

# MODELING GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP AS A LEARNING PROCESS

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## ABSTRACT

In an era of increasing globalization, Millennials are venturing abroad in record numbers. This paper is the result of a focus group conducted with students in Syracuse University's Public Diplomacy Program. It explores the impact of international experience on students' worldview and conceptualizations of citizenship. The end of the paper presents a model of citizenship as a learning process. It delves into notions of personal responsibility mobilized by new life experiences, growing awareness of self, others, critical reflection, and evolving identity. It provides some insight into the way graduate students of public diplomacy conceive of themselves and their role in the world.

## BACKGROUND

Richard Slimbach praises the Millennial Generation for its seriousness in making a difference in the world. In addition to the expansion of global travel and tourism, he discusses the "increased movement of students across borders to study, to serve, and to teach."<sup>1</sup> Thomas Friedman agrees, noting that "college students today are not only going abroad to study in record numbers, but they are also going abroad to build homes for the poor in El Salvador in record numbers or volunteering at AIDS clinics in record numbers ... they are rolling up their sleeves and diving in deeper than ever."<sup>2</sup> *Open Doors 2012*, an annual report published by the Institute of International Education (IIE), claims an all-time high of close to 274,000 Americans participated in a study abroad experience during the 2010-2011 academic year, representing 14 percent of undergraduates in U.S. universities who obtained a bachelor's degree. Whether Millennials are just adjusting to the times or making a conscious effort to make a difference in world, more young people now than ever before are going abroad, learning languages, committing themselves to service projects, and experiencing other cultures. What do students learn about themselves and others through this exchange? What changes in worldview do these overseas experiences engender? Do students re-imagine their role as citizens when they return home? This article outlines returning students' perceptions of their experiences and how they conceptualize their role as citizens in an ever-globalizing world.

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1 Richard Slimbach, *Becoming World Wise: A Guide to Global Learning* (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2010), 28.  
2 Thomas Friedman, "Generation Q," *New York Times*, October 10, 2007.

This project involved a focus group of students enrolled in Syracuse University's Public Diplomacy (PD) program. PD students complete a master of arts in international relations at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs and a master of science in public relations at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications. As a group, they tend to be highly open and communicative students who are academically and professionally interested and engaged in world affairs. All of the students who participated in the focus group have studied, lived, or worked abroad in some capacity.

PD students all desire careers dealing with some aspect of intercultural communications. According to the web site, the program was created to "address the growing importance of building positive relationships and mutual understanding across the world."<sup>3</sup> PD students are committed to finding ways to positively impact transnational flows of information and ideas. Given their median age of 25<sup>4</sup> and their diverse mix of international academic and professional experiences, PD students offer an ideal starting point for this project. This exercise sought out accomplished, articulate, and thoughtful participants who could debate and further define the meanings of global citizenship. The main assumption in selecting this population was that it would be difficult to imagine a more cosmopolitan group.

The second-year students who participated in this exercise were completing their final semester in Washington, D.C., interning in a variety of governmental and nongovernmental organizations and taking specialized coursework in public diplomacy at Syracuse University's Washington, D.C., academic center. The focus group was held on Tuesday evening, March 9, 2010, and 10 students were present. Three others who could not attend responded to questions by e-mail later that week. Ten of the overall 13 participants (including the three who responded electronically) were U.S. citizens; three represented minority groups (African-American, Asian-American, and Indian-American). The three international students hailed from Colombia, Bolivia, and Taiwan. All of the students questioned spent significant time living, studying, or working outside of their native countries. Four of the students were men. Most of the class came to the program with several years of professional experience. Their decision to focus on the combination of international relations and public relations underlines this cohort's extroversion and deep interest in communication among cultures.

The meeting was held at Syracuse University's Paul Greenberg House in Washington, D.C. The course instructor informed the students electronically about the focus group but provided no information about the content or objectives of the project. Presumably, the lack of information might have made some of the participants nervous, but all of them knew the moderator and author of this study quite well, namely as their academic advisor, and were merely curious about the nature of the meeting. The moderator informed the students that he would be asking a series of questions in an attempt to engage them in conversation, and that they should feel free to speak extemporaneously and express their thoughts and feelings candidly. Only at the end of the session did they learn more about the objectives of the focus group, which then had the additional benefit of generating further conversation.

The focus group method allowed the participants to discuss their beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions interactively. Students were able to hear their classmates' thoughts, discuss differences of opinion, forge commonalities with each other, and build a narrative. A range of questions was posed intermittently to the group, which served to spark dialogue.

Many of the questions had been prepared in advance of the session, in anticipation that the group might begin to discuss their abroad experiences. Given the free-flowing dialogue in this session, the focus group remained informal. A narrative emerged around various themes, particularly willingness to participate, new life experiences, awareness of self and others, and evolving identity.

To begin the conversation, the moderator asked the participants whether they considered themselves to be global citizens without first defining the term, because it unearths different emotions for different people. Most responded in the affirmative. Only one young woman in the group did not and said so up front. She was an active member of the U.S. Army and said she had only traveled abroad as a soldier. Unfortunately, the conversation did not lend itself to further interaction with her. It would have been instructive to learn more about her experiences and why she felt she was not a global citizen.

