from all over the country walk (sometimes on their knees) to visit the Virgin believing their pilgrimages will answer their prayers and cure their ailments.
- **Learning styles** are personal qualities that influence a student's ability to acquire information, to interact with peers and the teacher, and to participate in a learning experience.
- **Multicultural counseling competency** is having a good self-awareness of attitudes and worldviews into which the counselor has been socialized, in addition to recognizing and being sensitive to a client's worldviews and attitudes (Roysircar, 2003)

- **Planned experiences** include the cultural excursions and service-learning projects that the professors have planned for the students. These include visits to a local health clinic, a high school, a special needs school, and mass at a Catholic church.
- **Reflection** is a way to promote student development by giving thoughtful deliberation, and can be done by journaling, group discussion, or in-class activities (Jett & Delgado-Romero, 2009).
- **Service-learning** combines community service with academic learning in a structured manner as a means to foster student learning, skills, and involvement (Arnold & McMurtery, 2011; Burnett, Hamel, & Long, 2004, Kenny & Gallegher, 2000).
- The **special needs school** provides educational and social opportunities for students with a range of disabilities. The school is located in a small town and serves a large range of rural communities in the northern part of Costa Rica.
- **The Center** is a facility located on the edge of a rainforest in Costa Rica that provides dormitories, classrooms, and computer labs to support research, education, and outreach activities for universities. The facility and staff assist in the internationalization of education, research, and outreach programs in support of the university goals.
- **Tico** is a colloquial term describing any person who lives in Costa Rica. The term is used instead of Costa Rican.
- **Study abroad program** is an educational program that takes place outside of the country of origin.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented a summary of the research inquiry. The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the study abroad experiences of graduate counseling students.

Professional literature suggests that study abroad activities can enhance the multicultural development of counseling students. Because of the unique experiences encountered by students studying abroad, a qualitative research method was used. In Chapter 2, there is a review of the literature and research related to study abroad programs, multicultural counseling competencies, and multicultural training activities. Chapter 3 focuses on the research design and methodology used to examine the research questions. Chapter 4 covers the data analysis collected by examining the voices of the participants and providing the results. Finally, Chapter 5 provides a summary of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future research and implications.

## CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

In the literature review, multicultural trainings for graduate counseling students and study abroad programs are addressed, as well as service-learning, multicultural awareness, and cultural immersion. The current study sought to address the perceived impact of study abroad experiences to graduate counseling students; therefore, a thorough review of professional literature on study abroad programs and cultural learning in the field of counseling was reviewed. Study abroad programs for graduate students vary greatly by location, activities, and other factors. These aspects are reviewed, as well as literature pertaining to multicultural training programs for counseling students.

### **Multicultural Counselor Education**

As previously stated, the United States has seen an increase in diversification which demonstrates the need for professional counselors to confront the challenges of helping diverse populations (Lee, 1997) and the need to develop culturally-sensitive counseling services (Dickenson, Argus-Calvo, & Tafoya, 2010). Teaching counselors-in-training to become culturally sensitive has not been an easy task for counselor educators due to the myriad of training techniques and strategies, along with the diversity, and uniqueness of students.

According to Arredondo and Arciniega (2001), all counseling is multicultural in nature because sociopolitical forces influence the culture of beliefs, values, and practices of clients and counselors. Factors to be considered include clients' ethnicity, culture, race, sex, language, spirituality, and other aspects of identity. The personal identity model (Arredondo & Glauner, 1992) outlines a holistic view of the individual. It considers race and ethnicity, but emphasizes the unique aspects of each individual. The fixed parts work in conjunction with the unique aspects of the person in order to construct their identity. Counselors can use an ethnographic approach to obtain sufficient information about the client (Roysircar, 2003) with an open mind

and genuine curiosity. Clients are faced with a variety of problems, and these problems have become more complicated due to changes in the world. Environmental and social changes such as legislation concerning managed health care, the rights of minorities, global migration, and cutbacks in education constantly affect counselor-training programs (Arredondo & Arciniega, 2001). Because of the changing demographics of the country, there is a need for more culturally sensitive counseling services (Dickenson, Argus-Calvo, & Tafoya, 2010).

As a result of increasing cultural diversity in society, the multicultural counseling competencies (MCC) were developed. The accrediting bodies recognized the extensive history of a mono-cultural nature of training and supported an increase in multicultural practices, policies, curriculum, and accountability. It became apparent that, by not effectively training counselors in MCC, the chances of malpractice being committed were higher (Roysircar, 2003). Due to the growing need for culturally sensitive counseling services, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2009) mandated that multicultural courses be included in the core curriculum for counselor education.

Counselor educators have the responsibility to cultivate culturally responsive counselors in their programs. All counselors should strive to become culturally responsive counselors (CRC), that is, to have awareness, knowledge, and skills to work well with clients from culturally diverse backgrounds. Counselors need to understand the social and cultural context of their clients and work continuously on skills necessary to help people from various backgrounds. Multicultural competence is necessary because counselors want to help clients reach their full potential by successfully facing obstacles in their personal life, career, and education (Lee, 1997).

An important undertaking for counselors wanting to advance their multicultural competency is to explore one's own culture, biases, and heritage (Chao, 2012; Lee, 1997). Every student will interpret meanings and understandings differently in multicultural training activities due to their distinct backgrounds and histories (Dickenson, Argus-Calvo, & Tafoya, 2010). A counselor needs to understand not only his personal reactions to oppression, loss, and other experiences that affect human dignity, but his clients' as well (Arredondo & Arciniega, 2001). Without an honest exploration of one's own beliefs toward these issues, a counselor will be unable to fully comprehend the problems facing his clients. Once counselors are able to gain awareness of their own prejudices, they can minimize the negative effects on multicultural relationships with clients and others (Rowell, 2009).

A study by Constantine (2001) examined the self-efficacy of master's students in counseling programs. The researcher used various inventories to examine the students' perceived multicultural competence as well as their self-efficacy. The results imply that participants' beliefs about their ability to work effectively with clients coincided with their beliefs about their ability to work with culturally diverse clients. This study suggests that multicultural training courses can be an effective way to prepare counselors to work with culturally diverse populations.

### **Training**

Counselor educators have the responsibility to foster multicultural competence and concepts in students throughout their training in the field (Arredondo & Arciniega, 2001; Lee, 1997). The need for training in this area has been demonstrated, however, the best practices for training counselors in this area remain unclear.

Multicultural training courses vary throughout the field and are offered not only to students but also to professionals in various fields of studies. Trainings that foster self-reflection and ethnic identity attitudes include workshops, service-learning, guest lectures, and film discussions (Chao, 2012). Study abroad programs can enhance the learning experience by including many of these training methods in one course taken in a foreign country. Different factors contribute to multicultural counseling competencies, making the development of an effective course strategy difficult. By interacting with people of various backgrounds, counselors-in-training can begin to learn about various cultures and become more comfortable counseling diverse populations.

A study done by Chao (2012) investigated whether multicultural training changed the relationship of racial/ethnic identity, the multicultural counseling competencies, and gender-role attitudes. The participants included 460 nationally certified counselors across the United States. The instruments used to measure the variables were the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding, Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992), Sex-Role Egalitarianism Scale (King & King, 1993), and the Multicultural Counseling Knowledge and Awareness Scale (Ponterotto, Gretchen, Utsey, Stracuzzi, & Saya, 2003). Results indicated that racial/ethnic identity significantly interacted with multicultural training to affect counselors' multicultural knowledge, but not multicultural awareness. The same applied to gender-role attitudes. The study showed that training significantly changed the racial identity and multicultural knowledge of participants. The author of the study suggests more extensive training that can further the level of growth in these areas by including more exposure to diverse populations and cultural practices. It was recommended that counselors expose themselves to different forms of

multicultural trainings in order to reflect on racial/ethnic identity and gender-role issues (Chao, 2012).

A quantitative study done over a ten-year period by Manese, Wu, and Nepomuceno (2001) evaluated multicultural counseling competence at the beginning and at the end of an integrated multicultural internship-training program. The internship site had a representation of cultural diversity in both staff and clients, which was considered crucial. The curriculum included eleven training seminars, as well as a requirement that participants work with a diverse client population. Participants were continuously evaluated on their multicultural competence throughout the internship. The scores that were related to knowledge/skill significantly increased from the beginning to the end of the training, while the overall multicultural competency was partially supported. The researchers pointed out the possibility of raising MCC by using intervention programs that use integrative approaches, and discuss the need for more research that concentrates on the efficacy of interventions and training programs.

A study done by Dickenson, Argus-Calvo, and Tafoya (2010) examined the effects of a multicultural training course on MCC and attitudes of students. The Quick Discrimination Index, along with the Multicultural Awareness, Knowledge, and Skills Survey-Counselor Edition Revised (MAKSS-CE-R; Kim, Cartwright, Asay, & D'Andrea, 2003), were used. The participants in a multicultural counseling class reported more positive cognitive racial attitudes than the students in a comparison course. Students reported having concerns with their MCC because of their lack of experience with racially diverse clients. Participants considered self-reflective assignments to be the most beneficial. The researchers recommend that counselor educators consider these findings when designing courses and offering various assignments to enhance MCC and counselor development.

Multicultural counseling education should not be confined to books and lectures. Diversity should be taught through first-hand experiences such as internships, field trips, and other experiential activities (Lee, 1997). More research is needed regarding the impact of multicultural training on counseling students' racial attitudes in order to advance the understanding of changes in attitudes that take place during multicultural training (Dickenson, Argus-Calvo, & Tafoya, 2010).

### **Study Abroad**

There are various ways to conduct study abroad programs for graduate students. The following section will describe components and trends in study abroad programs across fields of study.

Studying abroad has been a long-lasting tradition for many higher education programs. According to the Institute for International Education (2013), during the 2011/2012 academic year 283,332 students from the United States received credit for studying abroad. This was a 3.4% increase from the 2010/2011-year. The major fields of study represented were the social sciences, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), and business. For the current study, studying abroad includes any educational opportunities offered by a host university in a foreign country. These programs are offered for students of all ages and levels of education. Studying abroad can be an integral part of students' educational experiences, and has the capability of changing students' views of the world and of themselves (Lantis & Duplaga, 2010). This type of educational program can take on many different characteristics by varying in length, country, activities, and areas of study.

There is a growing curiosity amongst students interested in study abroad programs (Lantis & Duplaga, 2010). There is a movement to internationalize curricula across higher

education (McCallon & Homes, 2010). Study abroad is now commonplace in various areas of undergraduate and graduate studies. It is seen as an opportunity for students and educators to advance professionally and personally while learning new cultures. Many prospective undergraduate and graduate students inquire about study abroad and international opportunities offered in their educational programs because they are aware that international experiences will help them advance in many fields (McCallon & Homes, 2010). “Students who live and learn in countries and cultures other than their own gain important global competencies and cross-cultural sensitivities that enable them to acclimate in a global climate of constant change” (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2007). Because of this awareness regarding the global economy, employers may consider the recognition of real-world experiences outside of one’s own country beneficial.

Study abroad programs help people realize the meaning and responsibility of being a citizen of the world. Those who have studied abroad gain cultural sensitivity and become knowledgeable about the world and empowered to solve global problems (Lantis & Duplaga, 2010). After participating in a course abroad, students are often better equipped with the knowledge, the understanding, and larger network that make it possible to take on larger problems affecting people around the world. This empowerment is common in successful professionals in many fields of study (Lantis & Duplaga, 2010).

### **Faculty-Led Study Abroad**

McCallon and Homes (2010) explained the different types of faculty-led study abroad programs. Stationary programs have a home base of operation and make excursions to other places. By facilitating experiences and interactions with locals, instructors foster cross-cultural

learning. With stationary programs “students come home with a more authentic understanding of the country, beyond the superficial knowledge that comes from touring” (p.45).

Another type of study abroad program is a multi-stop program that begins in one location and finishes in another. With this type of program, students get a better overview of the country because they visit more places than they would with a stationary program. The downfall to this type of program is the need for extra planning and transportation costs. Faculty may also consider an island or an integrated program for a course abroad. Island programs host groups from the same institution, and the group stays together as a cohort throughout its entirety. These programs have been known to build confidence in students while encouraging future travel. Traveling as a group allows students to collect their own experience, but to share in the experiences of others. This collaborative learning process is useful because students are able to understand various points of view from within their culture as well as the cultures being studied. On the other side, an integrated program allows for more opportunities to interact with the host culture and can include home stays and extensive communication with locals (McCallon & Homes, 2010).

### **Short-term Study Abroad**

According to the Institute of International Education (2013), there has been an increase in short-term study abroad programs. In 2012/2013, approximately 180,000 students engaged in short-term programs. In comparison, less than 120,000 participated in mid-length programs during the same time period. Short-term programs have been defined solely by duration, such as “less than a standard academic semester or quarter” (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2009). Short-term programs that allow for reflection can further growth and learning experiences (Lantis & Duplaga, 2010). Chieffo and Griffiths (2009) explained more students are choosing to enroll in

short-term study abroad programs because they may be more convenient and better suited for students. With more than half of modern-day students working to support themselves while enrolled in school, losing income for an entire semester may be difficult or entirely unfeasible. These programs allow students with families to participate while minimizing the impact to the home and family. Also, students unable to take a complete semester abroad due to the rigorous curriculum find that they can still enjoy the experiences abroad as short-term programs “give students the opportunity to enrich their education while keeping on track with their courses” (p. 366).

McLaughlin and Johnson (2006) published a study of a short-term program abroad. In their three-week field study of natural science students, researchers assessed the students’ cognitive learning levels based on field journals and self-assessments. Students reported that they gained knowledge, skills, and conceptual learning during their course abroad.

One of the largest studies to date was conducted by Chieffo and Griffiths (2004). They conducted a mixed methods study with 2,336 university students from 2003 to 2004. The research involved both qualitative and quantitative data from 1,509 students who studied abroad for one month and 827 students who took a similar course on campus. When the course concluded, the students were asked questions concerning changes in worldly attitudes and knowledge as well as the frequency of engagement in globally related activities. They stated they were more mindful of the different perspectives of people from various backgrounds, and they reported having more patience with foreign speakers. In the qualitative data, students who studied abroad wrote twice as much about the various topics than the students who stayed in their home country. While most of the on-campus group wrote about classroom knowledge, 27% of the writings of the study abroad group involved growth and development (Chieffo & Griffiths,

2004). This study demonstrates the profound impact short-term study abroad programs can have on students.

Because there are various fields of study that participate in study abroad courses, it is difficult to fully understand the impact they have on students. More research is needed to examine international educational experiences and the impact of visiting different areas of the world on the group dynamics of learning (McDowell, Goessling, & Melendez, 2012). Future research can also focus on assessing outcomes of cultural immersion (Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010).

### **Study Abroad for Counselors-in-Training**

Because of global changes and trends, graduate students need to familiarize themselves with other cultures and international communities. More internationalized educational programs are needed in the areas of counseling psychology and family therapy (Fang, McDowell, & Holland, 2006). Mental health professionals are beginning to see clients from many different backgrounds and cultures with a variety of presenting problems. International education and cooperation in the field are due to an increase in migration and diversification in the country (McDowell & Cohen, 2012). As counselors, it is important to understand cultural differences in order to help a diverse client population.

Graduate counseling programs support international coursework because they are a method of building multicultural sensitivity, cultural competence, international relationships, and global awareness (Fang, McDowell, & Holland, 2006; Leong & Ponterotto, 2003; Leung, 2003; McDowell & Cohen, 2012). By gaining these skills, counselors are better equipped to help clients and to foster relationships with other mental health professionals globally. By observing diverse counseling practices, students participating in international immersion become aware of

how their training has been culturally bound (McDowell & Cohen, 2012). Specifically, most of the teachings students are exposed to during their graduate education originate from Western countries. Also, current teachings in the area of multiculturalism in the counseling field reflect U.S. centrism (Platt, 2012). Providing opportunities for studying abroad helps students open up their minds to new attitudes and possibilities. Even a counselor who practices solely in the United States needs to be prepared to work with populations from around the world (Platt, 2012). Study abroad is one way to gain the awareness necessary to become a culturally sensitive counselor.

In order to understand the state of the study abroad programs for counseling students, the information presented by Rybalkina and Dyben (2013) on “Experiential Learning Abroad as Part of Graduate and Continuing Counselor Education: A National Review” at the 2013 American Counseling Association conference in Cincinnati, Ohio must be considered. They surveyed 55 counselor education programs in the United States and over 60% stated that they have some type of international experience as part of the counselor education curriculum. Various courses were linked to the international experience, including multicultural classes and on topics as specific as human trafficking. The destinations also varied. The most common location was Costa Rica with five programs visiting this country. Program length ranged from seven days to thirty days with an average of 15 days. The learning activities ranged from program to program and will be discussed further in the next section. When asked if they agree with the statement “I believe that the international experience we offer accomplishes intercultural competence learning that cannot be achieved through any other pedagogy,” 81% of the program leaders stated that they agreed.

