

# Creating Globally Minded Leaders in Agriculture: How Do We Do It?

by

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(Under the Direction of James C. Anderson, II)

## ABSTRACT

Agricultural students are not currently equipped to lead across multiple identities and cultures, yet the industry is facing some of the most trivial, interconnected problems across the globe. In an effort to better prepare agricultural students to lead on a global platform, this study will use Brown's (2004) Processing Value Judgments Model to determine if and how students are critically reflecting on new information. Through blogging on minority identities, students were encouraged to seek out new information about a population they did not fully understand in an attempt to promote a more multicultural mindset. In a second study, students participating in a cultural immersion experience in Morocco were interviewed before and after their long-term study abroad to determine if their pre-departure orientation affected their experience. Results indicated that critical reflection played a major role in the promotion of cultural plurality, as well as how students experienced a new culture abroad.

INDEX WORDS: cultural plurality, pre-departure orientation, global education, global leadership, minority identity, multicultural mindset, agricultural leadership, agricultural education, instructional methods, innovative teaching

CREATING GLOBALLY MINDED LEADERS IN AGRICULTURE: HOW DO WE DO IT?

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the unheard voices of the students and youth in agriculture. You have a place in this discipline, and we hear you. I hope this, and future work, provides a lens to further investigate how we can benefit underserved groups in agriculture, and how our future leaders can encourage leadership across all races, genders, religions, and cultures.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Anderson for his tireless efforts in ensuring my success. I may not have made it easy, but his confidence in me and my research interests have undoubtedly propelled me the past two years. You have made me a better student, researcher, and hopefully, one day, an educator. Thank you for all you have done to help me succeed! I would like to acknowledge my committee members, Dr. Bart and Dr. Lamm, for their support and input on this document. Thank you for your patience and guidance!

I want to acknowledge my family, especially my parents, for their constant support and love, even when they were 800 miles away. I know that I have kept you on your toes and driven you crazy with my international travels and unwillingness to compromise on what I think is best for me. You have let me fail and succeed just as I needed to. Although our beliefs may not always align, your dedication to making sure I succeed and pursue what I am passionate about is so appreciated. Words will never be able to express how thankful I am for all of you.

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## CHAPTER 1

### **Background of the study**

Researchers are evaluating new theories and working with businesses across the globe to determine what type of training and cultural preparation one should go through when working internationally (Lokkesmoe, Kuchinke, & Ardichvili, 2016; Tuleja, 2014; Tomlinson & Clarke, 2010; Barrick, Samy, Gunderson, & Thoron, 2009). Studies have been conducted to determine if service learning could develop global leadership competencies to prepare individuals for working with other cultures (Pless, Maak, & Stahl, 2011). Additionally, a plethora of research describes the benefits of both long and short-term study abroad experiences, and how they can empower leadership development. (Costello, 2019; Whitham, 2018; Smith & Mitry, 2008). Mendenhall and Osland (2002) created six constructs that can be the basis for global leadership: cross-cultural relationship skills, traits and values, cognitive orientation, global business expertise, global organizing expertise, and visioning.

Cross-cultural relationship skills refer to cultural sensitivity. Being able to connect with different cultures and build relationships with people who are different than us is crucial in global business. However, “the field lacks conceptual models and empirical research on how individuals learn to become responsible leaders based on their experiences while abroad, and on what kind of competencies are developed through such assignments” (Pless, Maak, & Stahl, 2011, 250). Therefore, what types of models and/or experiences can be used in colleges of agriculture to create a global mindset among college students that will be entering the workforce? Creating an environment where students have the opportunity to explore their own cultural biases and learn about minority cultures and identities could allow students to increase their cultural competence, depending on their prior experiences and how they react to the new

knowledge they have gained. Additionally, participation in full culturally immersive experience may increase students' CQ if they are properly prepared for the experience abroad. Hovland (2014) defined global learning in an inarguable way:

“Through global learning, students should (1) become informed, open-minded, and responsible people who are attentive to diversity across the spectrum of differences, (2) seek to understand how their actions affect both local and global communities, and (3) address the world’s most pressing and enduring issues collaboratively and equitably” (p. 1).

### **Problem Statement**

The Institute of International Education (2013) reported that there is an overall increase in collegiate international travel, but the number of agricultural students who study abroad continuously decreases. As the country continues to enter a globalized state, it will be crucial for agricultural educators to develop culturally competent students that can succeed in a diverse, globalized world. “Developing meaningful relationships with people from diverse backgrounds and experiences and taking opportunities to directly experience different cultures through travel are identified as ways of supplementing intellectual knowledge with experiential learning” (Mio, Barker, & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2006; Sue & Sue, 2008). However, in order to develop culturally competent students, the educators must have some level of cultural competence themselves. Murphrey, Lane, Harlin, and Cherry (2016) conducted an evaluation to determine how many agricultural students wanted to have an international experience. Although the population of students who wanted to travel was high, the majority of students chose not to travel because of the cost, or they wanted to travel to developed countries that shared similarities with western culture; rather than traveling to countries that were drastically different than the United

States. By only traveling in one's comfort zone, students are not gaining imperative multicultural experiences that will be needed to navigate society. If individuals are never exposed to those who are different than them, "[This encounter] may give rise to a climate of prejudice and stereotyping, which can possibly lead to prejudice, intolerance, and ultimately discrimination" (Coll, Miranda, Torres, & Bermudez, 2018, 342). Educators and leaders across the globe have the opportunity to prepare students for these occurrences, which will ultimately lead to a more accepting, culturally competent world.

### **Reflexivity Statement**

My identity and demographics encouraged me to approach this research with the notion that I have lived a privileged life, and in return, I want to dedicate my future research to the quiet voices who are frequently left out of the story. I am a white, middle-class, cisgender (female) who grew up as an only child in a stable home with two loving and supporting parents. I was involved in an array of facets within the agricultural industry, with one of the most dominant ones being leadership. I held multiple offices within youth organizations and was frequently asked to represent my peers at large speaking events. My involvement within the industry, as well as my family and mentors who have guided me in my quest for knowledge over the past decade, have propelled me into the research I am now so passionate about: the promotion of cultural competence within the agricultural industry. Every person needs agriculture at some point in the day, supporting the argument that agriculture would be one of the most diverse industries in the world in both breadth and depth. This research is the starting point for my passion to bring agriculture to under-served communities and minority groups who are frequently left out of this sector.