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3 "Director's Message," last modified 2011, <http://publicdiplomacy.syr.edu/html/deans.html>.

4 "Student Facts and Figures," last modified 2011, <http://publicdiplomacy.syr.edu/html/Students/studentfacts.html>.

## DESIRE TO PARTICIPATE

It became quite evident in speaking with the group of the overwhelming importance they placed on their overseas experiences to their individual understanding of their sense of citizenship. This starting point begged the question: “Why did you decide to study/live abroad?” The responses to this question varied from a desire for personal fulfillment to a thirst for various strands of knowledge. One student simply wanted to gain foreign language and cultural skills: “I wanted to learn French ... but I also wanted to see France ... to be inserted into the culture.” Another student tied in the desire to acquire a foreign language with the exoticism of personal adventure in a part of the world unknown to her: “I had never been abroad, and I wanted to experience it for myself.” Along these lines of desiring adventure, another student thought it would be “fun to go somewhere I had not seen before.”

Other students linked their decision to go abroad to their desire to study particular aspects of history or culture. “I had finished my major requirements and wanted the opportunity to learn about Italian history, culture, the Renaissance—something I would never have the same opportunity to study on campus.” Another student who wanted to learn more about the Holocaust was especially interesting, as she is German and felt a deep commitment to understand why “her people” behaved the way they did and to gain an appreciation for and potentially overcome any prejudices she might have felt once. Another student chose to study in Italy, because her father had studied there in college and her grandparents had emigrated from Italy. In other words, her decision was the result of a desire to explore her heritage.

A different answer emerged in speaking with the student from Colombia. He had a sort of “road not taken” response to this question: “I really wanted to run away and have different opportunities from all of my classmates in high school. I went to the most remote place that would take me, and that was upstate New York. I think at the same time I was seeking new opportunities and escaping perceived constraints.” He felt that in order to differentiate himself and to grow intellectually, he needed to remove himself entirely from his home country.

The group was also asked to divulge if anyone or anything influenced their decision to study abroad. Again the responses were varied. One student was pushed to study abroad by her parents because of a poisonous atmosphere at home: “I left home when I was 16 to live abroad on my own because of my personal circumstances at home, and my parents didn’t want me there to see it.” Another student answered in a more typical way, having been advised that study abroad would be good for her career: “My college guidance counselor and Spanish professor both urged me to go, telling me that it would make me more marketable for my career. At the time I was studying journalism.” One young man responded that his girlfriend at the time interested him in going abroad, presumably to accompany her: “My girlfriend really liked French movies, and I kind of already started to like French philosophers.”

Due to various internal and external motivating factors, this group of students eventually made willful decisions that led to a commitment to engage with the outside world. Once commitment is established, what happens next? Our discussion then led to the next step, participation.

## PARTICIPATION/NEW LIFE EXPERIENCES

The conversation then turned to what the students did once they arrived in their host countries and the ways that they participated in the local culture. The dissection of the responses to this question was challenging, as students participated in diverse ways, but general patterns emerged and can be categorized into popular culture, living arrangements, and politics. They also discussed how multiple sojourns and contextual factors can influence a student’s level of participation.

### Popular Culture

One of the students studied in Germany during the 2006 World Cup and developed a new appreciation for the culture surrounding soccer in Europe. Quite light-heartedly, she added, “German beer—every kind, every flavor—I soaked up German culture... literally.” Just to demonstrate the complexity of individual motivations and experiences, this response came from the same young woman who had decided to go to Germany to learn about the Holocaust. At one point during the discussion, she declared, “[I] love the Germans!” She had clearly found a way to better understand the modern German. Watching soccer and drinking beer has a place in cultural

integration and are important parts of host culture participation – especially in Germany. One young man articulated the importance of sports as a cultural element nicely by saying that “all over the world, you can walk into a little restaurant and tune into a soccer game and feel like you are a part of something.”

Another student who studied in Spain and Mexico claimed that reading local newspapers helped her to better understand and participate in the local culture. She also bought the most popular Spanish language CDs to “not only improve my language skills, but also just to know what people talked about,” and went often to the movie theater to watch Spanish films and American films dubbed in Spanish. She watched “Shrek” there and admits that now she will “only watch Shrek in Spanish. That’s all I know. I have never even heard the English version.”

## Politics

The same student had also spent time in the U.K. in 2003 and became involved in Iraq War protests. “Tony Blair was under the gun for having stood by the Bush administration ... my first protest started there.” So in addition to popular culture such as sports, beer, music, and movies, involvement in the host culture can take on a decidedly political form. It is noteworthy that these protests in London were her first, as if being in a strange country had emancipated her to act on her beliefs. Additionally, and on a very different note, she began to discuss how she liked to eat about once a week at McDonald’s. She said, “sometimes you miss things from home, and you want things that remind you of home ... I missed American food.” Her two very different responses display an entirely human quality: feeling liberated abroad to act on an issue she felt strongly about while longing for something familiar.