It is therefore important to consider different aspects of the study abroad process. The following sections will describe experiential learning, culture learning, and service-learning. A

discussion of these components is necessary to gain a proper understanding of study abroad programs for counselor education.

### **Experiential Learning**

Studying abroad is not only a tradition in higher education; it is also a trend towards experiential learning. Experiential learning includes learning by doing and reflecting on experiences, (Pagano & Roselle, 2009) and this often occurs during study abroad trips. Experiential learning includes firsthand experiences that result in more in-depth understandings and enhance the learning obtained in a classroom (Lantis & Duplaga, 2010). By debriefing and processing experiences with students, faculty members are able to lead them from considering situations as strange to realizing deep-learning experiences (McCallon & Homes, 2010).

There are a multitude of approaches to teaching multicultural competencies in counselor education. Experiential activities have been recommended by many researchers to build multicultural sensitivity and competence in counselors (Achenbach & Arthur, 2002; Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Kim & Lyons, 2003; McDowell, Goessling, & Melendez, 2012). Coursework should only be a small part of multicultural teachings for mental health professionals (Platt, 2012). Study abroad programs allow professors to use experiential learning in a new and unfamiliar context to expand learning. Experiential learning is important in counselor training because it bridges theory and practice, which is needed in multicultural education (Achenbach & Arthur, 2002). Although this learning has been suggested for multicultural counseling training, it is not understood how it influences the cultural framework of students (Achenbach & Arthur, 2002). Because of the various activities and experiences throughout a study abroad program, it has been difficult for researchers to pinpoint how study abroad impacts students and their development.

A study published by Achenbach and Arthur (2002) explains how to bridge theory to practice in multicultural counseling through experiential learning. The goal of the researchers was to investigate the impact of experiential learning exercises on graduate students' perceptions of cultural diversity. The participants of this qualitative study included 26 first-year graduate students enrolled in a course that addressed multicultural competencies in a counselor education program. The results of the study indicate that the cultural schema has three separate components including the cultural self, cultural other, and the cultural condition. The participants expressed many different feelings during the experiential exercise. The study implied that counselor educators "can increase students' awareness, and encourage reflection about personal reactions, by identifying the processes that take place during experiential learning" (Achenbach and Arthur, 2002).

Experiential learning can be used to remove biases and preconceived notions students have that often get in the way of effectively helping diverse populations. While studying abroad, students are able to participate in experiential activities in a new place and experience the world more fully. "International courses embody experiential multicultural education by offering a natural setting or context in which this type of learning can occur" (Goessling, & Melendez, 2012). Also, students who have prior cross-cultural experiences are able to further develop multicultural competencies through experiential learning (Achenbach & Arthur, 2002). As an example, a student who has previously visited a country, will have a completely different experience with a study abroad group.

In the national review of study abroad programs referred to previously (Rybalkina & Dyben, 2013), the variety of experiential activities used by professors during study abroad programs for counselor education was discussed. The most common activities were site visits,

cultural immersion activities, and sightseeing. Some of the participating programs reported experiential activities such as leading groups, administering play therapy, and student teaching. Processing tasks and activities proved to be important to most programs with 93% reporting time given as a group during or after the trip to reflect upon their thoughts and feelings about the experience.

### **Processing**

During a study abroad program, students are exposed to different cultures while participating in various activities. While the experiences are important, processing those experiences can be crucial for the learning process. Many students make a decision to study abroad because they simply want to learn more about other countries and the world in general and although they do accomplish this while studying abroad, they often learn more about themselves (Lantis & Duplaga, 2010). Courses often integrate processing and reflection throughout the curriculum to foster this personal growth so it is common for students to experience and challenge discomfort. This is a time when students are able to remove their 'blindness' and see the world more openly, which can trigger uneasiness at times (McCallon & Homes, 2010). Providing a safe environment to discuss their experiences and issues can help students gain a deeper understanding of changes within themselves.

To learn how to respond to people in a culturally sensitive manner, counseling students need to fully process new information and experiences (Achenbach & Arthur, 2002). This should be done in a group setting so that students share experiences, interpretations, and emotions. Professors can help students with the experiences of cultural learning by assisting them in processing their emotions (Achenbach & Arthur, 2002).

While studying abroad, students may experience discomfort due to their emotional reactions to observations or activities. After participating in experiential activities, debriefing assists students in finding meaning through the emotional reactions experienced by the group (Achenbach & Arthur, 2002). By sharing these individual reactions with others, students' emotions can be normalized and better understood. When counselors interact with people of diverse backgrounds, they are able to become aware of their own biases and assumptions, as well as gaining new perspectives and worldviews (McDowell & Cohen, 2012). When a group of students share their experiences, they learn not only about a new culture but also about the various views of others.

Processing is needed to help students learn from each other and to validate their own experiences (Arman & Scherer, 2002). While participating in a study abroad program, students participate in many different kinds of activities, ranging from lectures to service-learning. While interacting with a new population in an unfamiliar context, it is likely that students will become uncomfortable and it is common for counselors-in-training to be unaware of or to deny their prejudices (Rowell, 2009). A safe environment is needed for students to express their thoughts and concerns with a group because other students might have had similar reactions. As with other activities abroad, a crucial part of service-learning is reflection because experiences can lead to insight (Arnold & McMurtery, 2011).

### **Culture Learning**

Culture learning is an integral part of the study abroad process because it is a “psychologically and emotionally intense process of discovery, response, and change that occurs as learners recognize and revise their worldview” (Brubaker, 2006). Studying abroad incorporates experiential and cultural learning by allowing students to experience a new culture

and to broaden their view of people in other cultures. Learning about diverse families and counseling practices around the world show how culture can have an influence on relationships and behavior (McDowell, Goessling, & Melendez, 2012). By observing a new culture, counseling students can expand their worldviews and experiences in a new context. Programs that incorporate cultural immersion for mental health training programs give students an increased awareness of cultural differences and worldviews (Platt, 2012).

Interacting with people of a different culture can have many benefits for counseling students. Cross-cultural contact occurs when people of culturally different groups interact. Negative attitudes and biases that people might have previously held can be dispelled during these cross-cultural interactions, which may change attitudes towards members of culturally diverse populations and spawn development of MCC (Diaz-Lazaro & Cohen, 2001). While studying abroad, students not only learn about a new culture but they are able to learn more about themselves. Immersion programs assist students in learning while in an unfamiliar context, which can lead to increased awareness of themselves and their own cultural context (Platt, 2012).

A study done by Diaz-Lazaro and Cohen (2001), demonstrated the effectiveness of cross-cultural contact when incorporated into a multicultural course. Students in this study scored higher on MCC at the end of the course than they did at its onset. The researchers also analyzed the participants' journals and found that many participants indicated the most important part of class was cross-cultural contact. Some participants expressed that their lack of intercultural competence had to do with a lack of cross-cultural interaction and experience with diverse populations. When participants had cultural exposure and a multicultural course, more MCC were obtained. Participants in the study expressed a need to interact with diverse populations more often in order to become multiculturally effective counselors.

McDowell, Goessling, and Melendez (2012), examined the experiences of participants seeking a master's degree in counseling psychology. Participants completed a 12- to 17-day international course in either the Middle East or Asia. The researchers wanted to investigate the course's impact on the students' multicultural sensitivity and development. Participants experienced changes in their worldviews and reported becoming more socially aware. The experiences they encountered during their international immersion challenged the students to increase their global awareness. The students were able to recognize transformations, such as the recognition of their own privileged, inflated sense of social responsibility, and a commitment to improving society. An increase in empathy for diverse populations allowed students to gain a greater sense of multicultural sensitivity. Students referred to specific experiences and emotions that impacted them throughout their international learning experience, affecting their attitudes and values.

### **Service-Learning**

There are study abroad programs that incorporate service-learning and various fields in higher education have taken interest in service-learning in recent years (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Arnold & McMurtery, 2011). Service-learning is community service combined with academic learning in a structured manner that augments student learning, skills, and involvement (Arnold & McMurtery, 2011; Kenny & Gallegher, 2000). This experience gives students a chance to immerse themselves in a culture while getting a close look at how certain agencies, schools, or communities work on a daily basis. Service-learning is different from community service because, service-learning incorporates learning goals and objectives with providing services (Arnold & McMurtery, 2011). Counselor educators might use a service-

learning project for a study abroad course to give students the opportunity to be immersed in a culture and to comprehend the course objectives in a new manner.

In counselor education, service-learning promotes self-awareness, allows for exposure, and improves students' effectiveness and comfort in working with diverse clients (Arnold & McMurtery, 2011). By helping people in a new environment, students are able to move outside of the boundaries of personal comfort and experience new ways of working with people. It can also be useful for students before they take a practicum course because they will be better situated to make an informed decision on the area of counseling to which they will dedicate their future practice (Arman & Scherer, 2002). Learning can come from many different environments, such as schools or community centers. Students can increase their multicultural competence by working with different groups and becoming more involved with community needs (Arnold & McMurtery, 2011).

These experiences integrate theory with practice before students begin their internship, helping them transform their experiences into learning (Arman & Scherer, 2002). While most counseling courses offered abroad are related to multicultural counseling, professors look for activities that complement the multicultural counseling competencies. Students can take what they learn in class and apply it to real work experiences while developing their competencies (Arnold & McMurtery, 2011). While students can learn about a new culture through class time and assignments, their knowledge and understanding can fully and completely come together with real world experiences.

### **Considerations for Study Abroad in Counselor Education**

Studying abroad is an option that is not available in all counselor education programs, but many activities suggested in study abroad programs could be imitated in different communities

closer to home. Multicultural training activities can include learning more about one's own ethnicity, learning cultural practices, and attending cultural events locally (Chao, 2012; Ridley, 2005).

It is also important to consider that when students have returned from a study abroad program, learning may continue indefinitely while reflecting on the experience. It may be wise to consider a reentry component as a means of increasing learning (Platt, 2012). This is important because the learning that occurs after a study abroad program is not fully understood by researchers. More research is needed to examine the outcome of international education experiences for counseling students and the impact of visiting different areas of the world (McDowell & Cohen, 2012).

### **Summary**

The present study focused on thoroughly understanding the perceptions of graduate counseling students who studied abroad. An examination of this literature concerned the current study. This chapter outlined the current research on multicultural counselor education and study abroad to provide a context for the current study.

## CHAPTER 3: Research Design and Methodology

The purpose of this study was to gain a profound understanding of the way graduate counseling students perceived the experiences of a study abroad program and the perceived impact on them as counseling students. This study was designed to examine the experiences of graduate counseling students who participated in a study abroad course. In this chapter, the design and methodology is outlined.

### **Research Questions**

This qualitative study concentrated on two expansive research questions: What are the experiences of graduate counseling students who participated in a study abroad course? How do counselors-in-training perceive the impact of experiences during a study abroad course? Sub-questions addressed included: How do graduate counseling students (a) perceive the impact of a study abroad course on their understanding of multiculturalism? (b) perceive the impact of a study abroad course on their development as counselors?

### **Rationale for Qualitative Methodology**

Qualitative methodology was appropriate for the study because of the nature of the research questions. The objective of having these research questions was to add to the existing literature of graduate counseling experiences during study abroad activities. A social constructivist lens was utilized throughout the study in order to get an accurate understanding of the participants' world. "In social constructivism, individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work" (Creswell, 2013, p. 24). This lens was best for the current study because the goal was to rely on the accounts of the participants, which have been formed through their social and historical interactions with people and society. The meanings of the participants' experiences "are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals' lives" (Creswell,

2013, p. 25). Because the many factors contributing to the experiences are difficult to measure, a complex understanding can be gained by a qualitative study (Creswell, 2013). Because the social constructivist lens was used, the interview questions were broad to allow the research participants to make their own meaning of the experiences. A detailed description of the context in which the participants were learning is given in this chapter.

### **Phenomenology**

A phenomenological inquiry was used because I wanted to describe the lived experiences of the participants and their interpretation of the significance of those experiences. I set out to describe what participants experienced and how they experienced it during the study abroad activities (Moustakas, 1994). In addition to understanding the lived experiences of participants phenomenological inquiry seeks to understand how people make sense of their experiences and arrive at shared meaning (Patton, 2002). “Phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). To understand the study abroad experience, it was important that I set aside, or bracket, my own experiences and instead, approach the study as if I was a stranger learning about a new phenomenon (Holliday, 2000). “The ‘essence’ is the culminating aspect of a phenomenological study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 79).

### **Role of the Researcher**

I held various roles throughout the study. While in Costa Rica, I assumed the role of an observer and a guide. Because I was the only student who had participated in the study abroad course the year before, the students frequently came to me with questions regarding assignments, appropriate wardrobe, and activities. As one of three bilingual students, I translated occasionally. During the study abroad course, I was a doctoral student and held different roles in relation to the

students prior to the trip. Positions held included teaching assistant, supervisor at the university training clinic, and intern at an off-campus site. As an observer throughout the trip, I was present and open to the experiences of the participants. I dispensed advice to participants as needed, while withholding any extensive discussion of prior experiences. Taking part in the process with the group members was significant. I maintained a research journal documenting observations of participants, as well as my own reflections of the experiences. Because the researcher is part of the world being studied (Charmaz, 2006), it is important to understand my background both personally and professionally.

### **Background & Personal Experience**

When I returned home after my first year of college in 2007, my father handed me a plane ticket to Costa Rica. Clueless about his plan, I asked several questions regarding who I would be staying with, what I would be doing there, and why I was being forced to go alone. My father gave little information, other than explaining that a man would be waiting at the airport for me holding a sign with my name written in big letters.

The next six weeks completely changed my outlook on the world. I stayed in a roughly built dwelling with an unmarried couple and their two-year-old daughter. Chickens roamed freely in and out of their home, and monkeys in the trees constantly threw fruit at the windows. It became readily apparent that my father's intent was that I become fluent in Spanish because no one in the home spoke English. I also attended Spanish classes in the village with people of various ages from various countries.

I did not choose to go on the trip and was not happy about living with strangers and attending school during the summer. What I did not know was that those six weeks would change me forever. Upon my return, I realized subtle changes in my lifestyle, for example,

choosing to not to blow-dry my hair or apply make-up. The impact the trip had on me still affects me today, over a decade later.

Since that initial trip to Costa Rica, I have studied abroad in seven countries. Two were for school credit and the others were for personal growth. It became a habit for me to save enough money year round in order to travel more. I gained much knowledge of cultures and attitudes, and expansive views of the world. As result I am capable of meeting people in professional and personal situations with an open mind and genuine curiosity. Instead of feeling intimidated or afraid of our differences when encountering someone from a different culture, I am intrigued about our differing worldviews.

In 2011, upon completing my master's degree, I traveled to Brazil as a delegate with *People to People*. The *People to People Citizen Ambassador Program* enables professionals to travel together to different places around the world to network and learn with their counterparts. The program allows citizen ambassadors to share their knowledge about their professions as well as learn more about how others work in their countries. I attended as a member of the Multicultural Counseling Delegation in order to enhance my cross-cultural learning. During the trip, the delegation visited universities, non-profit organizations, and impoverished areas, and met with many human rights activists. During this trip the delegation learned more about the experiences of counseling students in a new country and about global advocacy.

As a doctoral student, I took a study abroad course in Costa Rica the year before the current study was conducted. I was taking a class in leadership and, therefore, took on many roles throughout the trip. I taught one master's-level class session about Costa Rican history and culture and led various discussions. As a supervisor, I met with two students throughout the

week to address their concerns and to reflect on their experiences. I also helped organize and plan the activities at the schools and other sites we visited.

During my counseling career, I have attended workshops pertaining to multicultural competencies and trainings, as well as study abroad programs. I engaged in coursework in both qualitative and quantitative methods of research and multicultural counseling. Additionally, I have worked with clients from various backgrounds and cultures, including Central American minors who are refugees. I have also served as a supervisor to counselors-in-training at a university training clinic. Studies and practical experience have therefore provided me with the knowledge necessary to conduct this study.

In summary, because a researcher, like all human beings, holds biases and has a history that may influence data collection and interpretation, one must remain open and accepting to new information. Thus, it was critical that I maintain a researcher journal to monitor my own perceptions and thoughts throughout the study and to remain open to experiences and findings that might be contrary to my original expectations.

### **Study Participants**

The purpose of this study was to further understand the experiences of graduate counseling students who study abroad. Participants included master's-level graduate students in a counseling program located in the southwest region of the United States. The participants included eight master's students enrolled in a summer course that took place in Costa Rica during the second summer session. These students agreed to participate in the study, and they were informed that their participation was strictly voluntary. They were also informed that they could withdraw their consent at any time without any impact on their coursework or grades.