While I played a major role in formulating the conclusions for both of these studies, my hope is that they provide content on the importance of cultural exposure to future leaders in agriculture, both inside and out of the classroom. I acknowledge that I was enrolled in one of the sections of the Advanced Leadership Theories, Ethics, and Culture course and participated in class discussions as well as created my own blog posts during the course. Further, I knew some of the participants on a personal level and frequently had outside discussions with classmates about what was being covered in class. I believe this aided my own development of cultural competence, but it also gave me another perspective on how my peers were processing the information that was being discussed in the classroom, and in their blog posts. Finally, I developed a personal relationship with the participants in my second study. I traveled with them on the weekends and spent the majority of my time in Morocco exploring the country with them. My discussions of the participants and their experiences are also impacted by my own interpretations of how they reacted in situations and things we discussed outside of the interviews. Accordingly, I acknowledge the possibility of personal bias and have tried to minimize bias by working closely with the Processing Value Judgment model during data interpretation.

### **Introduction/Literature Review**

“In many countries, and virtually every less developed country (LDC), agriculture is the biggest single industry” (Stoyanova, 2017, 29). As societies evolve across the globe, the means in which we obtain goods also does. According to FAO (2017), development of societies creates more linkages in our communication systems. Rather than the neighbor getting food from a farmer across the street, we have “commodity traders, processors, manufacturers who convert produce into food items and retailers, among others” (FAO, 2017). More recently, the *scientist*

linkage has been introduced. Plant biologists, nutritionists, chemists, and so forth, have made significant contributions to the agricultural industry (Genetically Modified Organisms, plant-based proteins, higher quality feedstuffs, advanced farming techniques, and more). Beyond the producer to consumer aspect of agriculture is agribusiness. “Multinational companies like Cargill, Brooke Bond Liebig, and Del Monte are examples of vertically integrated organizations with links all the way through from agricultural production to retailing” (FAO, 2017). These companies, and many others, reach across all parts of the globe, interacting and catering to hundreds of different cultures. As the population rises and moves towards 9 billion, these international companies and communication linkages will become crucial to the survival and livelihood of the world population.

FAO (2017) stated that this increase in food production would have to begin in developing countries. “The information needs of farmers in both developing and developed countries will only increase as they have to make more and more complex decisions on how to use their land, what crops to produce and how, in which markets to buy inputs and sell their products” (FAO, 2017). As a developed country, the United States can provide resources for countries that are in need of education and loans in order to improve their agricultural sector. According to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the U.S invests in 129 countries in an attempt to build their economy, decrease poverty and provide assistance during disasters (USAID, 2017). In 2017, the department invested \$1.2 billion dollars into the agricultural industry (total spending of USAID accounts for less than 1% of the federal budget), and of that amount, \$301 million was the value of agricultural and rural loans (USAID, 2017). Through departments like USAID, we can begin to help develop countries and start a dialogue between different cultures on how to provide for our growing population.

The ability to communicate with individuals around the globe in order to decrease food scarcity and world hunger will require globalized leaders that are culturally competent and effective communicators across cultures. “Employers seek intercultural sensitive professionals who can successfully navigate among a variety of cultures and serve as ambassadors to promote commerce internationally” (Fabregas, Kelsey, & Robinson, 2012). Knowing that these employers are seeking culturally competent hires, it would make sense that students need to be exposed to international industries and a variety of cultures that impact the United States. “Students should have the opportunity to be exposed to global perspectives even without leaving their U.S.-based classroom” (National Academic Press, 2009). If educators can begin to develop culturally competent mindsets without leaving the United States, it could better prepare students for a career in agriculture, whether domestic or international. The earlier that these skills and mindset are created, the more culturally competent students will be while operating in a globalized world.

Hinton (2017) discusses how individuals are born into a culture and how communicating in those social networks may influence how we perceive individuals or create stereotypes. Hinton (2000) defines a stereotype as an “overgeneralized attribute associated with members of a social group, with the implication that it applies to all members of the group” (p. 2). Martin, Cunningham, Hutchison, Slessor, and Smith (2017) conducted a study intended to describe how stereotypes are passed down via communication and social constructs. Individuals transmit information regarding a topic to another person, and eventually that information may lose its meaning or translate to something that may not be true as it travels through different communication channels (Martin et. al, 2017). Over the course of time, people periodically inject

bias into the information they transmit; we choose to only believe or accept the information we want to see or believe, thus biasing the information we are trying to pass on.

Additionally, observations play a crucial role in how we create our environment. Some observations we see for ourselves, while others may be second-hand information (Martin et. al, 2017). Stein, Lu, and Ohler (2019) investigated implicit and explicit biases among Chinese and German students during an international exchange experience. While their results were mostly positive, they identified strong in-group preferences, as well as seeing personal observations that the host country became less favorable as students' trip progressed (Stein et. al, 2019).

Moreover, Snodgrass, Morris, and Lambert (2018) examined the effects of a social equity course within a college of agriculture at a land grant university. At a predominantly white university, students showed the most multicultural growth when they were given opportunities to participate in “intentionally designed activities, discussions, and assignments in a supportive, small group setting” (Snodgrass et al., 2018, 304). The Advanced Leadership Ethics, Theories, and Cultures course at the University of Georgia capitalizes on this idea, as it remains to be a small course where a variety of identities and cultures are discussed throughout the semester. Additionally, this type of instructional method begins a dialogue among students, which allows them to reflect on past experiences and practice reaction skills before they participate in an out-of-class experience, whether that is abroad or in their communities.

Brown (2004) describes how beliefs about self and others, including stereotypes and prejudices, are established in early childhood. Students use perceptions of themselves to decide whether or not to resist information or modify their beliefs. If negative stereotypes or beliefs about other cultures are never modified, then this information is carried into adulthood. This could be detrimental when it comes to education, particularly with teachers. If educators have

low cultural competence, then they most likely would not have the skills to develop culturally competent mindsets within their students. According to Brown (2004), to be an effective educator in cultural awareness, “classroom teachers must be multicultural and possess the skills to provide a classroom environment that adequately addresses student needs, validates diverse cultures, and advocates equitable access to educational opportunity for all.”