The Colombian student described the process of participation in the host culture as “gradual and on-going;” for example, when watching a football game on television, he might still have to ask his American friends about a particular rule to better understand the game. He also discussed learning to appreciate and celebrate American holidays, such as Thanksgiving. Most interestingly, he discussed American politics, saying “one of the things that struck me most poignantly were the 2004 elections.” He moved to upstate New York in August of 2004 and quickly became drawn into the American electoral process, Republicans and Democrats, and the wide social discrepancies and geographic implications inherent in American politics. He was 18 years old when he arrived in the U.S., and he described a process of “coming of age” in a different country: “Right away, at an important historical time in U.S. politics, I was thrown into a system that my classmates had grown up with, and I was fascinated. In many ways, I now think that I understand the politics of this country better than that of my own country.”

Along similar lines, one of the students had arrived in Italy at the time of one of Berlusconi’s re-election campaigns and became engrossed in Italian and European politics. Having traveled to Italy multiple times in his life, he was fascinated by the increasing role of Brussels in the everyday social fabric of Italian life. Beyond politics, he described participation in Italian culture to be natural and easy: “It’s a Mediterranean country - they live their culture out loud. I was also there between two World Cups, and I still very much follow Rome’s soccer team.” Sports and politics were often mentioned in adjoining sentences.

## Living Arrangements

The role of living arrangements for many students also became a common theme. A young woman who spent time in Australia claimed she became involved in the host culture through activities at the sponsoring university: “I lived in the dorms and became quite involved with on-campus activities and clubs, for example with the rugby team, and I tried to travel and learn about Australia as much as I could.”

Others integrated into life abroad by living with host families. A young woman who spent a semester in Mexico described this impact on her: “I ate with them every day. I went to church with them. I went to birthday parties with the family. I mean, I really felt like I was Mexican!” Another student described both eating paella with her host family in Spain and being part of the mealtime conversation as playing a large role in her cultural integration. A third young woman felt at home and welcomed by her host family and perceived a “real exchange” of “mutual curiosity” that helped her to integrate into life in the host culture. She said the university program she was affiliated with played an instrumental role in involving the host families in the life of the students: “Our Florentine family members came to our events – lectures, award ceremonies. They would host dinners for our

families." She felt as if her particular family "really wanted to learn about what it was like for us at school, how we found the city and be a part of things with us."

## The Impact of Multiple Sojourns Abroad

In addition to our discussion about the ways that students participated in their respective host cultures, they began to speak about the barriers or factors that influenced participation. Most, if not all, of these students are experienced travelers and have lived abroad in several different countries. Interestingly, a couple of them described the impact of these multiple international sojourns. Initially, they sought out the expatriate community to feel more secure and to interact with others experiencing life abroad from a similar perspective. The more they went overseas, the more they chose to stay away from their compatriots, deciding instead to really get to know the "natives." One young man had been to France twice and to China once as a student. Reflecting on his experiences, he claimed that during his first stay in France, "it was like a bunch of Americans going around and seeing France. The second time there, I tried to cut that down a bit. And by the time I was in China, I wanted to be with Chinese people as much as possible, as opposed to seeing China with Americans." In effect, he was saying that with each trip abroad, regardless of country, his confidence built and his level of curiosity grew.

The Taiwanese student interjected on this point. She had grown up as the child of a diplomat and had lived in several countries throughout her life. She expressed that the length of time abroad and the age that one decides to go are important factors in determining the extent of participation. When she was older, she spent an extended period on her own in Singapore and felt a deeper connection to the people than she did when she was a child in Greece: "I hung out with a lot of local Singaporeans, and it was total assimilation."

The same student who protested in the U.K. against the Iraq War also studied in Spain and was there at the time of the March 11 bombings. Having already demonstrated politically in the U.K., it seemed natural for her to protest again in Spain. Her comfort level had increased, though she was in a different host culture, and she felt liberated to act on her beliefs and values: "When you are immersed in another culture, you just do things that the nationals would do."

## Contextual Factors

A fascinating outtake of this part of the discussion dealt with the contextual factors that facilitate cultural assimilation. The openness of the host culture can have a demonstrable effect on a student's level of participation. For the student from Colombia, his experience of studying in England was substantially different from his experience interning in Mexico: "There was a certain level of openness to the Mexican culture, and I already knew a lot about it coming from Colombia ... It was just a different experience than I had going to England, not that my approach was any different." Another student interjected that the opposite could certainly be true as well; the student's openness, as opposed to the culture's, could impact the level of cultural engagement: "It depends on the individual. There are tourists that just want to do touristy things, and then there are others that want to do something that other people wouldn't do or take a risk."

Another student claimed that linguistic and cultural similarity of the host and home countries could also impact participation. This point ties nicely into the discussion of the role of multiple sojourns abroad impacting the degree of interaction with host country natives. For an American studying abroad for the first time in the U.K., the immersion process might be much easier due the similarity of the two countries, both in terms of language and culture. If an American decides to study for the first time in China, cultural integration would occur more slowly, and a student's level of interaction and comfort with natives might lag behind the student who decided to study in the U.K. However, if the student remains in China for an extended time or decides to return later in life, this interaction and comfort level should increase.