Demographic information was collected at the time of the interview. All participants in the study were female and two reported being married. Three identified themselves as Caucasian, three as Latino, and one as African-American. The participants ranged in age from 26 to 42 years old. All participants reported that they had traveled outside of the United States on at least one occasion, and one reported that she had visited a total of nine countries. One student had only completed six semester hours, and the others were completing their final semester. Two of the participants had not taken any master's-level multicultural courses before registering for the study abroad course.

### **Setting**

The primary setting for the study abroad course was an education and research center in the northern region of Costa Rica. The center is a facility located on the edge of a rainforest. It provides dormitories, classrooms, and computer labs to support research, education, and outreach to various universities. The facility and staff assist in the internationalization of education, research, and outreach programs that support the goals of the university. The center is utilized by several universities for research and study abroad education. This location was used as the main hub for students, although they participated in daily cultural excursions and service-learning projects in nearby communities.

Studying abroad was a component of the course entitled Diversity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A Multicultural Immersion Experience. Students could use this course as an elective or as a fulfillment of the multicultural course requirement. The course was offered by the Counseling and Educational Psychology Department and could also be taken for credit by students obtaining their master's degree in Psychology. Two faculty members, three doctoral students taking a

course in leadership and pedagogy, and a doctoral graduate teaching assistant supervised the students throughout the trip.

The center was filled with people from different parts of the country who were studying various fields. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner were provided daily in a cafeteria with a buffet service. During mealtime, students had the opportunity to socialize with students in various programs as well as with professors and researchers. Coffee and tea were available 24 hours a day and students enjoyed the beverages during the breaks from class time. The classes were conducted in two rooms, each of which was large enough to hold approximately twenty students. The rooms were modest: white walls and wooden tables. They were equipped with a projector and dry erase boards. The center had a staff that was available every day to answer questions and help with any problems that would arise.

### **Sites and Activities**

The group was picked up from the airport by representatives from the center in a bus driven by the owner of a local tourist agency. The bus fit all master's-level students, doctoral students, and professors comfortably. On the way to our destination, we stopped at a store called the Maxi Pali. This was a fairly large grocery store where the students were able to buy snacks, drinks, and anything else they might have forgotten to pack. The bus then took us to the center in San Isidrio de Penas Blancas.

The first morning, breakfast was served at 7:00 a.m. in a common area. The group was offered a variety of fruit, eggs with ham, *Gallo Pinto* (black beans and white rice mixed), muffins, sweet bread, cereal, peanut butter and jelly, coffee, tea, iced tea, and water. Variations of these options were common throughout the week. After breakfast, the director of the center

gave the group an orientation to the center and to Costa Rica. An entry from my researcher journal describes the context:

8:00 a.m. Introduction

He was presenting a PowerPoint while walking in front of the class wearing the same light blue TAMUCC polo as we were wearing and saying, “How do I look?” The curtains were covering windows with tops open to see the jungle. Noises from other students out in the common area are clear because the screens on top are connecting us to them. The walls are beige, white tile floor, wooden doors, and tables for two. The desk for the teacher is in front with a dry erase board and projector screen behind the desk. There are three fans and no air conditioning but it is cool and we have natural light.

The classes were held in the same classroom most of the time during our stay. The introduction began with a lesson on biodiversity around the center. The mission, history, and local community were all explained to the group, as were the emergency guidelines. The director explained the danger of snakebites and used humor to explain precautions. For example, he said, “Don’t touch snakes. Don’t mess with Texas or snakes.” Once the introduction was complete, the professors split up the master’s and doctoral students and gave an introduction to the coursework, including assignments and expectations. Then one of the doctoral students taught a lesson about Costa Rican history.

After lunch, the group was taken on a nature hike through the rain forest that surrounds the center. The hike consisted of a trail that spans five miles up and down a narrow path and leads to a waterfall. During the hike we were able to see many different plants, birds, insects, and snakes. Because of the introduction that morning, students were able to understand the

biodiversity of the environment. Once the group arrived at the waterfall, they were able to get into the water and take pictures in front of a waterfall.

On the third day, we visited a school for children with special needs. The students were divided into small groups, with one Spanish speaker assigned to each group. Attendance at the school was low due to the heavy rainfall the day before, which makes it difficult for the families to travel. Parents and volunteers were seen throughout the school helping teachers and students. The groups rotated into different classrooms to experience different aspects of the school. In one classroom, a teacher explained how the school functions and showed us a recent art project she completed with the students. Another class was working on motor skills by helping the students through an obstacle course. In other classrooms, the group was able to help teachers who were using computer programs to teach various skills. At one point, one class took a recess break and turned on music in order for the children to dance. The master's students who were with that class joined in began dancing with the children. Before we left, the director took time to speak to the group and answer any questions they had about the school. When the group returned to the center, they had lunch and then class time. The class began with a discussion about their experiences thus far. After the students processed the day, a doctoral student then taught a lesson about the economy and government. The context for the class was described in the researcher journal:

The classroom is humid with fans on full blast. Rain on and off and the birds singing. All green outside the windows. Students are tired, dressed casual and attentive. Moving around and playing music during breaks. Tables are facing each other and most students have water bottles dripping with condensation. Others have coffee from the cafeteria with

the aroma making others want more. People are getting hungry and eating snacks they brought from home like jerky, raisins, power bars.

The next day began with a visit to a local elementary school, which was within walking distance from the center. There were only 6 students in the hot pink classroom. The group played with the children and did different activities with them.

The door was open to outside. No air conditioning. Old metal desk and file cabinets. Dry erase boards with “Hoy es jueves 01 de agosto” (Today is Thursday, August 1).

Workbooks and notebooks messy and unorganized on a glass case with the cleaner on top. Maps on wall of Costa Rica. Old wooden chairs with metal legs like you would see in our oldest schools. Purple and white plaid curtains. Lights with no cover. The teacher is young, early 30s with a grin the whole time. With a maroon shirt and khakis, he looks professional and casual. There is also a drawing of a kid in a graduation gown. The clock on the wall is stuck at 12. There were educational decorations all over the pink walls.

Lots of energy coming from group. (researcher journal)

While the group was playing a game with the children about acting out emotions, we could hear music outside and women cooking over a small fire with a large metal pot. There was a beautiful view of the rainforest outside the windows of the school.

Right after the group left the elementary school, we went to the high school next door. With only four students in attendance, our group outnumbered them greatly. The master’s-level students engaged the local high school students in icebreaker activities that consisted of learning about their ‘highs’ and ‘lows’ as well as their commonalities and differences. All the students had mud on their shoes from their hike to school that morning. The supplies were old and flags

were faded, yet the students seemed proud of their school. A wasp was flying around the classroom but nobody seemed to care except us, the visitors.

After lunch that day, we went to a health clinic in San Ramon. A doctor and nurse who were both pregnant were happy to share their knowledge and gave an introduction to the clinic and healthcare system. While we were there, a boy who was bleeding from his arm came in with his mother. We could see through the cinder blocks and the sun was beaming in from where people were waiting outside to be seen by the doctor. The question and answer session ended when two boys brought in a girl because she was intoxicated. The police arrived and went to the back room. Apparently, the girl was under the legal drinking age and the police were going to take her to the hospital where she would also meet with a social worker. The nurse then took the group on a tour of the clinic. Once we returned to the center, class started with the group processing the day and then a presentation was provided by a doctoral student about the community.

On the fifth day, the group was taken by bus to the *Virgen de los Angeles* festival. It was rainy and humid. The streets were made up of little rocks and stone yet the mud was all over peoples' shoes. The festival was the end of a pilgrimage for hundreds of people who walked from different villages to pay their respect to the *Virgen de los Angeles*. The journey ends in a church where people walk on their knees to the front of the church and pray. The church was selling *milagro* charms, which represent different ailments. There were many charms of body parts such as legs, lungs, breasts, and hearts, pinned on a wall by people praying to the *Virgen de los Angeles* for help with their illnesses or for family and friends from the *Virgen de los Angeles*. Whole ponytails from women giving up their hair in sacrifice to have a healthy baby were hung on the wall. The entire group stayed for the church service and then had time to walk around the

town. After we returned from the festival, the class time was about culture, social change, and families in Costa Rica.

On the next day the group took a tour of an organic farm. They were able to see how the farm functions and talked to different people who worked there. The group had a chance to take part in many of their daily activities such as picking fruit, tasting the produce, and even learning about how the farmers use geometry to separate the crops. Towards the end of the tour, the group members took turns pressing juice out of sugar cane that is used to make moonshine. Everybody was able to taste the fresh juice and moonshine they made there at the farm and then enjoy a lunch made from other plants and produce from the farm.

After the farm, the group picked up a tour guide who led us through a hike to see the Arenal volcano. The tour guide explained the history of the volcano and other volcanic activity in the area. She pointed out the unique vegetation that is a result of the richness of the soil and led the group to an observation point. The tour guide also explained the tourism culture of the community surrounding the volcano. During the hike, a storm came in which made it difficult for many students to hear the tour guide. The group members had raincoats and umbrellas yet still could not stay dry. After the hike, the group was taken to a resort with hot springs. There were several pools with warm water due to the volcano nearby. The group members relaxed in the pools with tourists from all over the world. They had a buffet dinner made up of local and international cuisines.

On the last day, the students had class and free time in the town of La Fortuna. The class time was devoted primarily to processing experiences from the trip. Students also participated in discussion about the American Counseling Association's Code of Ethics (ACA, 2005) regarding multicultural counseling competencies. When the group went to La Fortuna, they explored the

town in groups. They went shopping and explored the town on their own. Some took time for massages and then had dinner in town.

## **Data Collection**

### **Participant Journals**

Journal entries were an integral part of the study abroad course, were submitted for a grade. All journal entries were based on a series of questions designed by their professor to stimulate reflection about student experiences. Students were given time to write their journals after class sessions in Costa Rica. Copies of the journals from students who agreed to participate in the study were given to the researcher by the professor. The copies were identified by a pseudonym. In order to maintain confidentiality, the researcher did not see the copy with participant names and personal information. The journals were kept at the researcher's home office in a locked file cabinet.

### **Observations and Field Notes**

While in Costa Rica, the researcher documented observations of the participants in a journal. The researcher attended all activities described above with the participants in order to become fully immersed in the study. By observing the participants in the natural setting, the researcher was able to document observations while participants were involved in the situation under investigation, and had continual interactions with participants (Creswell, 2013). Especially important were observations made during class discussions at the end of each day, when the students processed all activities and experiences. Processing and debriefing experiences with students as they occur can transform each moment into a learning experience (McCallon & Homes, 2010). Observations and quotes from participants were utilized for the study.

## **Individual Interviews**

After the participants returned to their home country, they scheduled interviews with the researcher. Interviews were conducted by the researcher and followed a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix F) to ensure that all topics for discussion were addressed. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. Before the interview, the participants were asked to fill out a demographic sheet and to place it in an envelope with no identifying information. As the principal researcher, I audiotaped and transcribed the interviews myself. The participants' names were not used during the interviews, and they were not shared with the course professor.

## **Focus Group**

After transcription of the interviews, a focus group was scheduled with willing participants. Initial themes identified by the researcher were discussed in the focus group in order to verify accuracy. Therefore, the prompts for the focus group were determined after the first round of coding concluded (Appendix G). I was the facilitator of the focus group and had already built rapport with participants throughout the research process. I was prepared to be flexible and to follow the conversations of the participants because “the interaction between the participants is as important as the actual content of the conversation” (Kress & Shoffner, 2007). Participants were encouraged by the researcher to clarify or elaborate in areas they felt warranted more detail. Unlike the individual interviews, during the focus group participants were able to “hear each other’s responses and to make additional comments beyond their own original responses as they hear what other people have to say” (Patton, 2002, p. 286). The focus group lasted approximately one hour. Because of the difficulty distinguishing voices on the audio file, “member” is used for all quotations from participants in the focus group.

## **Data Transcription Methods**

The interviews and focus group discussion were recorded on a digital recorder and transcribed by the researcher. The transcription allowed the researcher to listen carefully to the interviews, paying close attention to every word several times for accuracy. By transcribing the data on one's own, the researcher has the opportunity to develop more insight by immersing herself in the data (Patton, 2002). After transcribing an interview, initial thoughts and reflections were noted in the researcher journal. Each digital recording was listened to several times and with the final transcription to ensure accuracy. Throughout this process, I was able to become more familiar with the data corpus, which helped in developing a feel for the experiences of the participants.

## **Data Analysis**

There were different stages of the data analysis because it is unlikely to initially attain an accurate understanding of the participants' experiences (Saldana, 2013). Grounded theory methodology was used, including open coding, comparative methods, and extensive memo writing. Before conducting the focus group, initial coding was utilized for the interviews, researcher journal, and participant journals in order to compose questions for the focus group. The initial coding consisted of highlighting units of meaning, writing what appeared to be significant in the margins, and finding commonalities throughout the data. Throughout the data analysis, analytic memos were kept to write thoughts about the data including insights, questions, and frustrations (Saldana, 2013). These memos show the path of the data analysis and the thinking that went into creating the themes. During the different stages of coding, a copy of the research questions and purpose of the study were kept nearby to maintain focus (Auerback & Silverstein, 2003). While reading through the transcripts and journals, any commonalities or

important topics were recorded to keep a clear trail of my thinking process. After the focus group was conducted and transcribed, the entire data corpus was revisited.

### **Initial Coding**

After the transcriptions were completed and checked for accuracy, the first cycle of coding was conducted. The data was printed, leaving enough room in the margins for codes and any thoughts regarding the data. The second step was to highlight words and phrases that appeared to be significant, thus identifying units of meaning in a pre-coding process. Because the study is aimed at examining personal meanings and experiences, the initial coding process included in vivo coding. In vivo codes were identified by highlighting the participants' own terms or expressions throughout the coding process. This was extremely helpful when capturing emotional states and reactions (Saldana, 2013). Initial themes were identified by organizing and reorganizing the initial, in vivo, codes into meaningful groups.

### **Focused Coding**

A second cycle of coding was done to organize the categories and to develop a better understanding of the data corpus after the initial coding and focus group were completed. Focused coding was used in order examining the data and deciding what was significant to the study. I reviewed initial codes and identified those that seemed most significant. I then put them into relevant categories. After organizing the units of data from the initial coding, I was able to restructure the data and get a better picture of it as a whole. An organizational outlining of the categories and subcategories was made into a tree diagram to show a simple representation of the data (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The practice of focused coding demonstrated the thinking process that contributed to the development of categories from the codes, creating an audit trail (Saldana,

2013). These focused codes were evaluated and reevaluated to ensure accuracy. Descriptions of the data groups were chosen to explain the themes that developed.

### **Data Organization**

Data must be organized in order to keep an audit trail of any and all connections from the raw data to the themes that were generated. Files of the transcriptions from the interviews and the focus group were kept in the researcher's personal computer. These transcriptions, as well as the participant journals and researcher observations were printed and used throughout the data analysis. After the initial coding process, the units of data were hand-written on index cards. The back of each index card indicated who and where the unit came from (interview, focus group, journal, or observation) and the page number. For example, if a card read 'C.1.J.' it would be from the journal of the participant with the pseudonym 'Chief,' on the first page. The process simplified the connection from units to the raw data, creating a clear audit trail that was easy to follow. Memo writing was used during the entire process to clarify the process.

### **Trustworthiness**

Establishing trustworthiness is essential to qualitative research. Credibility and trustworthiness, when considered from a constructivist perspective, are established in a number of different ways. Acknowledgement of and explication of subjectivity and bias of the researcher is critical. Personal experiences and biases of the researcher were outlined earlier in this chapter. In addition, multiple sources of data were used to establish triangulation. Member checking was utilized to ensure accurate representation of participants' voices. The detailed researcher journal provided contemporaneous notes about observations throughout every aspect of the experience and provided the opportunity for researcher reflection throughout the process. Organizing the

data and keeping track of how the themes were generated developed an audit trail. Extensive memos regarding themes were written, updated, and referred to often.

### **Triangulation**

Data was collected from multiple sources including journals, interviews, and a focus group in order to triangulate the data. This allowed the researcher to triangulate the data, thus contributing to the trustworthiness of the findings. By using multiple sources of data, researchers are able to triangulate information demonstrate credibility (Patton, 2002). Data triangulation helps to moderate bias that can be a concern in qualitative research (Miller & Dingwall, 1997).