Research conducted by Bigler (1999) concludes that lessons and content that include material discussing other cultures can assist in the development of a more positive mindset when it comes to other ethnic and racial groups. However, teachers must also have exposure to cultural diversity. According to Banks (2004), large portions of pre-service teachers attend limited, stand-alone cultural diversity courses in preparation for teaching. Their stereotypes remain unchanged and often reinforce them. Knowing this information, the issues lie within education. Teachers are not being exposed to multicultural education, and then students in classrooms are not being equipped with skills to navigate a globalized world.

Vincent and Austin (2020) conducted a study that determined degrees of closeness among senior aged Kentucky FFA students. While the demographics of the educators are unknown, the majority of participants were white, male students who identified as Christian and described their residence as rural. These students were the least likely to interact with other non-agriculture students who were a different race, or were members of the LGBTQ+ community. If this is still an issue in 2020, perhaps the solution lies in how we prepare educators to lead in their classrooms. If teachers have the opportunity to increase their CQ, then they can begin implementing material that is positively associated with other cultures.

Moreover, Chatman, Sherman, and Doerr (2015) concluded that groups comprised of multiple identities will complete task with more efficiency and creativity. Vincent and Austin

(2020, pp. 264) state that “racially diverse environments lead to both qualitative and quantitative gains as they stimulated creativity and speculation.” Diversity and inclusion are critical in developing leaders who have enhanced problem-solving skills, as well as, it gives students an environment where they feel accepted and can succeed (Vincent & Austin, 2020). In turn, this could also increase the CQ of the student population. This is especially important for students who already hold preconceived ideas about groups of people that they have never been exposed to or interacted with. “Research indicates that children come to school with many negative attitudes toward and misconceptions about different racial and ethnic groups” (Stephan & Vogt, 2004).

Additionally, Brown’s 1998 model states “students who enter cultural diversity courses with limited cross-cultural experiences will be apathetic or inquisitive about other cultures, and those who have had negative encounters or whose reference groups hold negative beliefs about the value of other cultures will enter into a contentious or distressed emotional state.” This holds true in Brown’s (2004) model as well as, showing that when students use prior experiences and knowledge to evaluate new information, if they have a negative belief or experience, it is likely to be reinforced. Educators are challenged with creating an accepting environment for all students and teaching them how to be culturally intelligent; however, many teachers have limited cross-cultural interaction (Brown, 2004).

Considering how globalization is defining our society today, agricultural programs should begin to prepare future agricultural leaders to have cultural intelligence and a global mindset. Cultural intelligence must be learned and synthesized; therefore, development of international experiences will provide a resource to begin building important skills to lead across a variety of cultures. “Agricultural and extension educators must develop the ways and means to

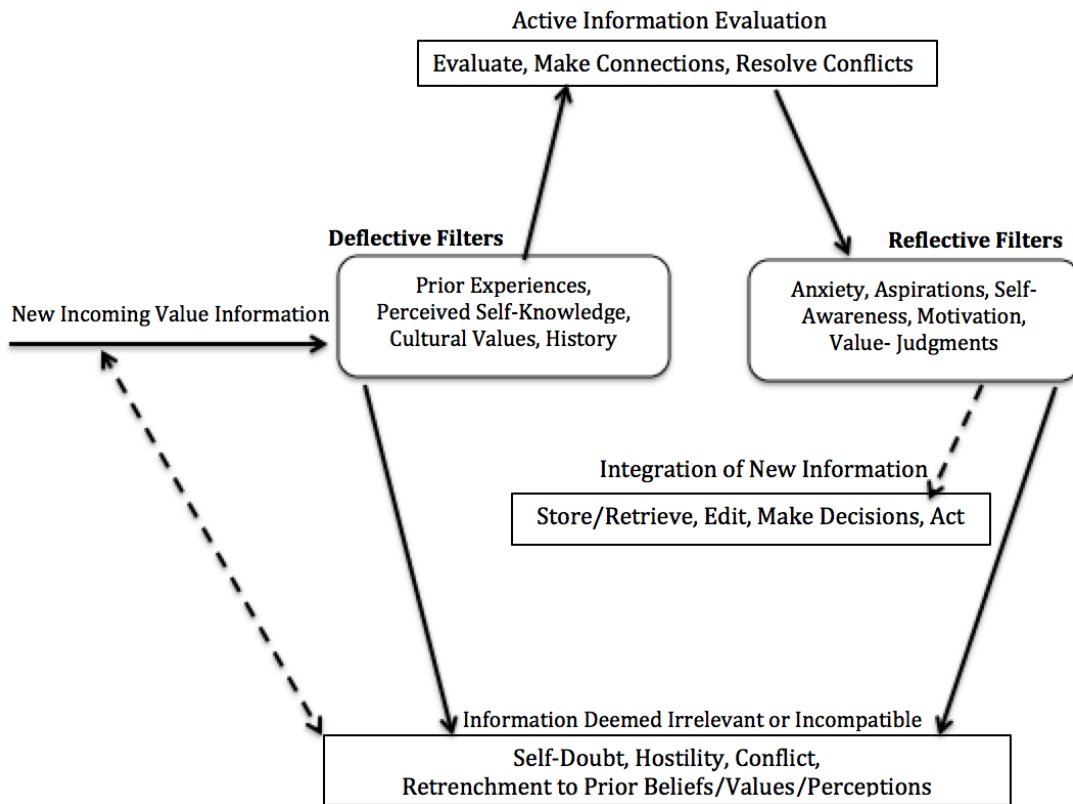
integrate cultural competence building activities into the curriculum if they are going to prepare students to work in a diverse society, simply because diversity is one of the most significant developmental social aspects of our time” (Talbert & Edwin, 2008; Strong & Harder, 2011).

Global Leadership Education is defined as the “development of individuals who possess the knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes to lead positive change in the larger global context (Brown, Whitaker, & Brungardt, 2012).” In order to be an effective global leader, individuals must be able to increase their Cultural Intelligence. Culture intelligence is associated with an “individual’s capability to function effectively across cultures (Van Dyne, Ang, & Livermore, 2010).” As society continues to globalize and adopt new and diverse methods of leadership, the need for culturally competent leaders is increasing (Brown, Whitaker, & Brungardt, 2012). Pisano and Skih (2009) stated that “leaders are not currently equipped to lead in political, economic and civil societies” due to the rise in globalization at such a rapid speed.