The Colombian suggested living or studying in a place where one might feel more isolated from other compatriots who might be studying elsewhere in the host country. He felt he was able to connect more strongly with the local culture in upstate New York than he would have been able to in a large city such as Washington, D.C. He made a direct comparison between Geneva, Switzerland, and Geneva, N.Y., both places where he had lived and studied. The comparison he made is not just one of big city versus small city, but also the type of immediate studying or working environment. He spoke about other contextual factors that might influence (or

even force) one's ability or interest to integrate. In Geneva, Switzerland, he was surrounded by "people from my embassy, where I was working. I had no immediate need to do anything but speak Spanish or learn anything about Swiss culture." In Geneva, N.Y., he was "the only Latin American speaking Spanish." He recalled a moment when he knew he had "been there too long, when I remember waking up and thinking that I had dreamt in English." In other words, living in a small town away from speakers of one's native language, one will literally be pushed into the host culture. Building on that theme, he also added that if he did run across another Colombian in Geneva, N.Y., "there was an immediate connection." One has a tendency to form a strong bond with fellow countrymen alone together in a foreign place, given shared experiences and a longing for something known and comforting.

For this group, participation in a host culture can take many forms and be influenced by one's interest in various elements of pop culture and politics as well as by the chosen living arrangements. Additionally, the length and the number of times abroad and a host of contextual factors shape the degree to which one participates.

## AWARENESS, IDENTITY, AND REFLECTION

At this point, the conversation began to steer away from participation to the students' reflections on their time overseas. The question "did anything surprise you about your experiences?" helped to set the stage.

The student who protested the Iraq War in the U.K. spoke about the timing of the abroad experience. Studying in the U.K. at the time of the start of the war, she was confronted with political tension and a significant amount of anti-American sentiment. "I was bombarded everyday with 'your people' or 'your government' is in charge of this," and she found herself in a position of having to defend herself and her country. She said, however, "The great thing about the Brits is that they are always open to dialogue, no matter how much you agree or disagree with them."

Another extremely interesting detail about this student emerged. She is an Asian-American student, and, having studied in the U.K., Mexico, and Spain, her appearance did not match stereotypes of the typical American. In fact, people always asked her where she was from. In the U.S., given the multicultural composition of the population, no one would ever question her identity as an American. But living abroad, she was confronted with another layer of complexity that she was forced to work through in her interactions with others.

The young woman who studied in Australia expected there to be many similarities between Australian and American culture but her experience ended with the opposite impression. According to her, there are "really deep cultural differences," despite the common socio-linguistic roots or "on-the-surface" appearances. Beyond and very much as a result of this realization, she was also incredibly surprised at the way "Americans are perceived" in Australia: "There was such a characterization of us that being here [in America] you don't realize how the world looks at us... in that moment, I was incredibly surprised."

In reflecting on his experiences in England, the Colombian student reminisced about the lack of a "culture of service" there: "I got yelled at on the bus, in restaurants, at the post office, in the supermarket ... In a restaurant once, I even had a menu thrown at me and had to wait 25 minutes before someone came to take my order." So even little things about a new culture can be surprising and can cause one to reflect on and appreciate elements of one's own culture (or even other cultures – in this case, his basis for comparison was, in part, customer service and attentiveness in the U.S.).

The Colombian student added that he was surprised that the negative stereotypes of Americans that he came to the U.S. believing turned out to be untrue: "The U.S. is so different from the perceptions that were widely communicated to me growing up. For example, Americans are fat. Americans are dumb. Americans are poorly dressed. They are not kind, but cold. Americans are not truly your friends." Once he arrived here, he quickly found these stereotypes to be untrue. He added that one of the things that struck him the most was that he found a country in which "one of the most prominent issues for people is how they thought about their own identity in a society that is very well run, given the fact that it is so diverse. Also, the people are so kind."

The same student went on to discuss American politics once again, remembering how he struggled before moving to the U.S. to understand why Americans had elected George W. Bush in the first place. After moving here and becoming intellectually engaged with the political process in 2004, he saw America and Americans in a different light. He tried to sort out the complexities inherent in U.S. culture and finally came to understand "why

[Bush] connected with people. And I understood who those people were much more than I ever had, and how he represented legitimate things for people here." He found U.S. culture to be so much more than "what is presented in the movies" or his own summer childhood experiences, when his parents brought him to various parts of the southern U.S. His observations provide an excellent example of how an overseas experience can fundamentally alter one's perceptions and level of awareness of others: "There are a lot of things that struck me about how truly great this country is and how complex it is and how diverse it is, and I don't think it gets enough credit for that in the [international] public perception."