### **Prolonged Engagement**

Prolonged engagement can be important for researchers and should include the development of trust with participants (Creswell, 2013). I attended the pre-trip orientation and all planned activities and classes with the participants during their study abroad course, and stayed engaged with them throughout research process. The journals were not read until a month after the trip concluded. During the interviews and focus group, participants appeared comfortable and provided candid answers due to the rapport they had with me. The prolonged engagement with the data included reading, coding, reflecting, and categorizing the data multiple times.

### **Member Checks**

Member checking was completed by disclosing the completed transcripts to each participant at the focus group. They were asked to read, delete, or clarify their statements and to return them to the researcher. Also during the focus group, the researcher presented the initial themes with participants for clarification and/or corrections.

## **Researcher Journal**

A detailed researcher journal was maintained throughout the research project and provided contemporaneous notes that included observations both about context and about participants. In addition the journal contained reflections, thoughts, questions, and decisions made by the researcher throughout the process. A detailed researcher journal, including contemporaneous notes, helps to establish the credibility of the researcher, minimize bias, and provide readers of the research with information that allows them to assess the findings (Patton, 2002).

## CHAPTER 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of graduate counseling students who studied abroad and the perceived impact on them as counseling students. The participants' journals, interviews, focus group, and researcher observations were analyzed to gain insight into the experiences of the participants. The data collected was used to identify three overarching themes which included: (1) adaptability and personal growth, containing the sub-themes of learning from hands on experiences, lack of preparation, negative emotions, dealing with discomfort, communication, and personal growth, (2) becoming aware of diversity, which includes the sub-themes of experiences with cultural immersion, spirituality, respect for country and way of life, (3) group process, which includes the sub-theme of learning from group diversity.

### **Adaptability and Personal Growth**

Students reported the need to be flexible and to remind themselves of the importance of adjusting to new situations. Being in the company of group members who adjusted well made it easier for some. As, one member explained,

Being adjustable because I think all of us can adjust in a new environment pretty easy...easier than maybe most people. But also we didn't give enough credit to the bond even if you are by yourself and easily adjustable there are a lot of factors that at the time would have brought you down, so I think that being adjustable and the bond.

During the study abroad program, students experienced a large range of emotions. Participants felt a need to adapt quickly because they were new to the center and most of them were experiencing Costa Rica for the first time. They were coming together as a group while also encountering many new and surprising things along the way. Ms. Bella illustrated this, while she recounted her experience at the special needs school as follows,

Children had a range of disabilities from autism to cerebral palsy to Down's syndrome. It was impressive how different their diagnoses were and how calm the patients and staff continued to be even in the presence of beginning aggression. I was most surprised about my experience at the school.

There were many times during the trip when students were unsure of what to expect at a location or when plans changed. Throughout the data, participants described different lessons in adaptability. Describing her experience at one of the schools, Seahorse stated,

I was uncomfortable at first with being close to the children and having to touch them. I am not a real touchy feeling type so I was a little uncomfortable with it. However, once I jumped in and just went with the flow it was easy. I think the visit gave me insight of who I am and how to handle uncomfortable situations in the future and be professional about it.

Another student who discussed the need to adapt was Sunny Days who said, "I was uncomfortable at first, but I followed suit when one of my colleagues jumped right in."

### **Learning from Hands-On Experiences**

Although activities were planned before visiting the schools, the circumstances often changed. Students needed to adapt to new situations and to be flexible with their activities. The participants attended a school for students with special needs where they had the opportunity to work directly with the students and staff at the school. Chief stated, "The only emotion I experienced was sheer happiness. I felt proud when I left there because I had a hands-on opportunity at the agency and I did not shy away from any opportunity to jump right in and help out." She further explained that she, "really enjoyed being able to participate with the special needs kids. I got to help out by walking different kids around their circuit, as well as play with

various toys with the younger aged girls.” Some students helped teach while others were able to play with students. Seahorse said, “I had a really positive experience when one student just reached out to grab my hand and dance with me.”

Some participants explained how experiential learning was helpful for them in this environment. Chief explained,

For me, I am hands-on and so even in classes... Like normal classes when we are lecturing and using PowerPoints, stuff like that, I am there but I do not retain information. ...But there I felt like with the experience and with the information it stuck... Going and seeing it, and putting together what we had talked about in class and then seeing it in the culture and being able to use it as like a basis to formulate your own perspective. So I am a hands-on learner. So, it was good for me.

After leaving the organic farm, Wildcat said she was “grateful for the hands-on experience” because she has family members who are farmers but she never had the opportunity to work on the farm. She also said that she enjoyed “being able to go over there and help out and work with people” while studying abroad.

### **Lack of Preparation**

A meeting was held before leaving for Costa Rica to prepare students for the trip, however many students reported feeling unprepared and confused upon arrival. A few students first reported surprise when they arrived at the facilities. They reported that they were unprepared for the lack of air conditioning. Tina wrote, “I was surprised by the lack of air conditioning but I’m happy they have breezeways to compensate.”

Participants explained that they were not prepared for the busy schedule and lack of time alone. One member explained, “I was not prepared for the intensity of it, of the schedule. I would

have liked to be mentally prepared for like not having any downtime for a week, that would have been good to know.” Agreeing with her, another member said, “That threw me for a loop.”

Various participants said they felt unprepared for the visits to the school. Chief said she experienced some anxiety as a result of being unprepared. She explained, “I think the first day would have been good to just go over everything and then there would have been less anxiety for specific people that we traveled with that were shocked.” She went on to explain that more communication and enthusiasm from their professor would have also helped with preparation.

Ms. Bella felt frustrated with the lack of preparation at various times throughout the trip. For instance, she wrote,

Our visit to the hot springs was very frustrating at first. I felt like we weren't given very many details about the destination, and I did not pack accordingly... I really prefer to be better prepared and would have enjoyed the experience more had I known more.

Another struggle concerning preparation was the confusion about their roles during certain visits. At the high school, Chief and Sunny Days were not clear about what they were supposed to do during their visit. Sunny Days explained, “I am confused as to what our role there was. I am not sure if we are just there to get an idea of what their daily school life is like, or if we are there to be advocates for the counseling field.”

### **Negative Emotions**

Many experiences causing discomfort and negative emotions were reported by participants regarding their activities and experiences abroad. The most common negative experience reported was fear during hikes in the Costa Rican rainforest. Tina said she felt scared during the hike and she was worried she was going to “fall off and die” because we had to walk down a narrow path near a cliff. While the hike induced a lot of fear on the way to the waterfall,

many reported feeling less fearful on the way back to the center. During the hike back, one member exclaimed, “Getting to the end of that hard hike was amazing!” Another member said that the hike was “totally worth it!”

Certain experiences were new and uncomfortable for many of the students. Seahorse described the crowded church during the festival as a “weird situation” because of the small space and close proximity to people, Sunny Days shared her sentiments by saying that she also felt “really weird” in the church. While in the clinic, Tina said she “felt some awkward vibes initially, like that we weren’t supposed to be there.” This visit also induced fear in Perla who wrote, “The limited resources of the clinic made me nervous.... overall I found myself hoping that I didn’t get appendicitis or have some sort of accident on the trip.” Sunny Days recounted that, at the special needs school, she felt “uncomfortable at first, but followed suit when one of my colleagues jumped right in” and became more at ease. In comparison, the weather and crowds at the festival caused Beiba to feel so uncomfortable that she had to leave the church.

Another negative feeling reported was the lack of control in certain situations. Some of these feelings were the result of the strict schedule set by the professor, and others occurred during certain site visits where participants were unable to leave. Perla felt like she had no control over the volcano hike, especially when it was pouring rain and she did not feel it was possible to turn around and go back. She wrote,

On a personal level, this took me to a bad spot. It reminded me of a sexual assault where you have no control of the situation. You have to endure it, and the more you fight it the worse it gets. Only this walk lasted for hours.

Fortunately, she explained that positive self-talk took her out of that bad place and wrote, “Those thoughts made me shift my thinking and start saying almost silly totally positive things... This is something we will remember the rest of our lives!”

Participants described both the physical and mental exhaustion that comes with this type of study abroad experience. Beiba described how it was tough “being in the situation 24/7” and how it was “tiring, but in a good way”. Seahorse explained that she felt overextended Ms. Bella said, “I know my personal limits and I had certainly crossed my threshold of being able to do it anyway.” Some detailed their frustration with the lack of time to complete the assignments: Sunny Days graphically explained that she did not like “being so fucking busy” while Seahorse said that it was difficult for her because “time was always accounted for.” For some participants these circumstances were very trying. Seahorse explained that,

Overall, today was tiring. I learned that I felt exhausted and that although I was feeling that way I still needed to remain professional despite how I was feeling. I think that after having three days with the group and going nonstop from place to place then class wore me out.

During the focus group, members explained that they would have preferred to have small breaks between site visits to take care of personal matters such as sending emails, showering, and changing clothes.

Participants also brought up the discomfort that resulted from the lack of independence throughout the trip. They wanted to have more free time to explore on their own. One member recounted that her biggest struggle during the trip was her lack of independence. She said, “I really felt like I had to rely on somebody else’s knowledge, somebody else’s transportation,

somebody else's time." Another member agreed and elaborated by stating, "We were all together all the time and never had privacy."

Many participants discussed their mixed feelings throughout the trip regarding different activities, which helped them reflect deeper on their experiences. Wildcat explained her experience during the hike to the waterfall, "I felt scared, worried, grateful, embarrassed, secured, and happy. Overall it was a great experience." Tina stated that the hike to the waterfall as "amazing and terrifying all at once." There were a few instances when the participants were not able to describe their emotions such as Perla who explained, after not being able to lead an activity at the high school, "It's not the end of the world but it made me feel funny." Also, Sunny Days said she got an "overwhelming feeling that is indescribable" and noted that at the elementary school, "I enjoyed being there. I did get emotionally overwhelmed when the children sang a song that their moms sing to them." As explained by Seahorse, the study abroad experience is "exciting but hard."

During the focus group, members reported that their negative feelings faded and the positive ones stayed with them. While laughing, one member stated, "Now when I think about my Costa Rica trip I think about this, this is my memory" and pointed to other members of the group. The group agreed that they no longer think of the negative feelings because they learned from them.

### **Dealing with Discomfort**

As discussed previously in this chapter, there were often times when participants had overwhelming feelings during the study abroad experience, and students reported using stress management techniques in times of distress. Perla explained that at times she resorted to self-talk. In particular, she wrote about her experience at the festival,

I was frustrated trying to buy rosaries and a couple times I was lost during the service, despite the fact that the order of mass is the same everywhere and I attend regularly. It was interesting to me how that happened and required some good self-talk to chill out about it.

Positive self-talk also helped her and other students in torrential rainfall during the volcano hike. Tina reported that it was “neat how everyone had their own coping style” and how “a good sense of humor” helped. Seahorse described mindfulness exercises that helped her when she was feeling impatient during the first hike by writing, “I had to remind myself to take deep breaths and be in the moment and try to be mindful of what was going on around me in the present moment.”

Seahorse also elaborated on her approach to coping by stating that what helped her was “trying to make the best of the situation and laughing and having a good time.” Tina related that the Costa Ricans’ attitude helped her during the hike,

Rather than having an “accepting my fate” attitude, the Ticos have a more positive ‘make the best of the situation’ attitude. This was something I really needed to hear, considering the rainy weather really brought me down during the volcano.”

Chief explained how her positive outlook helped during that time as well by writing,

I still made the best out of the experience and tried to find something positive and enjoyable out of the tour. Although I did not prefer to get poured on, it was inevitable. Therefore, once wet, all I could do was enjoy myself and the beautiful hike we were making. I found it awesome that despite the weather our tour guide was still so excited to share.

While motivating each other was evident during the first hike, the participants also practiced their own approaches to motivating themselves. Regarding the first hike, Perla shared that the waterfall served as the “grand reward at the end” and was worth the effort, making the hike back much easier. For Beiba, the waterfall hike reminded her that envisioning a reward at the end could help motivate herself and clients. Wildcat had a difficult time due to her fear of falling and described her perseverance by explaining, “I fell down a few times on my back. I even had to get on the floor and crawl in the mud.... I decided to keep on going. Once I got to the top of the hill I felt accomplished. I felt happy that I didn’t quit.” During her interview, Tina said that the waterfall hike reminded her “hard work is worth it.”

Some of the participants relied on other group members to help them cope in difficult situations. In the focus group, all of the participants reported that laughter helped them deal with negativity or difficult situations. Also helping them was the positivity of other members. One member reported, “I can be very negative so it’s better for me to be around optimistic people because it helps keep me in check.” Another member explained that she took care of herself by interacting with group members at the end of the day. She said,

I think about a lot, practicing a lot of self-care even after everything was going on and we were all tired and beat, like talking and staying up was in a way just letting me unload and process the day and getting it out would let me shift gears.

Building on this idea another member said, “We would have to process after the processing in our own way, in a supportive environment” explaining that they enjoyed talking casually about the day when they got back to their room.

Many stress management techniques were used during the trip and the site visits. One member explained what she learned about stress management from these experiences and how

they will help her professionally. After being asked if it was good practice emerging from ones comfort zone, she said, “Learning how to self soothe I guess. Like having my anxiety levels raised and then learning how to self soothe.”

## **Communication**

Issues with the language barrier came up often and had a big impact on the participants. Perla explained that she became stressed and challenged because of the language barrier while visiting the special needs school and then felt “hung up” on it again at the festival. While describing her experience at the schools, Sea Horse said,

I think that we did a variety of projects with the children, some of them responding well and some not so well. I think that the language barrier had something to do with it and that the interpretation of both cultures was another barrier. It was difficult trying to explain some of the information to the children and when we did I noticed that they understood it differently. The activities were great, however because of the language barrier or the way we interpret things and that the Costa Ricans interpret things definitely showed.

During the trip, some participants did what they could to communicate and used their limited Spanish skills. Tina’s recollection of the staff at the center was that “both people were nice and responded in English when I tried speaking to them in broken Spanish” and that she was later surprised that the Costa Ricans she interacted with were “tolerant of my awful Spanish.” Ms. Bella experienced pride when she was able to order food in Spanish during the festival.

Various students explained that they were able to overcome the language barrier which they originally perceived as a struggle. Wildcat said that the language barrier was not a problem

for her and that she was able to utilize nonverbal skills to communicate. Perla described understanding emotion without language when visiting the special needs school by stating,

For a minute there, I felt pretty stressed out that I couldn't understand Spanish.

Although it is completely reasonable that I would not be fluent in Spanish, for some reason my first reaction was to be critical of myself. I had to be mindful of the fact that I could still understand the emotion, and had a good translator. I didn't need to know Spanish to redirect the kids when I got a chance to work with them briefly.

Chief explained that, at the elementary school, they had the ability to communicate love without words and were able to overcome the language barrier. She wrote, "I really learned from that experience that we don't always need to have the same language to communicate how much we care and love others around us." Also, in regards to the same location, Tina noted, "I feel like I need language less to communicate with them, and usually, their behavior is simpler." One member in the focus group explained,

I felt like I could relate to them, even though I didn't speak the language and I was frustrated because I couldn't communicate so there was that but then I felt like we are all people, right, so I could relate when I could see like emotions like the kids at the school and how they were acting so I was kinda like, even though I might not know what they were saying or they might not know what we are talking about it still kinda felt welcomed.

Although the language barrier caused distress for some participants, it provided learning experiences for others. Seahorse explained her fascination with the language barrier,

I found most fascinating that even though the language was translated verbatim, it was still misunderstood on how the other person would like, how they interpreted it. So it was

interpreted word for word but their interpretation of what we were trying to say still meant something different ultimately.

Beiba had a unique experience with the language barrier because she served as an unofficial translator for the group. She described her experience with the communication,

We always talk about language barrier, language barrier, language barrier, and I'm like "whatever, what are you talking about." There I was able to experience that first hand. Like it does make so much of a difference. Because even with my family, when I go visit... my family speaks English or attempts to so. There is not so much of that barrier. So seeing that, it was interesting.

### **Personal Growth**

Participants reported that they learned about themselves and gained personal insight. Many times students stated that they wanted to be able to get out of their comfort zones, such as Beiba who explained that, "One of my goals during this trip was to get myself out of my comfort zone and processing experiences." She further stated that she felt the need to "step up and do that" referring to her being the main translator for the group. For many, emerging from their comfort zone helped them learn about themselves, as one member explained,

For me I'm a free spirit, free type: I enjoy a lot out of getting out of my comfort zone. When I am out of my comfort zone, I learn the most and so... cause I will take in... obviously you are out of your comfort zone so you are taking new experiences. So for me, my personality goes with getting out of my comfort zone. It's like my prime. Its like an adrenaline rush for me.

Another member built on her idea and described how this experience will help her as a professional. She said,

Well I like that we were put out of our comfort zone in a different way because I think as therapists when its just us and like one other person and the things we are maybe listening to will get us way out of our comfort zone and we are going to have to learn how to be mindful and just kinda roll ... roll with it.