Additionally, the U.S. will need leaders with advanced global leadership skills who are able to conduct business across borders in terms of imports and exports. Pless, Maak and Stahl (2011) stated, “The field lacks conceptual models and empirical research on how individuals learn to become responsible leaders based on their experiences...” Models like Brown’s (2012) may allow scholars to determine the effectiveness of programs and classes on how students develop CQ. Agricultural classrooms are in desperate need of evolving their teaching programs to include students from all backgrounds, especially those who identify with a minority identity. “Diversity and inclusion will need to find its place in the agricultural education classroom to continue to meet the changing skill and knowledge demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century agriculture industry” (Vincent & Austin, 2020, pp. 264).

## Theoretical Framework

The Processing Value Judgments model served as the framework for the studies (see Figure 1). It explains how students process incoming information in order to accept or reject judgments based on the use of deflective and reflective (Brown, 2004). More specifically, when students are exposed to new information they use these filters to decide how they will categorize information. Depending on their prior experiences, values and preconceived knowledge, they can accept the information in a positive light; evaluate the new information, make connections and then utilize to solve issues. Or, they can use those same experiences and preconceived notions to deflect the information: create self-doubt, reattachment to prior beliefs and deem the new information irrelevant.



Processing Value Judgments  
Dotted lines indicate potential to recycle information

Figure 1: Processing Value Judgements Model, Brown

In the following studies, Brown's model was used to explore how students enrolled in cultural experiences (i.e., a global agricultural leadership education course and study abroad) used selective perceptions, avoidance, and group support strategies to integrate or reject beliefs about self and others (Brown, 2004). Individuals take in information through deflective filters and determine if the information deserves active evaluation or if it should be deemed irrelevant/incompatible. Information that is actively evaluated then goes through reflective filters and is integrated into one's beliefs or rejected (Brown, 2004).

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to determine how educators could better prepare their students to lead in an ever-globalizing society. This study describes how innovative teaching methods, such as reflective blogging, can assist students in preparation to interact on a global landscape. Additionally, questions were posed as to how identity and pre-departure training play a role in how individuals experience a different culture abroad. Additionally, this study describes the effects of critical reflection, specifically on minority groups, and on the developmental process of students' multicultural mindset. The following questions guided this study:

1. How are students demonstrating the use of deflective filters (prior experiences, perceived knowledge, cultural values, history) when synthesizing and evaluating new information on minority identities?
2. How are students demonstrating the use of reflective filters (anxiety, aspirations, self-awareness, motivation, value judgments) when synthesizing and evaluating new information on minority identities?
3. How are students integrating the new information (editing beliefs, making decisions, intent to act) about minority identities into their global leadership worldview?

4. How are students using deflective filters, reflective filters, and integration of information after a culturally immersive experience?

### **Significance of the Studies and Manuscript Structure**

In 1956, Benjamin Bloom and a group of scholars created a tool used to categorize educational goals and activities (Mcdaniel, 2018). “The original taxonomy consisted of three domains (cognitive, psychomotor and affective); the cognitive domain is the most widely utilized, describing six levels that capture lower to higher-order thinking” (Yale, 2015). Bloom’s categories are: Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis and Evaluation. Although there have been multiple revisions of the original framework, the majority of scholars and educators remember these six categories (Mcdaniel, 2018). The studies being conducted will specifically analyze Bloom’s two highest levels: Synthesis and Evaluation.

Chapter 2 of this study, intended for the Journal of Leadership Education, entitled “Using blogs to enhance cultural competence in an Advanced Agricultural Leadership Education course” will explore an innovative teaching method that’s intended to promote cultural plurality. As we enter a more globalized paradigm, members of society must possess a globally minded skillset that will allow them to navigate the world and their workplace so they can lead across various cultures and identities. Educators will be tasked with identifying engaging and innovative teaching methods that allow students to explore their own cultural biases in order to help them develop and enhance their cultural competence.

This study utilizes Brown’s (2004) Processing Value Judgments Model to determine if students are critically reflecting on new information in an advanced agricultural leadership course. As students take in new information, they either reflect on the information and integrate it into their mindset, or deflect it, deeming it irrelevant or incompatible with their current beliefs.

Students created 4 blogs throughout the semester that covered the following topics: Race, Ethnicity, or Culture; Religion or Belief System; Sexual Orientation or Gender Roles; and Ability or Social Status. Brown's (2004), deflection, reflection, and integrative filters were used as *a priori* codes and blog posts, as well as blog responses, were analyzed for reflective statements. Participants published 282 entries. Of those, 71 entries contained deflection statements, 75 entries contained reflective statements, and 29 entries contained integrative filter statements, meaning students were actively evaluating the information and editing their beliefs, showing intent to act, or recalling their previous values and beliefs. Only 7 statements were present in the data that indicated students deemed certain topics irrelevant or incompatible with their current mindset. The final blog unit contained the highest number of integrative phrases. Recommendations were made to further investigate the use of blogging to enhance cultural plurality, as well as, an environment or service learning experience where students can apply the concepts learned in class in the real world.

Chapter 3 of this study, intended for the Journal of International Agricultural and Extension Education, entitled "A phenomenological approach to understanding how pre-departure orientations effect students' experience in Morocco" will explore how cultural immersion experiences were affected by pre-departure training. While the benefits of study abroad programs are well discussed in the literature, little is known about what steps should be taken in order to best prepare students for the experience abroad. Brown's (2004) Processing Value Judgments Model was used as the framework for this study. Brown's model states that individuals take in information and either reflect on the information and integrate new knowledge into their mindset, or they deflect the information and deem it irrelevant or incompatible with their values and beliefs. Pre and post immersion interviews were conducted

with 3 white, females who were pursuing undergraduate degrees in various disciplines. Students went to school in California, New York, and the UK. Participants described their pre-departure training, how they perceived their experience would go, and then, before departure, participants described their Moroccan experience as a whole. Reflective, deflective, and integrative filters were used as *a priori* codes to analyze the transcripts. The participant who went through the most extensive training was also the most reflective during the interview. Recommendations were made to further investigate this phenomenon with a larger, more diverse population.