At this point in the conversation, students began to reflect on what they learned about their own cultures and about themselves as a result of their experiences. The young woman with Italian heritage who studied in Italy began to speak about her interactions with other American students, many who became so immersed in soaking up and appreciating Italian culture and the "beauty" of Italian cities and landscapes that they began to cast America in a less than positive light: "What really frustrated me the most is how students reflected so negatively about America because of what they saw [while] abroad." As she continued to clarify what she meant by these comments, it became clear that she had been through a true learning process that only extended sojourns abroad can create. After arriving in Italy and being first awed by the history, architecture, and socially and gastronomically seductive elements of Italian life, she began to reflect thoughtfully on her own country and culture to appreciate, more so than ever, its beauty and its promises: "Europe is beautiful ... but America is wonderful too ... we should appreciate both for what they are and what they offer." Perhaps global citizenship and patriotism need not be mutually exclusive.

The Indian-American student, who had also studied and worked extensively in Italy and the U.K., had heard Americans say things such as "oh my god, the food's so much better here or ... you can drink outside." But the longer he lived there, the more he began to stray from the tourist sites to see what life was really like for Europeans. "If you hop on the bus that tourists won't get on or go to the towns that tourists don't go to, what one will find are a lot of industrial towns that look a lot like run-down, has-been cities in the United States." He peeled back the veil of what tourists normally experience to look deeply at European society. His travels took him to many rural towns as well, where he began to understand people's "exposure to the outside world was the same as going to rural towns in the States." One learns that "it's a much broader world than stereotypes" would lead us to believe. In the cosmopolitan sense, this student's reflections demonstrate a sense of commonality among people all over the world. Beneath the façade, we all deal with similar problems. "People are people, and you can have conversations anywhere you go."

He went on to discuss what he meant by "conversations," reeling in memories of people he encountered across Europe and reflecting on how he perceived himself to be viewed and what he learned by breaking down barriers: "Because I'm not a white guy, people didn't think I was American." Visually speaking, he was already changing people's perceptions of the typical American. Then, he claimed, it became evident in conversation that he spoke fluent Italian: "I was an Indian-looking guy, yet an American who spoke Italian." The more people would find out about him, the more likely they were to engage in a meaningful dialogue: "The longer you have conversations with people and defy their stereotypes of your culture, the easier it is to have conversations of substance." One of the things that surprised him was the ease of conversation and the interest others had in discussing America, once they overcame these mental barriers. It became natural to have "sincere conversations with people and to answer their questions, even if the questions were stated in the form of 'your president's an ass' or 'you guys are fat and lazy'." He took it upon himself not only to educate himself about the intricacies of European life, but also to educate others about the intricacies of American culture.

A young woman who did not participate in the in-person focus group added to this line of thinking by e-mail, stating bluntly that her time overseas provided her with the "experience to back up the idea of 'mutual understanding' – I don't think we can advocate this principle unless we have experience living/working in the countries we are engaging with." She also added that it is "critical to gain external perspectives of the U.S., warts and all."

Moving back to thinking about the role of patriotism, a young woman who had spent significant time in France and Germany noticed that many of the Americans she was studying with felt embarrassed to be American. She was there during the Iraq War and experienced the political tension between the French and Americans at the time. She noticed that many of her compatriots pretended to be Canadian to avoid uncomfortable confrontations,

but she was not about to do so: "By god, I am American! I wasn't going to tell anybody I'm Canadian. I didn't care what they thought. I love the Canadians, but I'm not one." Amusing as this quote might be, it unfolds a rich layer of complexity in students' identity formation. Some students wanted to shed their American identity either to avoid an uncomfortable situation or to express their true disapproval of U.S. policy in Iraq. In this young woman's case, regardless of her politics, she felt a strong need to hold on to her identity as an American. This was something she must have thought significantly about when she was there, and it was important to her.

In virtually the same breath, she also went on to boast of her French language prowess. She spoke of really knowing she had accomplished something when she spent time with her French friends in Lyon and tourists would approach her to ask directions: "And that's when I knew ... yeah, they think I'm French, and I could tell them where to go. Oh, they liked my accent ... Yeah, I'm pretty good!" So, although she would never wish to be confused for a Canadian, she was giddy to have the ability to fool people into believing she was French. Certainly, she paints a picture of conflicting identities, but these experiences all make sense in context. After studying in Europe, she felt a stronger sense of American identity as well as an affinity for the French, especially given her positive experiences there and the language abilities she acquired and of which she is proud.

Once again, building on this notion of identity and belonging, the Asian-American student began to reflect on her experiences as a minority student abroad. Similar to the Indian-American student, she spoke at some length about not automatically being seen as an American when she was abroad. Arriving in the U.K., she noticed that people referred to her as "Oriental," a term she feels would only be used in the U.S. to describe a rug. She would vehemently retort that she was Asian-American, not Oriental. She soon realized that although we speak the same language, the British often use different words, and Oriental was in no way pejorative, as it would be in the U.S. She articulated quite nicely "each culture has its own narrative, nuances and esprit, and you acknowledge this." Once she did, she looked at British culture with different and more understanding eyes. She also described a reverse experience she had in Spain. In Madrid, she lived with a "grandmother," who only spoke Spanish and could not believe that this student who looked Asian was American. It took the student some time to convince her that she had indeed been born and was raised in the U.S. and considered herself to be American. When her host mother's friends would come over, however, she would tell the friends, "no, no, no... she's from California," and her friends would have to have another conversation about that. She made the argument, much as the Indian-American student had earlier, that both the student and those whom the student encounters can often have myopic views, and she felt a responsibility not only to be educated but to educate in return: "Not only was I educated on the Spanish, Mexican, or British culture, but I knew people took some things away from me as well."