Other members agreed with her by saying it was good practice for them professionally. Seahorse explained that, “I got a fullness about myself and how well I can adapt to certain situations and certain circumstances” and “it brought awareness to myself.”

Some students described cultivating their own cultural or religious identity after observing the practices of the Costa Ricans. Sunny Days explained that after the trip, “Coming out of it felt like I know who I am and where I come from.” Chief explained that study abroad was good for her because of the personal growth and hands on learning. Even during the difficult times of the program, some students emerged with a new understanding of themselves. Perla explained, “it taught me some stuff about myself.” One member in the focus group stated, “in hindsight 20/20 I did grow a lot umm because I had already had multicultural counseling as a class. I took away so much more from it (study abroad) than I did in just the classroom.”

### **Becoming Aware of Diversity**

While studying in Costa Rica, students became aware of diversity by interacting with people from Costa Rica as well as with each other. While describing the differences of studying abroad and taking a course at home, Seahorse said, “it gave me a better picture of what is out there in the world.”

At different points throughout the trip, participants imagined what it would be like to be from Costa Rica. Some reported that they were beginning to look at the world through the Costa Ricans’ eyes. During the first hike in the rainforest, Tina explained:

At some points during the hike, I caught myself thinking about what it would actually be like to grow up or live in/near a rainforest. During or after most of my slips and uphill struggles, I would think about what it would be like to walk through this kind of environment every day. We even had it pretty easy, because there was already somewhat of a path in place for us. I felt like those thoughts helped me “suck it up” and keep going. At another point in time she asked herself, “If I lived here, how would I survive? Because I was thinking about the farmers and people who own that land who have to walk through it everyday so I have to just suck it up I guess.”

### **Experiences with Cultural Immersion**

Cultural immersion was one of the key aspects of the program. The participants reported positive aspects of cultural immersion and how they were able to learn from these experiences. Perla said, “It’s kinda fun because you get the best of both worlds.” Chief explained that her experience was a “positive, enriched, cultural experience” and Sunny Days described the immersion by saying she received a “sense of an important aspect” of Costa Rica. Tina noted that study abroad “provides what a text book does not” and that she had “the opportunity to experience something new and exciting.”

Participants continuously reported that they felt welcomed throughout their time in Costa Rica. One member said, “I didn’t feel like we were bothering them.” Another member stated, “I didn’t really feel out of place.” Perla described her experience at the special needs school and said, “Both children and adults inside seemed happy and calm. The principal was very warm and welcoming. The first teacher and volunteer we met were warm and excited to share with us.” Both Tina and Seahorse described Costa Ricans as “nice and helpful.” After the trip to La Fortuna, Ms. Bella said, “Positive reactions included the openness and kindness from the locals.”

Describing her experience with Costa Rican students, Chief explained, “They were so sweet and felt so comfortable that they just started braiding my hair. I felt so welcomed at the elementary school and truly felt so much love in the classroom.”

The members of the focus group expressed that they would have liked more time to be immersed in the culture and observe people in the community. They agreed that they would have all liked to be out in the community more instead of in the classroom. When asked what type of immersion activities they preferred one member explained,

Just going to the church. For me just going to the church, like, I learned more in that day about their culture than ... pretty much anything else. Because we weren't isolated, we weren't in a fixed or, like, a set environment, it was just everybody being natural, their natural self and we were in that environment.

Other members agreed with her by saying they mostly enjoyed the cultural immersion experience at the festival and at the church. Seahorse explained how much she enjoyed the cultural immersion and stated, “We got to venture and I think venturing to see the little houses and seeing the community and eating and then the waiter taking forever. That was like ‘oh these people are in no hurry’ but it was a real taste.” She also said, “Being in another country and seeing how other cultures interact with others is impactful.” Chief explained,

By studying abroad it allows you to fully immerse yourself in the culture and see things in a much different light, as opposed to just reading about the culture from the text. By reading the text and actually doing fieldwork, it helps an individual to experience their daily lives and actually apply it to what you have been reading. It makes things much clearer.

While studying abroad, participants were able to learn about the culture by making comparisons with their home country. Many of the participants reported that they saw many similarities. Perla said that she was able to see “way more similarities than differences.” Wildcat said, “I learned that things are much different and the same but different.” For example, when she first visited the grocery store she was surprised at how similar the selection was to her own grocery store. Some of the differences were seen as positive and made participants realize a negative side to their home practices. Seahorse noticed this while discussing the organic farm and said, “So I liked that, because everything has a purpose and, you know, we weren’t wasting, like we do.”

While visiting the local schools, participants were able to point out many similarities and differences. Wildcat explained, “As a teacher I started comparing and contrasting between the schools. I noticed that the teacher did not have as much technology as a typical classroom in the United States. However, I felt as if he did well with the materials he had.” While at the special needs school, Perla observed “the way the children played was similar, some mannerisms were similar – it’s like we have all these differences, but yet we have so much in common.” Chief noticed that the way the teachers interacted with the children was different from what we are accustomed to in the United States. Reporting what she observed at the schools, Tina said,

It’s easy to find similarities between the Costa Rican high schoolers and American high schoolers. As cheesy as this sounds, they are just kids trying to live their lives, spend time with their friends, achieve their dreams, play sports, etc. They have the same essential aspirations and hobbies as students in the states.

During the visit to the festival, students were able to make many comparisons between religious practices. Perla noted,

Lots of things were different: paying to use the restroom, the festival environment, the goods for sale, the language, the way communion went, and of course the music. At the same time there were so many commonalities and I got emotional towards the end feeling gratitude to be able to have this experience . . . especially on my birthday.

Overall, participants seemed to learn a lot about the Costa Rican culture by comparing and contrasting between the two cultures. Regarding these experiences, Chief said,

I believe that this trip helped to open my eyes to the commonalities between our culture, as well as the differences. It is much easier to recognize the differences between cultures, but often that makes us forget the similar things, which bring people together.

For Beiba, the experience was unique because she is originally from another Central American country but she has lived in the United States for most of her life. She explained that she was making comparisons between all three countries throughout the trip. She said:

So it was like different points of reference . . . people kept saying “oh that’s so different!” and “that’s so different” you know, from what they are used to and for me that was irrelevant, because for me, well from here maybe a little bit, but for me that was part of me what they were saying was so different. So that was kind of interesting. Is kinda like having a truly multicultural experience.

### **Spirituality**

Many of the participants reported becoming more aware of the differences in spirituality and religion. The group attended a festival in a small town where people walked for miles to attend, and spent time in the local church where the mass for the celebration took place. Chief described what she learned from this experience,

Working in South Texas with many Catholic clients, this has opened my eyes to the many beliefs my clients may possess and it is important for me to ask questions and learn about their religious preferences and customs if that is what is important to them.

For many familiar with the Catholic religion due to the demographics of their home country, observing the different practices in Costa Rica was unforeseen. Beiba described this observation:

Our site visit also contributed to my knowledge of Costa Rican culture in other ways. For instance, even though religious traditions appear to remain strong here, there also appears that some of the restraint and modesty that characterized Catholic Church goes in the past may have waned in this area.

Beiba also described how this new understanding would help her professionally. She said,

As a therapist I think that this point highlights that for clients that come from the same religious background their traditions and views of their own religion/church may vary widely depending on their own personal experiences with their religion, cultural background, age, gender, etc.

The festival impacted Chief because spirituality is a topic she has shied away from in therapy.

After the festival, she realized the importance of having an understanding of clients' beliefs.

Chief explained her new understanding of the importance of spirituality in counseling by saying:

After this I realize how important it is whether I am going to get that they have anything or not. You know, that they really cling to, it is important for me to ask. You know, if people are cutting off their braids to have a healthy baby, that would be...really important for me to have an understanding because I think it's out there; but if that is what they believe, that is something that is definitely going to impact the counseling process.

While spending the day in La Fortuna, Perla noticed that not one person in the group attended a church in the park even though it was Sunday. She said, “It reminded me that even those of us who share the same denomination approach their spirituality differently.”

### **Respect for Country and Way of Life**

The participants all reported learning from the way the Costa Ricans live. Chief explained, “I would say the most impactful thing for me was just their way of life. The kind of, I don’t know, almost like the “pura vida,” just very kind of simple, much more relaxed. They have a lot of pride, and that was evident in every place we went.” She also said, “They have their priorities in check, and money didn’t seem to be on top of their list of being overly concerned with reaching this certain lifestyle.” Towards the end of the trip, Sunny Days wrote, “I got a sense that Costa Ricans are traditional, family oriented, cook with love, takes things at a slow pace, and are honest.”

The Cost Rican way of life was described as relaxed and calm by the participants. Participants at various sites they visited observed this. While at the special needs school, many participants reported that they admired the way the Costa Rican teachers worked with their students. Many students admired the patience and calm nature of the teachers when students were acting up. Sunny Days said, “I believe that the patience and positive redirection that the educators at this school use is proof that it can work... They were passionate about what they believed in, and they believed in what they were doing.” On another occasion, Seahorse observed patience at the festival and said,

People were sitting on the floor, people were sitting out in the rain. It was like no organization but people just kept going with it, going with the flow. I don’t think that, like just seeing that in the midst of the rainstorm, all these people were like still there for

their purpose and did their thing and kept going with it instead of like “OH my God its raining!” and stop.

The simple way of life was a subject several participants brought up when talking about the Costa Ricans. The participants often admired the way the locals lived and looked at life. One member of the focus group said,

I know that I talked a lot about it, but how they were always so happy and refreshed and high on life and living so simply - look at the parallel for myself. Finding that quest for true happiness I think for me was definitely something I learned and can relate to, for sure.

Tina described how the Costa Ricans had everything they needed but so much less than what we are accustomed to. She observed that, “They do the best with what they have. And they have a lot. They have practice...I was like, our hospitals are all decked out but theirs, they still did a lot with the bare minimum.” Seahorse was noticing the lack of technology and resources in the classrooms and stated,

There was not any a/c or high tech stuff around the classroom. I noticed it was simple and that the lights were not even on, they were using the natural sunlight. It brought a warm feeling to me, in that it was safe and secure and loving.

At another time Seahorse described the experience at the schools by stating,

The teachers that we interacted with had so much passion for their work with the little resources that they had that it makes you be appreciative of the things you have. Like we have access to so many things were they had access to nothing, maybe a computer. And still at that they were compassionate about their job and the kids were like, happy.

Also admiring the simplicity of the school, Sunny Days said, “It reminded me that it is not always necessary to be in a hurry to get the latest technology tool, and sometimes it is important to take it back to the basics.”

One aspect of the Costa Rican culture that brought on stress, as well as admiration, was what they called “Tico time.” This is a reference to their lack of urgency or punctuality. This was brought up by several participants, such as Seahorse, who expressed frustration while waiting for a waiter who was in no hurry to bring her check. After having time to reflect on this concept, one member of the focus group began to see the positive side of living unhurriedly and said,

There is island time for me and there is Tico time- part of it to me, and I make parallels all the time, because I have to be. I have to let go more and just roll with the punches. It makes me more, it makes me aware, I need to get with the program; I need to be on island time, I need to be on Tico time. It’s not a bad way to be.

During the trip, many participants pointed out the pride and passion they observed from the Costa Ricans. Most of the Costa Ricans they encountered and interacted with worked at the sites they visited. Towards the end of the trip, Seahorse said, “I also noticed that no matter where we went, all service workers shared a passion for their job. Everyone was nice and calm and welcoming.” Beiba said of the elementary school, “I was captivated by the gentleness, the professionalism, and the commitment of educators towards their students.” After reflecting back on the trip, Chief noted, “There was not one activity that the Costa Ricans did not put their whole heart and effort into.”

While at the special needs school, the students had a chance to not only interact with teachers but they had the opportunity to work directly with the students in their classrooms. Beiba explained what it was like to witness the passion of one of the teachers by stating,

She received our questions and answered them with a tone that denoted the passion she has for what she does. In very few occasions had I sensed the high level of commitment, appreciation, and dedication for what a person does for a living like that expressed and demonstrated by Mrs. Z.

She also wrote, “I, also, was not expecting the impressive level of professionalism and love of the profession that these special education professionals in a small town, in a developing country demonstrated.” Also impressed with the passion displayed by the teachers was Perla who noted,

Though I could not understand the words she said, she exuded enthusiasm and passion about her work. I was very impressed by their desire to help meet each child’s individual needs and strengthen their abilities and skills. I felt genuine compassion and desire to enrich the lives of the students.

Chief said her positive reaction from the school was that there was, “a tremendous amount of love and dedication by the teachers, volunteers, and administration.” Wildcat, who is a special education teacher, observed the similarities between the classrooms and her own. She was impressed with the teachers and said, “they responded kindly and professional when the students lost their focus.” While at the school, some participants observed aggressive behavior and outbursts in the classroom. Ms. Bella said, “It was impressive how different their diagnoses were and how calm the patients and staff continued to be even in the presence of beginning aggression.”

A visit to a local organic farm allowed students to talk to people who worked there and experience what it was like for farmers including picking fruit, making moonshine, and eating a meal made from fresh ingredients grown on site. Sunny Days wrote, “It was great to see someone so passionate in what they were doing. I am starting to notice a trend in the Ticos, they

seem to put so much of who they are into what they do everyday.” She described the tour guide and owner of the farm as “a man passionate about growing organic food.” Perla, who explained that her brothers are also farmers, stated, “I have never seen anything that worked so smoothly and looked so beautiful in the U.S.” and then went on to say, “I got a strong sense of pride in the lush fertile landscape, and pride in their country and work.” Also describing her experience at the organic farm, Chief noted, “I was amazed at all the hard work the Tico people have to put into their crops on a daily basis. Due to them only working by hand, this job calls for some intense, manual labor that to my surprise the workers seem to enjoy.” She also said,

I really admire Don Juan for truly getting into the business because he loves the land and has a passion for farming, and not because he is just trying to make a bunch of money off his people. We learned to do so many things on the farm from picking our own corn, pulling papayas down, geometry and how its useful in farming, how to make moonshine, and so much more... Our tour guide was so full of life and energy. He truly loved his job and it was evident that he has a passion for his country and educating others.

To sum up the experience at the organic far, Tina noted, “All the workers seemed very proud of their jobs.”

The group took a guided tour to a viewing spot of the Arenal Volcano. Almost every participant admired the tour guide for her patience and professionalism throughout the difficult conditions. Chief said, “I found it awesome that despite the weather our tour guide was still so excited to share the volcano and its history to the group.” Seahorse was also surprised that the tour guide continued the hike in the rain. She said, “This experience taught me patience but also appreciation for the culture and the pride that the tour guides had as discussing information.” The positive attitude of the tour guide helped some students get through the hike. Tina said,

She had a good sense of humor, which was helpful while we were hiking up the volcano path in the pouring rain... One thing she said that resonated with me was her statement of being more positive about everything, especially where you live, because accidents can happen anywhere, and it is bad to live one's life in fear of something.

### **Group Process**

Group dynamics were interesting throughout the trip as the participants were living, eating, traveling, and studying together in a newly formed group. Most students reported they were unfamiliar with the other students in the group despite being in the same counseling program at home. Perla wrote, "For the most part, this summer has been anything but routine, but taking a trip with 14 people I don't know very well did cause me some anxiety." Ms. Bella compared the study abroad experience to being in an airport and noted, "The quick conversations and hurrying to their gate and long goodbyes. Much like the nature of our trip – a group of people all squished together who might otherwise never cross paths." During the first couple of days, Wildcat felt like she was "growing closer to my classmates every day." Chief wrote, "The second day was really amazing for me. I felt as if our group really bonded and had a great time together today getting to know one another."

The bonding experience developed extensively during the first hike to the waterfall when many of the students were experiencing fear and excitement.

We saw poisonous dart frogs, bullet ants, woodpeckers, hummingbirds, metallic ant bees but it seemed like the biggest awe moment was the waterfall. There were many times when people almost gave up or were frustrated but we encouraged ourselves and made it. People even waited and clapped at the end for classmates. (researcher journal)

Beiba reported feeling uplifted by the group, which helped her make it through the arduous hike. She said,

Another aspect of the experience that also felt very energizing was the interaction between the group members. This was evident by the high level of collaboration and mutual concern in a group that has just very recently come together.

Teamwork was also evident during this hike as reported by Perla who wrote about walking together as a team and waiting for one another. Chief said that she was able to feel “a sense of unity within the group.” For some, the hike was difficult until they became closer to the rest of the group, which was hiking in a single file line due to the narrow path. For example, Sea Horse hurried to the middle of the group, because she could not enjoy it until group members surrounded her. Beiba also reported that having a group with a good attitude was a huge help to her during the hike. A touching experience brought up by several students was an incident when one student fell behind during the hike and needed extra help from the tour guide and a doctoral student. When she finished, she found many of her colleagues clapping for her at the end of the trail. Wildcat explained how supportive the group was by writing, “Eventually we made it to the research center. I was surprised to see my roommates there cheering me on. This experience left me with a lot of emotion.”