## CHAPTER 2

### **Using Blogs to Enhance Cultural Competence in an Advanced Agricultural Leadership**

#### **Education Course**

#### **Introduction**

Globalization is inevitable; therefore, educators must find a way to incorporate multicultural learning opportunities into their classrooms; both in grade school and higher education. Critical reflection allows students to process new, perhaps uncomfortable, knowledge, and can be especially beneficial in an online setting (Glowacki-Dudka & Barnett, 2007). In an advanced leadership course, critical reflection encourages students to explore the new identities they have encountered, which is imperative as educators prepare their students to become global leaders. A study conducted by Wiersma-Mosley (2019) offered insight into what a social justice or advanced leadership course may look like. While there is not a set of guidelines on what to teach or how to do it, it is a safe start to begin with the idea of stereotypes, prejudice, and cultural biases (Wiersma-Mosley, 2019). This may look like taking a cultural competence assessment, reading books about minority cultures, or visiting sites within the community. The important part is for educators to begin the dialogue. “Those in academia are in a unique position to influence future business and political leaders by what we teach and how we teach it” (Garfalo & Huillier, 2017). Garfalo and Huillier (2017) further discuss the need for globally minded educators. While many universities posit they are yielding culturally competent graduates, this does not necessarily hold true (Garfalo & Huillier, 2017). Although Garfalo and Huillier (2017, 215) discuss globalization in terms of business development, their viewpoints can be adapted to fit agricultural education:

“Students need to be exposed to the richness and diversity that all cultures have to offer, the historical context and social interactions of people and given opportunities to develop skills needed to address contemporary business issues in a "humane" way.”

Educators are tasked with catering to various identities and finding ways to effectively communicate information as it relates to their discipline. “Efforts to educate students on issues regarding diversity and cultural sensitivity can be emotionally charged... met with some resistance by university officials” (Tindell, Young, O’Rear, & Morris, 2016, 159). Tindell et. al (2016) describes their experience from teaching a social justice course within a college of agriculture, and the types of challenges that were faced. Specifically, how instructors overcame the pushback resulting from uncomfortable conversations that occurred in class. While this class is similar to the one utilized in this study, offering students the opportunity to work through difficult or uncomfortable information via blogging should allow for less pushback among students. Additionally, these types of course push students out of their comfort zone and encourage them to view reality from a different lens, which is imperative when it comes to leadership. “Global leaders are required to readily adapt to change and deal with the complexity of interpersonal relationships in order to flourish in an environment of ambiguity comprised of cultural differences in values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors” (Tuleja, 2014, p. 6). Our values and beliefs may be impacted by our cultures that have evolved and changed over time (Atiles, Gresham, & Washburn, 2017). Atiles et. al (2017) also describes how there is a direct correlation between our values and beliefs and personal experiences. As we experience new things, the way we behave and make decisions will also be altered (Atiles et. al, 2017). Brown’s model (2004) also represents this idea; that prior experiences, our cultural values, and what we think we know, will have an effect on how we reflect on new information or experiences. Thus, reflection is

important when we it comes to understanding the world around us. “How we perceive ourselves and others is influenced by our own values and histories” (Ixer, 2016, 816). Ixer (2016) discusses how reflection is influenced by the power structures and social constructs around us. Our values and beliefs are inextricably linked to our reflection process, as our morals and values may or not be societally correct within our environment (Ixer, 2016). Moreover, our reflection process can be influenced by language, culture, and the way we interpret the world around us. Therefore, it’s important to find a way of reflection that allows for creativity and for us to not be bound by societal constraints. Online journaling, such as blogging, allows for peer-to-peer learning, and encourages disengaged students to participate as they can obtain a sense of ownership with their work (Jenkins & Clarke, 2017). Traditional journaling methods only allow students to participate in one type of communication, thus limiting their reflective process (Jenkins & Clarke, 2017). Additionally, blogging has been known to increase learning and enhance teaching (Walton, 2016). Blogging encourages a dialogue between student-to-student interaction, as well as, student-to-teacher interaction. If educators can create a safe space for students to discuss and delve into sensitive topics, then perhaps we can begin to better prepare students to more effectively traverse across cultures.

This research study examines students’ ability to critically reflect on new information, and examined if students become more critically reflective over the course of the semester. Blogs that explored minority identities across the globe were analyzed for reflective statements, and then editorial responses were also coded for critical reflection.

### **Subjectivity Statement**

I am a past student of the Advanced Leadership Theories, Ethics, and Cultures course. I took the course my first semester of graduate school and, ultimately, that course is what has

fueled my passion for asking sensitive questions around diversity and inclusion within the agricultural sector. I grew up in this industry and have experience both in the production side, as well as being involved in youth programs and holding leadership positions within agricultural groups. As I have gotten older, my interests have evolved into bringing agriculture to underserved communities and minority groups who are frequently left out of our sector. When speaking with peers and friends I have made through this industry, frequently it seems we live in an echo chamber, and I want to be someone who leaves the chamber. The advanced leadership course incorporated open, but strategically guided, discussions that allowed for us to explore our own biases and gave us a space to ask sensitive questions with our classmates. While I did leave my own blogs out of the data in this study, and removed identifying information from blogs, I have a personal relationship with some of these participants. We discussed concepts outside of the classroom and frequently went more in depth with these discussions when we were in a smaller group. I also have my own thoughts and opinions regarding the topics discussed which could be present in the results of this study. These interpretations are mine and mine only, which I acknowledge is a limitation.