This part of the conversation illustrated that, for these students, living overseas became an exercise not only in learning about others, but as a consequence, learning about themselves. As they became more aware and knowledgeable about others, their own identities were called into question. As a result, they had to reflect on who they were and their place in the world.

## OUTCOMES AND CONSEQUENCES

The conversation then turned to considering the major outcomes of their abroad experiences and the consequences for their professional and personal lives. At first, the students focused on the immediate impact of returning to their home countries after spending time overseas. The Italian-American student said the first thing she wanted to do upon her return was to run out and find a bagel and a big American coffee. This immediate acquisition of something she had forcibly had to deny herself for so long felt immediately gratifying. Yet as more time elapsed, she began to notice things about America for the first time that she never thought about before living in Italy. She started missing things that she had in Italy, for example "how easily you could hop on public transportation ... how welcoming the people were, the little cups of coffee at the bar, and the way they eat their meals." She described how hungry she was at first in Italy, when she was not used to waiting until 9 p.m. to eat and then, by contrast, how after arriving back in the U.S., she could not bring herself to eat at 7 p.m. anymore. "You re-experience how you lived your life," and life is never the same. When she first returned, she was "happy to be back in the States, but then after time elapses, you start to miss a lot of things [about the host culture] and realize how meaningful it was." Her comments evoke a "grass is always greener" mentality, but the emotion was shared across the group. Once back from overseas, these students felt they were never the same. Something fundamental in their lives had changed.

At this juncture, the African-American student in the group began to speak at length about her experiences. She had spent the previous summer in Uganda and said she was the first on both sides of her family to return to Africa: "There was such a connection, and I did not try to make that connection, as I saw myself as African-American, but they saw me as their sister. Everyone called me sister and told me I must be Ugandan. They said ... you look just like us!" This experience had a deep impact on her. She had never before been interested in learning more about her heritage, but her time in Uganda made her long for that discovery. She said she has always been "black, from the South" and it had never occurred to her to investigate further. Now she desires to "know more about who I am and where I come from." Living abroad gave this young woman some historical perspective about herself and her family. Much in the way studying overseas impacted the other minority students, she felt a broadening of her identity, with the simultaneous knowledge that she had so much more to discover.

A student who was not able to participate in the focus group in person responded by e-mail that her experiences abroad "opened my eyes to other cultures," and as a result, they also "widened my perspective on the world, and my opinions and thoughts have been internally challenged." She writes that she is now "more understanding and accommodating to others that are different from me and more excited about making new friendships with those from other countries and cultures." She also raised a theme that the others did not discuss much. After living and studying overseas, she is now willing to work professionally in another country: "Before, I would have never even thought or dreamed of doing that. Now, I know that not only could it be possible to work abroad, but that I would enjoy doing so." Studying overseas provided her with new ideas and fresh thoughts about her future.

The Bolivian student was not present that evening but added in an e-mail that his time in the U.S. had "enormous personal and professional effects" on his life and career direction: "On a personal level, I have become a much more independent and responsible adult. I am far from my family and their direct, everyday support."

The young woman who studied abroad in Australia said something quite similar. She described her experience as the "classic 19-, 20-year-old going abroad for the first time." For her, she confidently opined that going abroad "changed everything." When asked what she meant, she went on to describe how she was forced into doing everything for herself for the first time in her life. From finding her way around town to traveling by herself around Australia to journeying to different countries in the region, she became an adult. She described this sensation as a "sense of confidence. I felt confident, driven, and motivated." This response also reveals a great deal about the learning process involved with studying overseas; not only can one learn firsthand about other cultures and reflect in a nuanced way about one's own culture, but one can also experience a healthy maturation process. She clearly felt as if her experiences had built her character and nothing would ever be the same in her life. Studying abroad had "totally changed my direction."

The Colombian student completely agreed. He concurred that for him, everything had changed as well: "There's nothing about the way in which I knew my past and the way in which I live my present and plan my future that has not been affected by [my international experiences]." Having made that telling observation about his life, he dug a little deeper to uncover a thought-provoking sentiment that many in the room found surprising. Yet as he continued to speak, many heads began to nod, if not in agreement, then at least with profound interest: "For me, the idea of global citizenship is very much attached to the sense that I have lost my own." He went on to say that when he goes home now, he realizes that he is not "Colombian enough now, nor will I ever be." He went on talking about the "incredible bonds" he formed with other international students studying at his undergraduate college in upstate New York who were "as culturally different from each other as they were from the Americans." But the experience they shared together (he described the experience as being "the other") provoked in them the same phenomenon. Just six months into a four-year education, they returned to their home countries on vacation and "were already seen differently ... I wasn't aware as a 17-year-old that that was the price that I was paying." He added that the benefits of living abroad have been numerous, and it has allowed him to see the world in a way that would never have been possible if he had stayed home: "But it's a high price to pay, a high price to pay ... when you feel so detached from your own culture that global citizenship is the only option." He offered that he had thought quite a lot about this dynamic and listed it as the reason he is studying public diplomacy.