The study abroad trip was an unexpected bonding experience to some participants. After the first day, Chief explained in her journal that there was “lots of laughter and many new relationships formed.” Tina noted that the first couple of days were “a great bonding experience.” Perla said she felt like she was being immersed in a graduate counseling culture. Some members of the group also reported that they have become closer since the trip to Costa Rica. One member stated,

I felt like my roommates were my support system because I felt like there was a split between groups so it was like my support system was keeping me sane. Or keeping me like “ok we are here to have a good time and here to enjoy the moment instead of concentrating on the negative aspects...”

Another instance of group cohesion was in class when the participants were processing their experiences. Beiba said that she was now open to processing experiences in class, which had initially made her feel uncomfortable. Some students, such as Beiba, were “pleasantly surprised” about the group cohesion. Regarding group interactions Perla stated, “We were all getting a little deeper.” While in class, and listening to other classmates sharing their experiences, some students realized they were not alone in experiencing difficult emotions. For example, Tina said “I enjoyed listening to my classmates interpretations of our hiking trip yesterday. I’m glad I wasn’t the only one who was scared, nervous, etc.” Wildcat also reported that she was very grateful for the group collaboration in class because it “contributed to my personal growth.”

However, not all group interactions were seen as positive. Ms. Bella said, “We did not do a very good job at traveling as a cohesive group. There was group one who seemed to be sprinting, group two, group three and the last two.” She was disappointed in the lack of group cohesion during the hike because, in her perspective, people were not helping each other enough. She also reported being surprised at the clinic when some students were “milling around the lobby” and reported annoyance with their disrespectfulness. At times, Chief sensed negativity from people in the group but this made her more grateful for her own optimism.

## **Learning from Group Diversity**

While studying abroad, the students had many opportunities to share their perspectives with each other. After visiting a location, the group would process the experiences in class. One member described how she learned about different perspectives and attitudes from other participants while in Costa Rica. She explained,

I think about it a lot still. Umm, because it was eye opening to me. Each one of us are individuals and each one of us would react to the same thing differently . . . especially because it was a bunch of counselor types, you know, and we are all in touch with our emotions and interested in other people. To see that was the biggest multicultural part for me. Yeah, just like each person in our group instead of the people we were going to study, you know? ... Each one of us has a unique worldview.

While visiting the same sites, participants reacted to the situations differently. Seahorse explained,

This was unique to me because despite the rain, I was trying to make the best of the situation and laughing and having a good time. I enjoyed it that I could see everyone's reactions and how they were feeling versus the tour guide's situation.

Perla described what it was like to hear others react differently than she did, and indicated, they would have “three or four other people listening to one person tell a story and then see how each person has a different question and each person is looking at it from a different angle.”

## CHAPTER 5: Discussion, Summary, and Recommendations

Chapter 5 consists of a discussion of the findings. First, there is a summary of the findings and discussion about how they relate to the current literature. Next, consideration of an emerging theory regarding the experiences of counseling students and study abroad is reviewed. Limitations, recommendations for future research, and the implications for practice are discussed at the end of the chapter.

### **Overview of Findings**

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the study abroad experiences of graduate counseling students. The study was informative in regards to experiences of students who participated in a course that included service-learning and cultural immersion. The participants described their experiences during the study abroad program and their perceptions of what impacted them. From the data collected, three distinct themes emerged: (1) adaptability and personal growth (2) becoming aware of diversity, and (3) group process.

### **Existing Literature**

Little research has been published regarding the experiences of counseling students studying abroad. There is some published research regarding service-learning, (Jett & Delgado-Romero, 2009) and some of the findings presented in Chapter 4 are consistent with existing research. However, other findings are unique and contribute to the literature. The research presented reflects the experiences the students perceived as impactful in the current study.

### **Adaptability and Personal Growth**

Participants expressed their discomfort in certain situations while studying abroad. Students in the study also described various times when they learned from and managed this discomfort. Often, these occurrences were the result of new and unfamiliar experiences. Another reason for this discomfort stemmed from the lack of control over situations that arose. All of the

participants were master's-level students accustomed to having their own schedules, and while in Costa Rica, their days were planned out for them. The strict schedule was intense, and packed with classes and activities, leaving little free time. This caused many students to become both physically and mentally exhausted. The findings are similar to those of McDowell, Goessling, and Melendez (2012), who found that their participants experienced a wide range of emotions related to experiential learning and awareness including anxiety, fear, and exhaustion. These emotions were common for participants in the current study because of the new environments and situations.

Previous research has shown that counselors-in-training have become more aware of their comfort levels by working in different environments, bringing about a deep self-awareness (Jett & Delgado-Romero, 2009). Students in this study learned more by moving outside the boundaries of their comfort. They gained insight, as well as a better understanding of how to manage their discomfort. Service-learning, has been seen as an opportunity for students who are new to the profession to get an introduction to different counseling environments (Jett & Delgado-Romero, 2009). Participants in the current study were also able to experience different environments, such as a clinic and various schools, which helped them gain a better understanding of where they feel most comfortable.

Each participant had her own personal approach to dealing with struggles during the program. Because all participants were counseling students, it was not surprising to hear about the various stress management techniques employed. Some techniques mentioned were: positive self-talk, deep breathing, and keeping a positive outlook. Some students stated that they prepared for the trip by reminding themselves to keep a positive attitude and to 'roll with the punches'. Another way participants reported coping with discomfort was by laughing and joking with other

members of the group. As a group, participants motivated one another at various times during the program. These techniques and personal approaches to stress helped the participants learn about what helps them and what might help clients in the future. This was a unique finding that was not found in the literature.

While studying abroad, students must adapt to new situations and circumstances. The participants in this study experienced many lessons about adaptability. In addition to having to adjust to the new climate and country, they had to adapt to new schedules and living situations. The service-learning projects called for students to work with new populations, such as children with special needs, while being unable to speak their language. Plans and circumstances often changed, and students had to adapt to a new and unplanned situation. For example, we were expecting to work with a full class at the high school and due to bad weather and an art festival; the class consisted of only three students. Although participants were required to adapt to these situations, they all noted some degree of personal growth that derived from these lessons in adaptability. It was common for participants to say that they learned about themselves while moving beyond the boundaries of their comfort. Consistent with the findings by McDowell et al. (2012), all participants reported different degrees of personal growth and transformation. One study suggested that pre-practicum service-learning helped the emerging counselors to develop professionally as well (Jett & Delgado-Romero, 2009). Learning how to adapt to new situations helped counselors-in-training prepare for the changing circumstances they will face as professional counselors.

**Learning from Hands-On Experiences.** The service-learning in the schools allowed participants to work directly with people from the Costa Rican community. There were many hands-on learning experiences during their time in Costa Rica. Many students left the service-

learning locations with a sense of pride and/or happiness because they were able to work directly with local children in the community. Also, while taking a tour of a local organic farm, participants had the opportunity to work on the farm by picking fruit, making moonshine, and learning the geometric system used on the farmer's plot of land. As a result of these hands-on experiences, they gained a sense of what it was like to be a farmer in Costa Rica. McDowell et al. (2012) found that students have an improved ability to work cross-culturally after completing a study abroad program and participating in experiential learning activities. After an experience such as this, participants felt better equipped to work with people of various backgrounds.

### **Becoming Aware of Diversity**

Participants became aware of diversity in various ways throughout the program. During excursions, they reported imagining what it would be like to be a Costa Rican. Their experiences with cultural immersion were helpful in learning about diversity. One of the contributing factors to this positive cultural immersion experience was the constant feeling of being welcomed. Most of the participants stated that they felt welcomed by the 'Ticos' everywhere they went, allowing them to feel comfortable and experience the culture. Students suggested more cultural immersion activities in future programs because they believed that they learned more from these experiences than any other mode of learning.

By recognizing their cultural differences, participants were better able to clarify their own cultural values. Coinciding with previous studies, participants were better able to identify the pros and cons of their home culture while observing another culture firsthand (McDowell et al., 2012). Many participants in this study were able to gain a deeper understanding of diversity after realizing the similarities and differences of the two cultures. While studying abroad, students constantly made comparisons between the host country and their own country. They became

aware of the diversity by observing the cultural similarities and differences. During the visits to the schools, participants observed and appreciated differences in ways classes were conducted, such as the patience of teachers towards the students, and less technology. McDowell et al. (2012) found that comparisons and judgments of home and host cultures are common while studying abroad. Some students in this study were able to better understand the cultural practices of the Costa Ricans by taking a better look at their own cultural practices.

Participants in this study expressed a desire to have more opportunities to talk to people in the community. Instead of spending time in class, they preferred cultural immersion activities that involved personal interaction with people. Previous research found that contact with people from different cultures has a positive effect on multicultural counseling competencies and was considered the most impactful (Diaz-Lazaro & Cohen, 2001). Incorporating more of these activities can further multicultural learning for counseling students.

**Spirituality.** Participants in this study became aware of diversity in regards to spirituality. A person's identity is comprised of ethnicity, culture, history, social cultural, political and economic dimensions, which include religion and spirituality (Arredondo, 1996). Spirituality can be defined as "meaning and purpose in one's life, a search for wholeness, and a relationship with a transcendent being" (Hage, Hopson, Siegel, Payton, & DeFanti, 2006). Learning about a new country and how the people in that country view spirituality is an important component to a study abroad course. A counselor must have a working knowledge about their clients' spirituality in order to completely understand them. Because of the numerous religions and the large spectrum of spirituality, a counselor is not expected to know the details of each religion but he should have an open dialogue about the differences while keeping an open

mind. Therefore, learning about spirituality in a new culture can impact the professional development of students.

The group learned about spirituality when they attended church services for the *Virgen de los Angeles* festival. During the services, they were completely immersed in the culture and they witnessed the spiritual practices of Costa Ricans firsthand. Because all of the participants are from an area with a high Catholic population, they found the differences remarkable. For example, after walking to church from another village, the attendants would finish the last part of their pilgrimage on their knees. This was an eye opener for many students. This visit also helped participants to realize the importance of understanding clients' spiritual beliefs in a counseling relationship. Some participants stated that they normally shy away from this topic in therapy and that now they feel more comfortable raising it when deemed appropriate.

When designing a study abroad course, counselor educators may incorporate visits to local churches, religious festivals, or worship locations. Counselor educators have reported little preparation in the areas of spiritual and religious diversity and interventions; however, they are willing to have more classroom discussion about these issues (Hage, Hopson, Siegel, Payton, & DeFanti, 2006). Students reported that learning about the Costa Rican religion and practices was an enriching addition to the study abroad course.

**Respect for country and way of life.** The respect for the Costa Ricans and their way of life was apparent throughout the trip. It quickly became obvious to the participants that the locals do not worry about details in life that they are accustomed to worrying about, such as punctuality. The 'Ticos' take life at a slower pace and appreciate the small things. Students often commented on the simplicity of life in Costa Rica. Participants were also surprised at the many similarities they observed with the Costa Ricans, and they learned to respect Costa Ricans and

their way of life. The simplicity of their way of life made participants aware of the extravagance that they are accustomed to at home. Similar to past findings (McDowell, et. al., 2012), the participants recognized the privileges they are familiar with, and they came to admire the way Costa Ricans function quite well without technology and resources readily available to them. Participants became aware of this at the special needs school, when they noticed that significant family and volunteer involvement made up for the lack of resources. When some students would get frustrated with “Tico time,” they realized how accustomed they are to always being in a rush.

The passion Costa Ricans have for their work and country impressed many participants. The participants admired the efforts Costa Ricans put into their jobs even though the working conditions were not ideal. They commented on the love they sensed from teachers to their students, the dedication of the farmers, and the passion these individuals had for their professions. One person that stood out to most of the participants was a tour guide who led them on a hike during a rainstorm. All of the students commented on how positive and enthusiastic she stayed throughout a downpour.

### **Group Process**

Because the group was together day and night for an entire week, an intense group process took place. They came together as strangers and connected because of their desire to learn about a new culture. In the beginning, their relationships began by helping each other get situated into their dormitories and getting to know each other. During the hikes, they assisted group members who fell behind and motivated each other to keep going when the hike became difficult. Observing the group come together at the waterfall was inspiring because they took pictures of each other and held each other up. The members served as constant motivators and

stress relievers for each other, which was very uplifting. During classes, the group would often process the day out loud with the professor and doctoral students. In the beginning it was difficult for some to share personal reactions with the group, but, after a couple days, participants appeared more comfortable.

**Learning from group diversity.** Processing as a group helped students recognize the diversity of the group. This was consistent with previous findings (McDowell et al., 2012). Throughout the trip, the students learned about the diversity within the group itself. Participants pointed out that sharing in class served as a multicultural lesson because of differing views and backgrounds. The group processing gave members the opportunity to learn about other group members as well as to hear new perspectives and reactions. At times, the students would hear other members' opinions and rethink their own. Also, by working together in a different environment, counseling students in a pre-practicum service-learning program have been able to network with other counselors to foster their professional development (Jett & Delgado-Romero, 2009). While working in the Costa Rican community, participants were able to see other students' approaches to helping and communicating.

### **Thoughts about Emerging Data**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of graduate counseling students while studying abroad and the perceived impact on them as counseling students. The existing literature on this topic is scarce, suggesting a need for this study. After reviewing the research on strategies for multicultural learning, I expected the themes would indicate the students' perceived impact of experiential learning, cultural immersion, and personal growth. Because I used grounded theory methods to evaluate my data, I bracketed my initial ideas and theories to discover what materialized from the data (Charmaz, 2006). Three individual themes

emerged from the data after reading, observing, and listening to the voices of the participants. The themes overlap and are closely related, however they are all connected because they relate to how the participants learned through the study abroad experiences.

When students engage in a study abroad program, different types of learning occur. Students must be open to new experiences in order for this learning to take place. They must readily participate in activities, visit the sites, and engage themselves in the learning process. If these conditions are met, the students will learn through the study abroad experience.

Students perceived many factors in this study to impact their learning during the study abroad experience. Students reported they learned through discomfort, adaptation, and recognition of diversity. Interestingly, students also reported that they learned from other group members while studying abroad. The learning that occurred through the group process was unique to this study abroad situation where the group members were constantly engaged with one another. Also, the group was able to gain respect for the host country and way of life, furthering their learning about their own values and practices.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations to this study. First, the participants were all students in the same program and who currently live in the same area. Second, participants were aware of my observations throughout the study. During the trip I grew close to them and was invariably a part of the group experience. Because of this closeness, the participant answers and my responses might have been influenced by these factors. Additionally, the fact that the journals used for the study were turned in to the professor for a grade may have influenced their responses. The students had different experiences with the professor, both positive and negative. Because the journal entries were submitted to the professor at different points during the trip, their entries

may reflect what they perceived as the best answer for a passing grade. Some participants raised this topic at various points of my data collection by stating that certain thoughts were left out because of the possibility of a lower grade.

Another limitation of the study was the strong connection between group members. Although most participants did not know each other before the trip, they became close to one another during the program. There were four students per dormitory: a master's-level students in two dorms, and the doctoral students in another. This seemed to cause a divide within the group, and only one of the groups attended the focus group. Because of the various group dynamics, the experiences of the focus group may have differed from the other group.

### **Implications for Practice**

The diversity in our country is growing; therefore, there is a dire need for counselors to be multiculturally competent. Study abroad courses give students the opportunity to learn by experiential multicultural education (McDowell et al., 2012). Counselor educators can use study abroad opportunities to further the learning in this area or even replicate these activities in their own community. Students feel a need to have more meaningful encounters with diverse groups to fully develop their multiculturally effective skills as counselors (Diaz-Lazaro et al., 2001).

Educators must pay careful attention to the details and scheduling of the trips by keeping in mind the type of audience they are serving. The activities, guest lectures, and excursions can be the determinant of whether the program is a success in the eyes of the student (McCallon & Homes, 2010). Program directors must choose activities that allow students to be exposed to the culture while tailoring them to the student's interests. Cross-cultural contact has proven to make a strong impact on students (Diaz-Lazaro et al., 2001).

The participants in the study learned a great deal about diversity by processing as a group. A safe environment for students to process is needed in order for these revelations to occur. By having real and honest discussions, students were able to express their true thoughts and experienced insight at a more profound level.