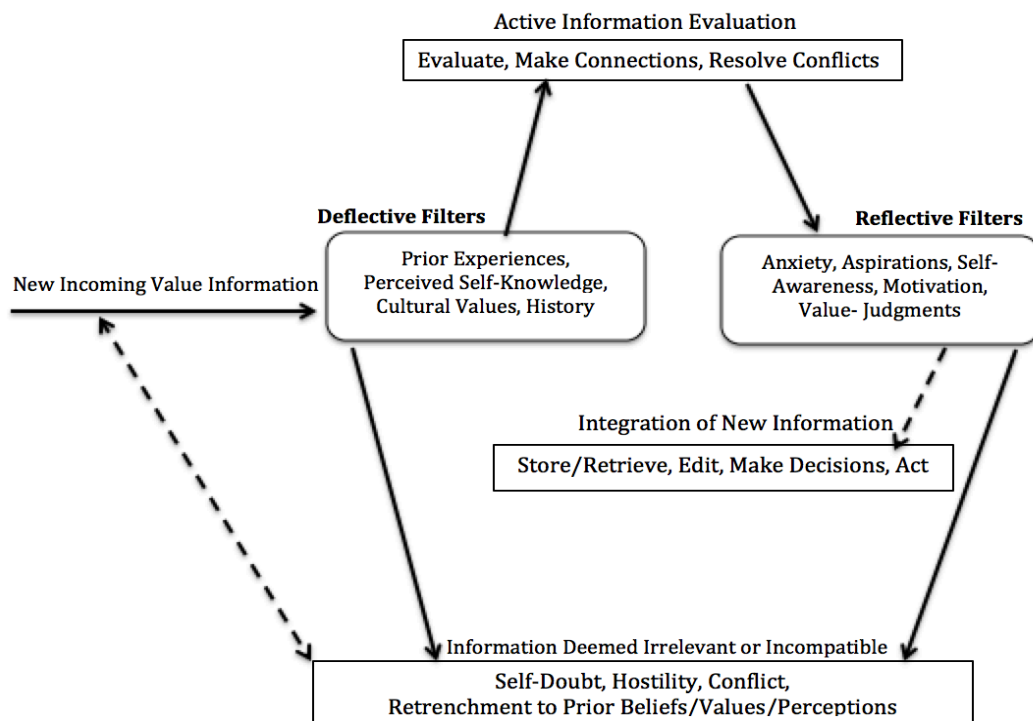
### **Statement of the Problem**

Global leadership and education is a relatively “young field of study” and has yet to identify a conceptual model that can address the need for culturally competent leaders across the globe (Pless, Maak, & Stahl, 2011). Society, specifically the United States, has evolved into a world that requires culturally sensitive leaders across all disciplines. Agricultural students should be at the forefront of this evolution, as they will be tasked with creating the technology that continues to cater to the needs of our globe in order keep humanity alive. “In an increasingly connected world, the industry of agriculture finds itself at the centre of the challenges of

globalization, including diversity and social equity issues” (Snodgrass, Morris, & Acheson, 2018). However, leaders are not currently equipped to address the 21st Century challenges in this diverse political, economic, and civil backdrop because many do not possess the level of cultural intelligence (CQ) needed to function across cultures. Before students gain international experience or begin a career in international agriculture, we will need to expose them to identities they may encounter outside of the classroom. How can educators use innovative teaching methods to discuss the importance of cultural plurality before releasing future leaders of agriculture into a globalized society?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The framework for this study was Brown’s (2004) Processing Value Judgments Model (see Figure 1). Brown’s model states that as students take in new information and experiences, they will evaluate the information using deflective filters: prior experiences, perceived self-knowledge, their own culture and beliefs, and history. Ideally, students will then choose to actively reflect on the information and make connections, then using reflective filters (Aspirations, Anxiety, Motivation, Self-Awareness, and Value-Judgements), they will integrate the new information or experiences into their mindset. They will alter their choices, edit their current beliefs/values, and store the information so they can re-evaluate it if necessary. However, if students do not choose to actively reflect on the information they may deflect the new information or experiences, resulting in self-doubt, hostility, conflict, and retrenchment to the prior beliefs and values.



Processing Value Judgments  
Dotted lines indicate potential to recycle information

Figure 1: Processing Value Judgements Model,

This framework was used so we could determine if students were actively reflecting on the cultures and identities they were being exposed to in class. The Advanced Leadership course was designed using Bloom’s Taxonomy. By the time students are creating their blogs within a unit, they should be synthesizing and evaluating the new information. Brown’s model will allow us to determine that.

### Literature Review

Traditional instruction methods tend to be more teacher-centered, thus focusing on how the instructor teaches rather than monitoring what and how the student is learning (Moore, Odom, & Boyd, 2017). When discussing leadership and culture, especially in a global context, it is important to determine what information students are taking in, and what information they are

not willing to reflect on. Therefore, the need for more innovative, learner-centered instructional methods is crucial (Riggio, Ciulla, & Sorenson, 2003). Everett and Raven (2018) describe how instructional leadership course methods “should leverage experiences that provide students with “real-world” interpretation of ideas, concepts, and skills that will in turn create learners and leaders who are successful in their future careers” (p. 35). Experiential learning, service-learning, study abroad, and a variety of other outlets allow students to gain leadership skills that are needed to be successful, while also exposing them to cultures and identities they may not otherwise interact with. However, to ensure students know how to respond appropriately or navigate cultural differences they may encounter, educators must allow them to explore scenarios and real-world applications within the safety of a classroom. Clack and Ellison (2018) discussed the benefits of a flipped classroom; the students take control of their own learning by role-playing, discussing lived experiences, and applying concepts to realistic scenarios. Additionally, educators can create “teachable moments” (Clack & Ellison, 2018, p. 6) by describing their own lived experiences and building those connections between reality and theory. Moreover, Snodgrass, Morris, and Lambert (2018) described the effects of a social equity course within a college of agriculture at a land-grant institution. They concluded that when the instructor generates purposeful lessons, discussions, and activities, students were more likely to see an increase in cultural competence. At a predominantly white institution, this type of course can have a major effect on how students perceive the world outside of the classroom, and can be an effective way for students to explore their personal stereotypes and biases in a safe environment (Snodgrass et al., 2018). Educators can bring innovative learning and methods inside their lectures and prepare students for their experiences after colleges.

The Advanced Leadership Theory, Ethics, and Culture course used in this study capitalizes on several of those non-traditional methods. Case studies, student-driven discussions, and the blogs allow students to be in charge of what and how they learn, with the help of a professor who shares his own leadership experiences to bridge the gap between classroom and reality. A study conducted in a rural African community concluded that when students are interacting with and learning about a community, they foster enhanced, trusting relationships that allow students to become more aware of the members in their community, as well as, the community is more likely to accept the students and they have a higher chance at two-way collaboration that solves problems within the environment (Kalule et al., 2018). This further solidifies the need for student-centered learning and how cultural exposure can prepare students to traverse across cultures and identities upon graduation.

### **Purpose and Research Objectives**

The purpose of this study was to determine if blogging on *cultural plurality*; the acceptance of minority identities within a majority culture, encouraged students to evaluate, reflect, and integrate a global mindset. The research objectives that guided this study are as follows:

1. Describe how students are demonstrating the use of deflective filters (prior experiences, perceived knowledge, cultural values, history) when synthesizing and evaluating new information on minority identities.
2. Describe how students are demonstrating the use of reflective filters (anxiety, aspirations, self-awareness, motivation, value judgments) when synthesizing and evaluating new information on minority identities?