After listening to the Colombian student's thoughts, an American student expressed an opposite view: "My going abroad has really made me feel more American ... I am incredibly aware of being American, and I am not ashamed at all of it." He said that before going abroad, he had these "romanticized images" of what Europe

should look and feel like and did not feel completely at ease in his American skin. After going to Europe, he claimed to be able to see more clearly and understand all of the associated positives and negatives: "You realize there are homeless people there right next to the Eifel Tower. There are bigots all over Europe that are not always accepting ... and you start to break down these romanticized images." Although he appreciates the differences, he now feels "much more secure in my American culture."

The Indian-American student chimed in and agreed with this sentiment, though he framed his argument somewhat differently, returning to his earlier comments about really getting to know another culture and finding commonalities. He described a conversation he had with a French friend during the time he was studying in Strasbourg the previous summer who was expressing negative thoughts about conservatives in America. But when the student confronted the friend about the success of Le Pen's party in parliamentary elections, the friend became offended: "Part of their ability to continue to reinforce those stereotypes is the presumption that you know nothing or not nearly as much about their culture as they do about yours." He makes a valuable point that people all over the world can be just as ignorant and uninformed and can perpetuate inaccurate and poisonous perceptions about other cultures: "The lack of self-awareness that often gets placed on Americans is not just in America."

## RESPONSIBILITY/COMMITMENT TO THE WORLD

A final theme of the conversation reverted to the place it started, discussing the students' sense of responsibility and commitment to others around the world after having lived and studied overseas. The African-American student was the first to react, stating her deep sense of commitment to the people in East Africa: "Because I felt so connected to the people, because they took me in ... I saw Uganda was not the easiest country to live in ... The things we do in America greatly affect the way people live ... their quality of life ... I just felt that we have to be more responsible."

The young woman who had studied in Australia added that she "felt a personal responsibility that I didn't see before." She went on to say she was privileged to have had "this little taste." Her sense of commitment extended not only to the people she met there but also to doing something important with the knowledge that she gained.

Along these lines, a young woman who could not attend the discussion wrote after the session that her "interest in international relations was initially [piqued] by overseas travel [and] ... my sense of responsibility grows as I gain knowledge that I think might lead me to make some small contribution to the way we interact with foreign publics. So I guess overseas travel sparked my desire to learn more, and my education has led me to feel that I can and should contribute."

Another student who could not participate wrote quite holistically about her new sense of global responsibility: "Most definitely, my understanding of the world and commitment and responsibility to making things better for not only myself, my family, my community, city, the great State of Texas, the U.S.—but also other countries where I've studied, lived and worked in are especially special to me and I want to see progress and development there."

Another student felt differently. He claimed initially that his abroad experiences did not make him feel more responsible. He said that when he was growing up, he felt this "obligation to go abroad. I was this stupid American that hasn't seen the world ... I felt like I had all the responsibility on my shoulders, that it was my fault for not doing more." But then, after going abroad, he realized that responsibility should be reciprocal, and others needed to demonstrate just as much commitment. Interestingly, after the focus group, he felt the need to follow-up his comments with an e-mail to clarify his thoughts. His comments express a fascinating sentiment and deserve to be cited in full:

I believe that I initially went abroad burdened with feelings of responsibility and (quite frankly) guilt that I was an American who was not doing enough to make the world a better place. But as I have continued to travel to other countries and participate in other cultures, I have gotten the sense that I am not entering a world where people share this desire for unity or a compassion for their fellow man. While abroad, I've observed a number of foreign nationals who are culturally and politically ignorant of the U.S. (yet always critical) and who are, in many instances (especially in western Europe), full of culturally sanctioned bigotry. To me, this was unsettling. I felt that I was doing my part by trying to learn more about the

world and by trying to break down these stereotypes, but the people I was trying to learn from did not share the same hunger. I wanted to tell them to come to America to see what things were really like here, or to ask them why – beyond tradition – they could justify their disgust for the people of other cultures and nations (e.g., French attitudes toward Turks).

This then is why I did not feel a greater sense of responsibility after traveling abroad. On the contrary, I felt that the responsibility did not rest squarely on my (and my fellow Americans) shoulders, but should be spread equally to all people, regardless of their nationality. All too often – and sometimes with justification – Americans are labeled stupid, culturally insensitive/ignorant, and stubborn. But I find this assignment applies with equal force to foreigners who are complacent in their attitudes and beliefs.

He acknowledged verbally that, having said all of that, his sense of responsibility could not be negated, but that he believed everyone should share a commitment to making the world a better place.