Studying abroad spawned a tremendous amount of personal growth in the participants. The students reported that learned about themselves because of the different activities, processing, and self-reflection activities. Counselor educators should understand this process and cultivate these experiences in the classroom. Participants left their one-week of study abroad with a new understanding of themselves that will help them in their professional and personal life.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study was done with one group of students from the same university. More research of counselors-in-training who study abroad because it appears to impact them greatly and it is becoming more common. The activities they experienced on this trip were limited because it was a short-term program. Future research might examine which activities provide a deeper learning experience for students in different programs. Do counselors-in-training learn more from a study abroad course than they do in a multicultural course at their home campus? What length of time is best for students to learn? What activities are most helpful to counseling students?

More research is needed to compare the different variables such as length of stay, living arrangements, and activities. Another area for exploration is the impact of different countries. Does the same learning occur in all countries? What countries provide deeper learning experiences? Does the level of globalization have an impact on cultural education?

## **Summary and Conclusion**

This study was intended to explore the experiences of counseling students who studied abroad. I wanted to determine what the participants perceived as impactful from the study abroad program. Also, I wanted to discover the perceived impact of a study abroad course on students' understanding of multiculturalism and their development as counselors. The majority of the findings were consistent with previous literature, although some themes discovered in this study have not been discussed in depth.

Current literature is consistent with learning and managing discomfort, lessons in adaptability, becoming aware of diversity, and the group process that took place in this study. Studying abroad provides a unique learning environment where students experience a wide range of emotions and learn from them.

The respect for country and way of life expressed by participants was not found in the literature. The participants came out of the study abroad program with a new view of the Costa Rican culture and of themselves. They learned from the people they encountered and realized that a more simple way of life is a positive.

I anticipate more research in the area of study abroad for counselors-in-training. This will hopefully motivate further analysis about the intense learning that can occur for counselors and emerging counselors during a short-term study abroad program. Studying different cultures is important for all counselors and developing the best methods to learn about various cultures is imperative.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER



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Research Compliance Officer  
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**Human Subjects Protection Program** **Institutional Review Board**

APPROVAL DATE: July 25, 2013  
TO: Ms. Kate Rodriguez  
CC: Dr. Robert Smith / Dr. Michelle Hollenbaugh  
FROM: Office of Research Compliance  
Institutional Review Board  
SUBJECT: Initial Approval

Protocol Number: 72-13  
Title: Study abroad in Costa Rica: A qualitative study of graduate students' impactful experiences  
Review Category: Expedited  
Expiration Date: July 25, 2014

**Approval determination was based on the following Code of Federal Regulations:**

Eligible for Expedited Approval (45 CFR 46.110): Identification of the subjects or their responses (or the remaining procedures involving identification of subjects or their responses) will NOT reasonably place them at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the their financial standing, employability, insurability, reputation, or be stigmatizing, unless reasonable and appropriate protections will be implemented so that risks related to invasion of privacy and breach of confidentiality are no greater than minimal.

Criteria for Approval has been met (45 CFR 46.111) - The criteria for approval listed in 45 CFR 46.111 have been met (or if previously met, have not changed).

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

**Provisions:**  
**Comments:**

This research project has been approved. As principal investigator, you assume the following responsibilities:

1. Informed Consent: Information must be presented to enable persons to voluntarily decide whether or not to participate in the research project unless otherwise waived.
2. Amendments: Changes to the protocol must be requested by submitting an Amendment Application to the Research Compliance Office for review. The Amendment must be approved by the IRB before being implemented.
3. Continuing Review: The protocol must be renewed each year in order to continue with the research project. A Continuing Review Application, along with required documents must be submitted 45 days

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

## **CONSENT FORM**

### Study abroad in Costa Rica: Graduate students' lived experiences

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research study. If you decide to participate in this study, this form will also be used to record your consent.

You have been asked to participate in a research project studying experiences that contribute to multicultural awareness in students who participate in a course that includes service learning and cultural immersion in Costa Rica. The purpose of this study is to better understand the multicultural awareness and knowledge that takes place during study abroad programs for counseling graduate students. You were selected to be a possible participant because you are registered in the multicultural course taking place in Costa Rica.

#### **What will I be asked to do?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to turn in a demographic sheet and your journal, and participate in an individual interview and a focus group. The principal investigator will be observing participants during the study abroad program in Costa Rica. Observations and quotes from participants will be used for the study. The interviews and focus group will be conducted by the principal researcher. If you agree to participate, the researcher will contact you to set up a time that is mutually convenient to conduct the interview. Once the interview has been transcribed, you will be sent an electronic copy so that you can make any corrections or clarification you wish to make. Once initial themes have been identified by the researcher, you will be contacted to participate in a focus group. The study abroad course will last 7 days and interviews will be conducted in the two weeks that follow. Each interview and focus group will last approximately one hour.

Your participation will be audio recorded.

#### **What are the risks involved in this study?**

The risks associated in this study are minimal, and are not greater than risks ordinarily encountered in daily life.

#### **What are the possible benefits of this study?**

The possible benefits of participation include the opportunity to have their voices represented pertaining to the study abroad experience. Also, it is possible for the participants to have a sense of elevated awareness regarding their international experiences. If the study abroad experience positively impacted their multicultural awareness, they may obtain the ability to relate to a wider variety of clients, being able to expand their clientele

#### **Do I have to participate?**

No. Your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without your current or future relations with Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.

**Who will know about my participation in this research study?**

This study is confidential and all records will be kept private. No personal identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only Kate Rodriguez will have access to the data.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be audio recorded. Any audio recordings will be stored securely and only Kate Rodriguez will have access to the recordings. Any recordings will be kept for one year and then erased.

**Whom do I contact with questions about the research?**

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Kate Rodriguez, M.S., 361-442-8812, [Rodriguez.kate@gmail.com](mailto:Rodriguez.kate@gmail.com).

**Whom do I contact about my rights as a research participant?**

This research study has been reviewed by the Research Compliance Office and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact Erin Sherman, Research Compliance Officer, at (361) 825-2497 or [erin.sherman@tamucc.edu](mailto:erin.sherman@tamucc.edu)

APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC FORM

Demographic Information Form

**Instructions:** Please provide a response for each of the following questions:

1. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

2. What is your sex?

Female  Male

3. What is your marital status?

Single  Married  Separated  Divorced  Widowed

5. With which racial or ethnic category do you identify?

African American  Asian/Pacific Islander  Caucasian  Latino

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Have you ever traveled out of the country? Yes  No  If so, what countries have you visited?

\_\_\_\_\_

7. How many semester hours do you currently have in the counseling program ?

\_\_\_\_\_

8. Have you taken a multicultural counseling course? Yes  No



## APPENDIX D: COURSE SYLLABUS

# **Texas A&M University- Corpus Christi**

## **CNEP 5390 Professional Seminar**

### **Diversity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A Multicultural Immersion Experience**

#### **Summer Session II**

**July 29, 2013 – August 5, 2013**

**Professor:** Lisa A. Wines, Ph.D., CSC, LPC-Intern

**Office:** ECDC 223

**Office Hours on Mondays and Wednesdays:** 3:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

**Classroom:** Location in Costa Rica

**Date/Time:** Monday July 29, 2013 – Monday August 5, 2013

**Phone:** 361-825-2469

**Email:** [lisa.wines@tamucc.edu](mailto:lisa.wines@tamucc.edu)

#### **I. Course Description**

This course is a study abroad cultural immersion experience designed to familiarize students with diversity across the globe. Emphasis of this course is on intrinsic awareness and personal reflection regarding multiculturalism in counseling, and the conceptualization and experiential activities relative to Costa Rican populations. Stronger emphasis is placed on the culture and social change in Costa Rica- reflective of mental, physical, and regional characteristics; history, economy government, and politics; education, religion, family; and leisure activities of this population. This population is examined in relation to the larger global community.

#### **II. Course Rationale**

Participants in the study abroad cultural immersion program will be exposed to the Costa Rican population through experiential activities such as visiting a school and university, a psychiatric hospital, a church, participating in a cultural event, and taking a nature and/or farm tour. Students will integrate their current knowledge of the Costa Rican population and develop their various limitations through course reading, completion of course assignments, interactions with other course participants and individuals of the Costa Rican population, and offer participation in an end of course research study. This course will assist participants in improving their counseling

effectiveness by developing appropriate attitudes, knowledge, and self-understanding of diversity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **III. State Adopted Proficiencies for Counselors covered in this class are the following:**

#### **Learner-Centered Knowledge:**

1. Counseling students understand human developmental patterns and use this knowledge base to create developmentally appropriate guidance and counseling programs.
2. Counseling students understand environmental, social, and cultural factors that affect learners' development and the relevance of those factors to guidance and counseling programs.

#### **Learner-Centered Process:**

3. Counseling students learn to create an environment that supports and encourages exploring options, sharing new ideas, and innovative problem solving.

#### **Learner-Centered Guidance Curriculum:**

4. Counseling students learn to create and utilize a guidance curriculum that values the diversity of others, builds self-confidence, teaches decision-making and problem-solving skills, effective communication, responsible behavior, and increases motivation to achieve.

#### **Learner-Centered Planning:**

5. Counseling students demonstrate multicultural competencies in relation to diversity, equity, and opportunity in student learning and development and advocates for a school environment in which diversity is acknowledged and respected, resulting in positive interactions across cultures; **(CACREP F1)**

#### **Learner-Centered Professional Development:**

6. Counseling diverse groups of students learn self-assessment and self-evaluation.

#### **Equity in Excellence for All Learners:**

7. Counseling students learn multicultural sensitivity.
8. Counseling students learn to respect all learners, be sensitive to their needs, and to encourage them to use all their skills and talents.

#### **Learner-Centered Communication:**

9. Counseling students learn active listening skills, open communication, empathic responding, caring confrontation, and conflict resolution.

### **IV. TExES Competencies Covered in this Course**

**Competency 001:** Knowledge of human development in creating a counseling environment that fosters a sense of empowerment and self-determination.

**Competency 002:** Knowledge of a wide range of social, cultural, language, and economic factors in the home, the community, and school that affect clients' personal growth and success.

**Competency 003:** Multicultural respect, knowledge about respecting beliefs and values of others.

**Competency 006:** Knowledge of a variety of strategies to establish rapport and to develop a trusting relationship.

## V. Course Objectives/Learning Outcomes:

*PLEASE NOTE: The standards shown in bold type are the targeted course objectives that will be assessed throughout the semester.*

### CORE

1. **CACREP Standard II-G-2-a: Multicultural and pluralistic trends including characteristics and concerns between and within diverse groups nationally, and internationally.**
2. **CACREP Standard II-G-2-b: Attitudes, beliefs, understandings, and acculturative experiences, including specific experiential learning activities designed to foster students' understanding of self and culturally diverse clients.**
3. **CACREP Standard II-G-2-d: Individual, couple, family, group, and community strategies for working with and advocating for diverse populations, including multicultural competencies.**
4. **CACREP Standard II-G-2-e: Counselors' roles in developing cultural self-awareness, promoting cultural social justice, advocacy and conflict resolution, and other culturally supported behaviors that promote optimal wellness and growth of the human spirit, mind, or body.**
5. **CACREP Standard II-G-2-f: Counselors' roles in eliminating biases, prejudices, and processes of intentional and unintentional oppression and discrimination.**

### CLINICAL MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELING

6. **CACREP Standard III-D-2: Applies multicultural competencies to clinical mental health counseling involving case conceptualization, diagnosis, treatment, referral, and prevention of mental and emotional disorders.**

**7. CACREP Standard III-E-1: Understands how living in a multicultural society affects clients who are seeking clinical mental health counseling services.**

**8. CACREP Standard III-E-2: Understands the effects of racism, discrimination, sexism, power, privilege, and oppression on one's own life and career and those of the client.**

**9. CACREP Standard III-E-5: Understands the implications of concepts such as internalized oppression and institutional racism, as well as the historical and current political climate regarding immigration, poverty, and welfare.**

#### **MARRIAGE, COUPLE, AND FAMILY COUNSELING**

11. CACREP Standard III-E-1: Understands how living in a multicultural society affects couples and families.

**12. CACREP Standard III-E-4. Understands the effects of racism, discrimination, sexism, power, privilege, and oppression on one's own life and that of the client(s).**

13. CACREP Standard III-E-5: Understands the effect of local, state, and national policies, programs, and services on diverse family systems.

#### **SCHOOL COUNSELING**

**14. CACREP Standard III-D-1: Demonstrates self-awareness, sensitivity to others, and the skills needed to relate to diverse individuals, groups, and classrooms.**

**15. CACREP Standard III-E-1: Understands the cultural, ethical, economic, legal, and political issues surrounding diversity, equity, and excellence in terms of student learning.**

16. CACREP Standard III-E-4. Understands multicultural counseling issues, as well as the impact of ability levels, stereotyping, family, socioeconomic status, gender, and sexual identity, and their effects on student achievement.

17. CACREP Standard III-F-1. Demonstrates multicultural competencies in relation to diversity, equity, and opportunity in student learning and development.

#### ***The following Student Learning Outcomes will be met in this course:***

1. Students will demonstrate their knowledge of multicultural and pluralistic trends including characteristics among diverse groups internationally as evidenced by rated rubrics for Participation in Study Abroad Program, and the Application of the Multicultural Counseling Competencies/American Counseling Association.

2. Students will express their attitudes, beliefs, understandings, and acculturative experiences, including specific experiential learning activities designed to foster students' understanding of self and culturally diverse clients as evidenced by rated rubrics for the Participation in Study Abroad Program, Journals, Personal Integration of Costa Rican Culture papers and Doctoral Student Evaluation.

3. Students will understand counselors' roles in developing cultural self-awareness, eliminating biases, prejudices, and processes of intentional and unintentional oppression and discrimination, promoting cultural social justice, advocacy and conflict resolution, and other culturally supported behaviors that promote optimal wellness and growth of the human spirit, mind, or body as evidenced by rated rubrics for Participation in Study Abroad Program, Personal Evaluation of Multicultural Competencies and American Counseling Association Code of Ethics, Personal Integration of Costa Rican Culture Papers, and Journal.

4. Students will demonstrate their knowledge of how living in a multicultural society affects clients who are seeking clinical mental health counseling services and the effects of racism, discrimination, sexism, power, privilege, and oppression on one's own life and career and those of the client as evidenced by rated rubrics for Participation in Study Abroad Program and Personal Integration of Costa Rican Culture.

5. Students will demonstrate their knowledge of the implications of concepts such as internalized oppression and institutional racism, as well as the historical and current political climate regarding immigration, poverty, and welfare as evidenced by rated rubrics for the Participation in Study Abroad Program, Journal, and Personal Integration of Costa Rican Culture Paper.

6. Students will demonstrate self-awareness, sensitivity to others, and the skills needed to relate to diverse individuals, groups, and classrooms as evidenced by rated rubrics for the Participation in Study Abroad Program, Application of the Multicultural Counseling Competencies/ American Counseling Association, Journal, and Personal Integration of Costa Rican Culture.

7. Students will demonstrate their knowledge of cultural, ethical, economic, legal, and political issues surrounding diversity, equity, and excellence in terms of student learning as evidenced by rated rubrics for the Participation in Study Abroad Program, Journal, and Personal Integration of Costa Rican Culture.

## **VI. Course Topics**

Major topics to be covered include: Cultural self-awareness, the Costa Rican culture, and multicultural counseling competencies. Additional topics are described below in the course schedule.

## **VII. Instructional Methods and Activities**

Instruction will be implemented through a travel and study abroad program. Activities will include visiting a school and university, a psychiatric hospital, a church, participating in a cultural event, and taking a nature and/or farm tour. The format to deliver instruction is supplemented through small and large group discussions within a classroom setting, participation of daily activities, and completion of course assignments. Given the focus on experiential activities, students will be expected to engage in discussion with faculty, individuals from the Costa Rican population, with other masters and doctoral level students from our campus and other A&M campuses, and a self-reflective process.

## **VIII. Evaluation and Grade Assignment**

**MEANS OF ASSESSMENT:**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Percentage of Final Grade</b>
Participation, Professionalism, and Research in Study Abroad Program	<b>1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6,7, 8</b>	<b>20 points</b>
Personal Integration Paper	<b>2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7</b>	<b>20 points</b>
Journal	<b>2, 3, 5, 6, 7</b>	<b>15 points</b>
Personal Evaluation of Multicultural Competencies and American Counseling Association (COE's)	<b>1, 3, 6</b>	<b>30 points</b>
Doctoral Student Evaluation- Given by Doc Student	<b>2</b>	<b>10 points</b>
Personal Doctoral Evaluation- Given by Masters Stu.	<b>2</b>	<b>05 points</b>

**Participation and Professionalism in Study Abroad Program (20 pts.)**

Students are expected to attend and remain for all meetings before, during, and after the Costa Rica trip. Daily attendance will be taken. Students should participate and engage in discussions during class. Discussions should be constructive, honest, well thought of, and informed (based on completed class readings). Participation includes, but is not limited to, participation in all daily, experiential, and research activities, class assignments and submission of work, small and large group discussions, and group exercises. Participation is also measured by punctuality to class. It should be noted that attendance and punctuality is expected and will be excused only under special circumstances as determined by the instructor of record. Given that true learning takes place in discussion and interaction with others where students express and articulate their ideas, participation is a crucial aspect of this course.