3. Describe how students are integrating the new information (editing beliefs, making decisions, intent to act) about minority identities into their global leadership worldview.

### **Methods**

A content analysis was conducted using blog posts from an Advanced Leadership, Ethics and Cultures course. Holsti (1969) defines content analysis as, "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages." Content analysis is beneficial when identifying patterns and trends in large amounts of data (Stemler, 2001). The final assignment for each unit in the course was for students to create a blog post that researched a minority identity different from their own. This resulted in a plethora of data since every student enrolled in the course was to create 4 separate blogs. Document analysis is a form of content analysis in which documents are interpreted by the researcher to give voice and meaning around an assessment topic (Bowen, 2009). Researchers may look at 3 different types of documents: public records, personal documents (emails, blogs, Facebook, newspapers, etc.) and physical evidence. Bowen (2009) stated that the quality of the document is more important than the quantity of documents examined. However, using multiples types of documents is beneficial.

One of the biggest issues with document analysis is bias; from the author and creator of the document. If the creator of the document has bias when writing the document, then that person could inject bias into the research. It is also possible that they may be writing on secondhand information rather than their own experiences. For example, the researcher interpreted the blog posts. They identified filters and used *a priori* codes from their perspective of reading, rather than from the author of the blog posts. Another issue with document analysis is "unwitting evidence, or latent content, of the document (O'Leary, 2014). "Latent content refers

to the style, tone, agenda, facts or opinions that exist in the document” (Triad 3, 2016). O’Leary created another 8-step process to that can aid researchers in looking at documents as a whole, rather than precise recordings of an event that occurred. The steps are:

1. Gather relevant texts.
2. Develop an organization and management scheme.
3. Make copies of the originals for annotation.
4. Asses authenticity of documents.
5. Explore document’s agenda, biases.
6. Explore background information (tone, style, preference).
7. Ask question about document (who, why, when).
8. Explore content.

O’Leary refers to step 8 as exploring the actual content of the document. There are 2 techniques to accomplishing this. The first technique is treating the document like an interviewee. The researcher asks questions and then searches for the answers within the text of the document. The second technique is looking for specific words or phrases within the document. The researcher decides what is being searched for and then keeps track of how often the specific content, word or phrase is mentioned. “The researcher must maintain a high level of objectivity and sensitivity in order for the document analysis results to be credible and valid (Bowen, 2009)” (Triad 3, 2016).

There is a multitude of reasons that document analysis is beneficial. It is an efficient methodology and documents are fairly simple to manage. Additionally, they can continuously be reviewed without the researcher affecting the quality of the data sample. The sample will remain the same regardless of how many times it is handled. “Documents can also contain data that no longer can be observed, provide details that informants have forgotten, and can track change and development. Document analysis can also point to questions that need to be asked or to situations

that need to be observed, making the use of document analysis a way to ensure your research is critical and comprehensive” (Bowen, 2009).

### **Data Collection**

Using Bloom’s Taxonomy and Socratic seminar, the idea was to allow students to go through a developmental process that would allow them to end each unit with an increase in cultural competence. The population of the study consists of undergraduate and graduate students studying agriculture and related sciences. The convenience sample that was used in this study is students interested in capacity building through leadership development who enrolled in an advanced leadership course. The course, which focuses on leadership theories related to leadership ethics and culture, was structured using the six levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy. The class readings allowed students to develop a basic understanding of class material, increasing their knowledge of the concepts being covered within a unit.

Socratic seminar was used to facilitate open discussion between classmates. Students had the opportunity to voice their opinions and determine if they comprehend the information that was being covered. Upon completion of the unit readings and class discussions, groups of students facilitate a specific case study. They became the leaders of the discussion and must be able to analyze the case and then synthesize the information being studied in order to conduct an effective and efficient class. This activity incorporates higher order thinking and prepared students for the final level of Bloom’s Taxonomy: Evaluation. Students’ created 4 blogs during the semester. Each blog was created at the end of a unit. The blog entries were intended to introduce an identity that was different from the students’ own in the following categories: Race, Ethnicity, or Culture; Religion or Belief System; Sexual Orientation or Gender Roles; and

Ability or Social Status. The identity selected was required to be a minority identity in the context of a larger majority culture.

Students' were to describe the identity as it relates to the selected culture using support from a reputable source, discuss an organizational or societal issue associated with the identity they selected, and provide a personal editorial on their findings. Individuals were encouraged to incorporate visuals, videos and various items that would make the blog more interactive. A week after students wrote their blog posts they had to respond to two other students' entries. They were to write a one-paragraph response to the blog. Individuals were supposed to discuss what they learned from the blog, what their reaction was to the editorial, and provide new information not mentioned in the original post that they were able to find. The new information had to be related to the theme of the blog and supported by a reputable source. This was the final assignment of four different units. Document analysis was used to dissect the blog posts. After reviewing blog excerpts and coding important statements, researchers can determine if students have decided to utilize the information discovered and increase their CQ, or if they deflect the information and resort back to their initial stereotypes.

### **Data Analysis**

Using Brown's (2004) Processing Value Judgments Model, the researcher identified reflective and deflective statements that were present in the blog. At this point in development, students have already received the new information. According to the model, students use their prior experiences, perceived self-knowledge, cultural values and history to determine if they will decide to evaluate the new information, reflect on it, and potentially edit their beliefs or act on in, or if they will deem it irrelevant; which could result in resorting back to their initial beliefs/stereotypes and create conflict. Reflective statements will contain phrases that describe

student aspirations, self-awareness, motivation and value judgments. Deflective statements will have phrases leading to self-doubt, hostility, conflict, and retrenchment to prior beliefs/values/perceptions.

Blog posts are stored online at [blogger.com](http://blogger.com). Blog posts were individually analyzed using *a priori* codes. All reflective statements that contained phrasing portraying Anxiety, Aspiration, Self-Awareness, Motivation, or Value-Judgments were recorded. The same technique was used for blog responses. The posts and responses were analyzed to determine if students increased their reflective thinking over the course of the semester. At this point, we hope to determine if students have decided to utilize the information discovered and increase their CQ, or if they deflect the information and resort back to their preconceived notions. Document analysis will be the most beneficial data collection because these blogs are written at the end of each unit, allowing students to synthesize leadership content and evaluate how this knowledge can be used to lead ethically in diverse contexts.