Responding to whether or not he felt a different sense of responsibility to the world, the Colombian student replied with an unequivocal “absolutely.” He spoke about all that he has had an opportunity to see throughout his multiple experiences and the impact on his life and deep sense of commitment: “I have seen the children in the slums of Colombia that are sons and daughters of paramilitaries” who are being deprived of an education, “and I’ve also seen the ambassador in Geneva discussing those very children and the way in which the international community is supposed to respond to them and doesn’t do so appropriately.” From slums in Bogota to ambassadors in Geneva, the “privilege” that he had had to see such a wide “range of things” has made him feel “responsible to act on what I see as right and wrong ... I don’t know how I could feel otherwise.”

## CONCLUSION: MODELING GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP AS A LEARNING PROCESS

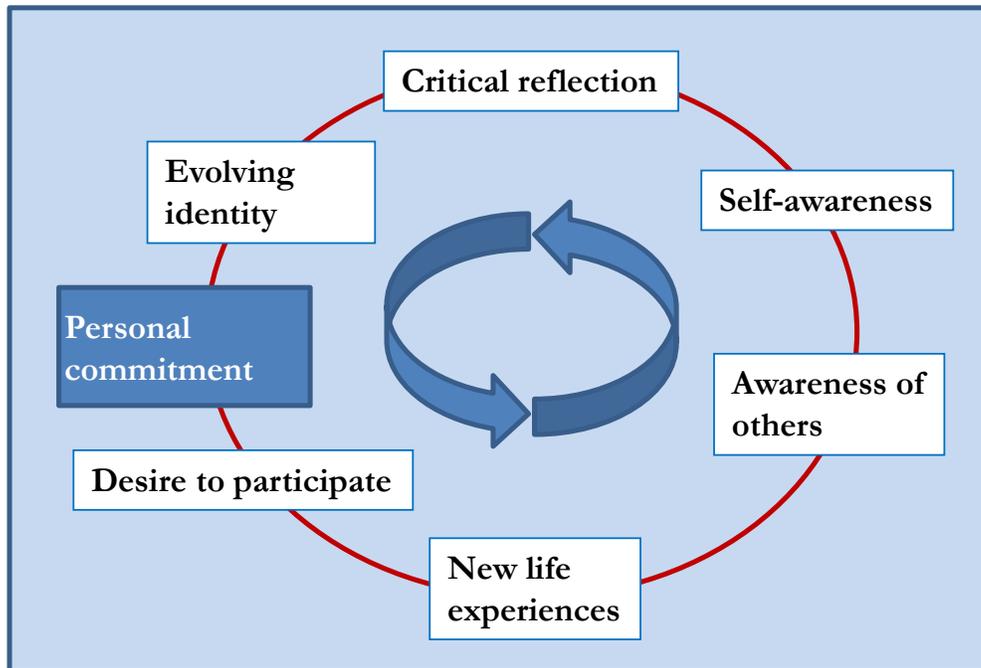
After a careful analysis and rereading of the qualitative data collected during the focus group, it is evident that participants’ original commitment or desire to study overseas evoked a unique learning process that continues for them even today. What happened to this group after its members decided to dive in and experience a new culture, once they committed to engaging with people and cultures outside of their geographic borders? First, they participated in something, whether by nature of their extroverted personalities or just because they had to. Once you dive, you better swim! Then, as a result of this participation, they learned new languages; they met and eventually grew to appreciate new people, new customs, and new cultures. They became aware of others. Due to this newfound awareness and interaction, they began to acquire new knowledge about themselves. Their identities were called into question, which required them to consciously become introspective and ask themselves, “Who am I really?” and “What is my place in the world?” They all claimed to have emerged from this process stronger, more confident, and independent. And more often than not, they emerged committed, feeling a sense of responsibility that stemmed from what they had learned and their desire to engage with the world in a meaningful way.

As demonstrated, the personal commitment component of the citizenship model becomes the starting point of a learning process that eventually circles back on itself. It is dynamic, subject to change and renewal. All of the rights and obligations of citizenship root themselves within the limits of the nation-state. But citizenship is not just about one’s legal rights and duties to the state. It also touches on who we are as people. Based on our particular experiences in life, we develop individual identities that shape how we interact with others. Our identification with a local, regional, national, or even a global community drives our behavior. “A citizenship defined only by entitlement is not resilient; it does not build the social capital that sustains vibrant communities in which people understand justice to be done.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, as our identities develop through life experiences, a dynamic feedback loop emerges, linking our life experiences to our evolving identities, which influences our sense of responsibility and commitment to both the people and ideals important to us.

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5 Linda Kerber. “The Meanings of Citizenship.” *The Journal of American History* 84 (1997): 852.

Figure A. Global Citizenship as a Dynamic Learning Process



Citizenship is a learning process. New and renewed notions of personal commitment can evolve through new life experiences. Meaningful contact with other cultures has the potential to reduce our out-groups and enlarge our in-groups, which in turn engenders a different level of personal commitment or citizen responsibility. The participants' overseas experiences provided the spark that became a defining lifetime experience, impacting their sense of identity and encouraging their commitment to think and act globally.

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