The time designated as *classroom time* will be utilized by discussing the chapters in the book (instructor or doctoral student led), focusing on assignments, working with their colleagues, and preparing for and reflecting on site visits.

Professionalism is demonstrated through the students' ability to move within the structure of the program with no appearance and evidence of resistance. Arriving on time to scheduled activities and making sound behavioral judgments (e.g. disposition, language, safety of self and others), when not in the presence of faculty, is expected. Students should have high levels of cooperation and collaboration exuded when working with others, and should give strong consideration to their attire and outward appearance.

Following is an excerpt from the Student Competency Evaluation Document in the masters student handbook. Students are expected to exhibit

- an attitude that respects individual uniqueness and potential growth and development of all individuals;
- personal stability as well as professional and ethical behaviors according to the ACA Code of Ethics and Texas law;
- an awareness of, knowledge about, and skills in working with diverse populations in a pluralistic society;
- a productive and cooperative working relationships that display motivation, independence, maturity, adaptability, and respect for others;
- a commitment to continuing personal and professional growth characterized both by participation in experiential and diverse learning opportunities and professional organizations that promote counselor identity

### **Personal Integration of Costa Rican Culture (20 pts.)**

Students will write a reflective paper that compares your current culture to that of the Costa Rican culture. Your discussion should be honest, and reflect an analysis of how your culture shares common beliefs or practices. Conversely, this paper should outline differences in your culture when compared to Costa Rican culture. The purpose of this exercise is to have you begin thinking about the cultural truths that may align you more with those who appear vastly different. Additionally, it helps you understand and define your own culture. Using your textbook, please select six of the twelve available chapters to use as a reference point. It is recommended that you use experiences obtained as examples of or justifications for your perspective and response on this assignment. This assignment should be between 5-10 pages. **This assignment is due on August 8, 2013.**

### **Journal Reflections (15 pts.)**

This assignment requires students to keep a “daily” personal journal. This journal should be kept electronically in one Microsoft Word document. Journal writing should begin on the first day of travel when we arrive in Costa Rica on July 29, 2013, **and is due on August 8, 2013.** While journals should be personal reflections of each day’s events, it is expected that each entry includes comments about the following:

1. Describe the location visited. This description is to include the name of the facility, and as much information as you can gather about the physical location, history, the purpose of the facility and how it functions on a day-to-day basis. How you conceptualized and experience the facility will be unique to you. Discuss your positive and negative reactions. Did you enjoy the visit? Why or why not? Were there any emotions experienced at this site?
2. Did the visit provide a learning experience for you? Explain your response. Discuss the new information learned and how this information will benefit you professionally. Discuss how the visit broadened, enhanced, clarified, or challenged ideas you may have had about issues, people, or situations prior to the visit.
3. Conclude your daily journal entry with a discussion of things you learned about the

Costa Rican/Hispanic population that you believe will benefit and impact how you work with or counsel members of this culture.

4. The last journal entry (August 5, 2013) should summarize the educational experience and personal benefit of participating in this international study experience. Discuss how an international study abroad experience can be an effective way to open students' mind to the world awakening their interest in and knowledge of other diverse cultures.

### **Personal Evaluation of ACA Ethical Code (15 pts.)**

Students are to read the following sections of the ACA codes of ethics: **A)** Counseling Relation [A.2.c, A.6.a], **B)** Confidentiality, Privileged Communication, and Privacy [B.1.a], **C)** Professional Responsibility [C.5], **E)** Evaluation and Assessment [E.5.b., E.5.c, E.8], **F)** Supervision and Training [F.2.b, F.6.b, F.11.a, F.11.b, F.11.c], **G)** Research [G.1.g]. Once these sections have been read, students should document and be prepared to discuss each section and their current or limited understanding of each on the last class day in Costa Rica. Students should work to close the gaps of their knowledge and skills pertaining to multiculturalism and diversity, and if needed, be able to articulate their personal growth and development.

Students then should read and refer to the glossary. Please describe the similarities and differences in the following terms and what it means to you as a counselor-in-training to be the following:

1. Multicultural/Diversity Competence and Multicultural/Diversity Counseling
2. Culture/Diversity

### **Personal Evaluation of AMCD Multicultural Competencies (15 pts.)**

This assignment requires students to critically evaluate the Multicultural Competencies. Prior to our departure, you should spend some time critically evaluating where you currently stand in relationship to the competencies. The multicultural competencies are created in three sections: 1) Counselor Awareness of Own Cultural Values and Biases, 2) Counselor Awareness of Client's Worldview, and 3) Culturally Appropriate Intervention Strategies. Under those sections are the following sub-sections: A) Attitudes and Beliefs, B) Knowledge, and C) Skills. Please read each section and respond to your current understanding of each sub-section.

At the end of the trip, add a header under each sub-section titled "Personal Growth and Development". This section will address how being immersed into Costa Rican culture has changed, impacted, or influenced your previous understanding of each section. **This assignment is due on August 8, 2013.**

### **Doctoral Student Evaluation (10 pts.)**

As a part of the doctoral student course expectations (CNEP 6355), doctoral students are responsible for evaluating your performance during the site visits at the high school and special needs school. The relationship between you and your assigned doctoral student is key and necessary for everyone's development throughout this study abroad program. The doctoral student will submit their evaluation to me at the end of the trip to Costa Rica and will serve as 10% of your overall grade.

### Personal Doctoral Evaluation (05 pts.)

As a part of the courses expectations, you will provide feedback to your assigned doctoral student in the area of leadership, pedagogy, and diversity.

### IX. Course Daily Schedule and Policies

DATE	Topic and Activities <u>Due</u>	ASSIGNED READINGS
7/29/2013	Arrival to Costa Rica; Participation and Professionalism; Journal Reflection Personal Integration; Evaluations of Multicultural and ACA Competencies; See Travel and Activity Schedule	Begin Reading Chapter 1 and 2
7/30/2013	<b>Doctoral Student Teachers</b> Participation and Professionalism; Journal Reflection; Personal Integration; Evaluations of Multicultural and ACA Competencies; See Travel and Activity Schedule	Chapter 1- The Land of People Chapter 2- History
7/31/2013	<b>Doctoral Student Teachers</b> Participation and Professionalism; Journal Reflection; Personal Integration; Evaluations of Multicultural and ACA Competencies; See Travel and Activity Schedule	Chapter 3- Economy Chapter 4- Government/Politics
8/1/2013	<b>Doctoral Student Teachers</b> Participation and Professionalism; Journal Reflection; Personal Integration; Evaluations of Multicultural and ACA Competencies; See Travel and Activity Schedule	Chapter 5- Class and Ethnicity Chapter 6- Community
8/2/2013	<b>Doctoral Student Teachers</b> Participation and Professionalism; Journal Reflection; Personal Integration; Evaluations of Multicultural and ACA Competencies; See Travel and Activity Schedule	Chapter 7- Housing, Health, and Everyday Living Chapter 8- The Family
8/3/2013	<b>Doctoral Student Teachers</b> Participation and Professionalism; Journal Reflection; Personal Integration; Evaluations of Multicultural and ACA Competencies; See Travel and Activity Schedule	Chapter 9- Education Chapter 11- Leisure
8/4/2013	<b>Doctoral Student Teachers</b> <b>Discuss ACA Review of COE</b> Participation and Professionalism; Journal Reflection; Personal	Chapter 10- Religion Chapter 12- Continuity and Change

	Integration; Evaluations of Multicultural and ACA Competencies; See Travel and Activity Schedule	
8/5/2013	<b>RETURN FROM COSTA RICA</b> Participation and Professionalism; Journal Reflection; Personal Integration; Evaluations of Multicultural and ACA Competencies; See Travel and Activity Schedule	Review of All Chapter Readings
8/8/2013	<b>All Assignments are Due (Journal Reflections, Personal Integration Paper, Research Interviews- 4 Students in ECDC 223</b>	Review of All Chapter Readings
TBA	Research Interviews	

All assignments should be typed. No handwritten work will be accepted. No late work will be accepted.

Attendance and punctuality are mandatory and the responsibility of the student. More than one absence will result in the lowering of a letter grade. More than 3 lapses in punctuality will be equivalent to an absence. Any excused absence is left to the discretion of the instructor.

**All cell phones must be turned off and remain off during class.**

Syllabus Statement on Disabilities:

Students with disabilities, including learning disabilities, who wish to request accommodations in this class should notify the Disability Services Office early in the semester so that the appropriate arrangements may be made.

Syllabus Disclaimer:

While the provisions of this syllabus are as accurate and complete as possible, the instructor reserves the right to change any provisions herein, with notice if circumstances so warrant. Every effort will be made to keep students advised of such changes and information about such changes will be available at all times from the instructor. It is the responsibility of each student to know what changes, if any, have been made to the provisions of this syllabus and to successfully complete the requirements of this course. Questions regarding information on the syllabus and course requirements need to be addressed by students when the syllabus is received.

	Tuesday July 30, 13	Wednesday July 31, 13	Thursday Aug 1, 13	Friday Aug 2, 13	Saturday Aug 3, 13	Sunday Aug 4, 13	Monday Aug 5, 13	
7AM-8AM	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	
8AM-9AM	Orientation to Soltis Center	Special Needs School	Visit Clinic	High School	Visit Organic Farm	Attend Church Service (Optional)	Pack/Prep Departure	
9AM-11AM	Visit to the Store		Class Time					High School
11AM-12PM								
12PM-1PM	Lunch	Packed Lunch	Packed Lunch	Lunch	To La Fortuna (Lunch) Hike Arenal Bolcano & Baldi Hot Springs (Dinner)	Packed Lunch		
1PM-2PM	Nature Hike	Special Needs School	High School	High School		Class time		
2PM-3PM								
3PM-4PM	Class Time	Class Time						
5PM-6PM		Dinner		Dinner		Dinner		
6PM-7PM	Dinner	Class Time	Dinner			Extra time for work		
7PM-8PM	Extra time for work		Extra time for work					
8PM-9PM			Extra time for work					

**X. Textbook(s)**

Biesanz, M.H., Biesanz, R., and Biesanz, K.Z. (1999). *The Ticos: Cultural and Social Change in Costa Rica*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

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## **XII. Grade Appeals\***

As stated in University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, a student who believes that he or she has not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in the class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course. The burden of proof is upon the student to demonstrate the appropriateness of the appeal. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details, including the responsibilities of the parties involved in the process and the number of days allowed for completing the steps in the process, see University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, and University Procedure 13.02.99.C2.01, Student

Grade Appeal Procedures. These documents are accessible through the University Rules

Web site at [http://www.tamucc.edu/provost/university\\_rules/index.html](http://www.tamucc.edu/provost/university_rules/index.html). For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Office of Student Affairs.

## **XIII. Disabilities Accommodations\***

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please call or visit Disability Services at (361) 825-5816 in Driftwood 101.

If you are a returning veteran and are experiencing cognitive and/or physical access issues in the classroom or on campus, please contact the Disability Services office for assistance at (361) 825-5816.

## **COURSE RUBRICS AVAILABLE DURING COURSE**

### **TEMPLATE**

In small groups, students will choose a cultural group and, in detail, utilize the MCC to demonstrate some fundamental aspects counselors should be aware of when working with this group.

\_\_\_ Completed presentation within 15 – 20 minutes **(0-10 pts.)**

\_\_\_ Provided handouts for each member of the class including instructor **(0-2 pts.)**

\_\_\_ Provided background and overview of Group or Issue **(0-2 pts.)**

\_\_\_ Discussed relevance to counselors and provided suggestions for counselors working with this specific population/issue **(0-2 pts.)**

\_\_\_ Provided journal article(s) for further information **(0-2 pts.)**

\_\_\_ Provided other helpful resources for working with this specific population/issue **(0-2 pts.)**

\_\_\_ Submitted an evaluation of other team members. This evaluation is based on your perceptions of the contribution of each group member. Please use the grading policy provided to determine each member's contribution. **(0-5 pts.)**

**Total Score:** \_\_\_

**Other Rubrics Available on Blackboard**

## TAMUCC Online Student Evaluations

A – Strongly Disagree

B – Disagree

C – Neutral

D – Agree

E – Strongly Agree

### System Questions

1. Course expectations/learning outcomes were clearly communicated at the beginning of the course.
2. The course examinations were aligned with the content of the course.
3. My instructor seemed to be very knowledgeable about the subject matter.
4. My instructor seemed to present the course material in an organized manner.
5. Whenever possible, my instructor taught the course in a way that stimulated my critical thinking.
6. Whenever possible, my instructor utilized a student-centered approach in teaching this course.
7. Whenever possible, my instructor provided real-world examples.
8. My instructor created a classroom atmosphere that was productive/conducive to learning.
9. The instructor was enthusiastic about the subject matter of the course.
10. My instructor set high standards that challenged me in the course.
11. By providing helpful feedback on assignments/tests, my instructor encouraged me to actively participate in the learning process.
12. My instructor encouraged all students to take advantage of additional assistance outside the classroom (office hours, e-mail, etc.).
13. My instructor demonstrated respect for individual differences (for example gender, race, religion, etc.).
14. I perceive that my knowledge/skills in this content field have improved as a result of this course.
15. I would take another course with this instructor, if possible, or recommend this instructor to other students.
16. I recommend this instructor for a teaching excellence award.

## General Questions

1. The course objectives were clear.
2. The course content was provided in a clear, orderly and logical manner.
3. Required course activities and reading assignments were clearly stated.
4. The course content provided the means to meet the course objectives.
5. Links in the course were helpful in understanding the course content.
6. The chats and other communication tools facilitated my learning.
7. Course assignments and online tests were graded according to stated course objectives and/or rubrics.
8. Course assignments and online tests were returned in a reasonable amount of time.
9. The instructor encouraged online participation and questions.
10. The instructor responded promptly to inquiries.
11. The instructor provided adequate feedback regarding completed course assignments.

## Blackboard specific questions, not to be tabulated into the Instructor's overall score

1. The site map was easily negotiated.
2. I was able to connect to the class easily.
3. The chats and other communication tools were easy to use.
4. The technology in the course was user-friendly.
5. Website problems were quickly resolved.
6. Please comment on what you liked the most about the course. Give examples.
7. Please comment on what you would change about the course. Give examples.

## APPENDIX E: JOURNAL PROMPTS

**Counselor Education Study Abroad Programs: The significance of graduate student's experiences and their candid reflections of those experiences**

**Journal Reflection Prompts**

1. Describe the location visited. The description is to include the name of the facility and as much information as you can gather about the physical location, history, the purpose of the facility and how it functions on a day to day basis. How you conceptualized and experience the facility will be unique to you. Discuss your positive and negative reactions. What did you enjoy or not like about the visit? Describe any emotions you experienced at the site.
2. Did the visit provide a learning experience for you? Explain your response. Discuss the new information learned and how this information will benefit you professionally. Discuss how the visit broadened, enhanced, clarified or challenged ideas you may have had about issues, people, or situations prior to the visit.
3. Conclude your daily journal entry with a discussion of things you learned about the Costa Rican population that you believe will benefit and impact how you work with or counsel members of different cultures.
4. DOCTORAL STUDENTS ONLY: How did the daily activities facilitate your leaning as a future counselor educator? What did you learn about working with master's students and about leadership in the counselor education field?

For the last entry respond to the following:

1. Summarize the educational and personal benefits provided from participation in this international study experience.
2. Discuss how an international study experience can be an effective way to open students' mind to the world awakening their interest in and knowledge of other cultures (respond to international experiences in general).

## APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## Interview Questions

What was it like for you to participate in the study abroad course?

How was taking a course abroad different from taking a course at the home campus?

How has the study abroad experience impacted you professionally?

How has the study abroad experience impacted you personally?

What was most helpful to you as a counselor-in-training?

Tell me about anything that was not helpful to you.

## APPENDIX F: FOCUS GROUP PROMPTS

## Focus Group Prompts

What were the most common positive feelings you experienced?

What were the some of the negative feelings and experiences?

How was the group helpful while studying abroad?

Did you experience personal growth, and if so, what are some examples?

What helped you during times of distress?

What did you learn from the Costa Ricans?

What modes of learning were most helpful?

Did you feel prepared? Explain.

What was it like to get out of your comfort zone?

What could help with wellness for future students abroad?