It should be noted that the themes discussed in this study are representative of only my interpretation. Member-checking or peer-to-peer coding did not take place leading to a limitation for this study. Additionally, this study only looks at blogs from one institution over three different semesters, so it is limited in diversity of students and time for students to process and implement substantive changes outside of the course. While multiple identities were presented in this population, it should not be generalized to discuss all land grant institutions and college students alike.

## **Results**

The data collected for this study spanned 2017-2019. All participants in this study were enrolled in an Advanced Leadership Theories, Ethics, and Cultures course. In 2017, 10 students

were enrolled, in 2018, 15 students, and in 2019, 5 students were enrolled. Over that time-span, 22 undergraduates and 8 graduate students were enrolled in the course. Of those, 4 students identified as black, 20 identified as white, 2 identified as Indian, 2 identified as Asian, 1 identified as Latina, and 1 identified as Native American. The sample population also included 20 students who identified as female, and 10 who identified as male.

Students provided 288 entries, comprised of 110 blog posts and 178 peer responses. Blog topics covered minority representations based on course content within the following areas: 1) Race, ethnicity, and culture; 2) Religion or Belief System; 3) Sexual Orientation or Gender

Topic	Original Posts	Peer Responses	Deflective Posts	Deflective Responses	Reflective Posts	Reflective Responses	Integrative Posts	Integrative Responses
Race, Ethnicity, and Culture	28	42	6	8	8	18	5	3
Religion or Belief System	27	43	10	10	6	10	2	1
Sexual Orientation or Gender Roles	26	43	6	5	8	8	4	3
Ability or Social Status	29	44	8	18	20	39	0	11

Roles; and 4) Ability or Social Status. Bolded phrases are intended to highlight how a student was portraying the filter in their discussion.

Table 1: Blog Posts and Responses

### Deflective Filters

Research objective one sought to determine how students are demonstrating the use of deflective filters when synthesizing and evaluating new information on minority identities.

Students provided 30 examples of deflective filters in their initial blog posts, and 41 deflective filters in their responses, which include prior experiences, perceived knowledge, cultural values,

history. Students frequently utilized prior experiences to make connections with information being discussed.

### ***International Differences***

Students considered encounters that had occurred throughout their life, especially those outside of the United States:

“I have traveled to a few different countries and I have seen the same thing happen in any restaurant or hotel that I have visited. **Due to colorism being a big issue in different countries, the people that will be placed in those menial jobs will be people of dark skin complexion and are considered the minority.**”

“This is such an interesting paradox to me because **I have traveled and done mission trips and seen how willing people are to help disabled beings in other countries, but ignore the ones here.**”

### ***Questioning Religion***

Other students thought back to religious encounters, both with groups they were familiar with and those they weren't:

“Prior to researching this group, **my only contact with them was that split minute of panic when I realized one was at my door, followed by me silently hiding,** hoping they didn't notice I was home.”

“Despite the anti-feminist paradigm in the American church, **many of my mentors and pastors were supportive of women serving and speaking.** Withal, I have always been confused by the idea of gender roles.”

### *Cultural Differences*

Other students used this filter to describe their workplace experience. They also identified cultural differences that impacted their experience:

“There were **obvious cultural differences between her and the other employees** at the hospital, and the longer I worked there the more **I noticed how religion and culture are linked**, and these **religious practices have impacts on a person's life style** and work environment.”

“I have **encountered transgender individuals in my community but I realized how little I understood**. This was evident when, from the father’s terminology, I was unable to figure out which gender their child transitioned from and too.”

### *Personal Values and Perceptions*

Some students had experiences that connected back to their identity or **cultural values**:

“Often times as American women fighting on the front lines for equality looks a heck of a lot different than fighting for equality in other nations.”

“**I usually don't speak about to politics**, or who currently sits in the "oval office" due to the stress and **fear of back lash that it tends to cause myself and many other black and brown people**.”

“I identify with Christianity like the majority of the United States. I have never felt marginalized for my religion, and I think that is why I found Sahil's testimony so intriguing.”

“**Being white, female, and American**, I can say that I have **witnessed numerous accounts where black women were not treated fairly** and received the same opportunities if they were white.”

## **Reflective Filters**

Research question two sought to determine how students are demonstrating the use of reflective filters when synthesizing and evaluating new information on minority identities. Students provided 34 examples of reflective filters in their initial blog posts, and 41 reflective statements in their responses. These filters include anxiety, aspirations, self-awareness, motivation, and value judgments. When students use reflective filters, the posts tended to be more emotional and personal.

### ***Emotions***

Students made statements about being emotional or anxious when reading information about a topic that made them uncomfortable. Some of these statements included phrases like, **“This issue disturbs me and saddens me greatly; initially, when I watched this video, I cried; I felt really sad and bad about that.”** Other students portrayed anxiety when discussing what the future holds:

“I believe it is hard to find common ground. How do you protect all of the citizens, and respect all of the citizen's religious beliefs? I feel like **this is the question of the twenty-first century that leaves many countries including America having trouble facing.**”

### ***Self-Awareness***

Most students discussed the concept of becoming more self-aware; they learned something new, they experienced “eye-opening” moments, or they encountered a new feeling about something when they received more in-depth information. These statements included phrases like, **“I was very surprised, this isn’t something I’ve heard much about, this blog really opened my eyes.”** Some students became more aware of their perceived privilege or cultural bias and voiced that awakening:

**“It is a shame that many American citizens complain and do not understand how well off they actually are,** and do not see the way things could be, had they been born in a third world country.”

“We unknowingly place labels on individual of a minority in a larger area such as athletes, and **make assumptions for the larger group without knowing them on an individual basis.**”

“Therefore, to have respect for one another means, truly have respect, means to have humility in knowing that **just because someone else is not like you does not mean that someone else is less than you; we are all HUMAN.**”

### *Vision for the Future*

Many students were motivated to become more competent of the minority identities around them, to create a space where everyone felt welcome, and felt they served a larger purpose than only serving themselves: **“I believe that we were put on this earth to make a difference and not just sit on the couch and be selfish for 80 years.”** Another student described how their privilege should allow them to create a more equal world: **“In order for this narrative to change we, those with privilege to walk, talk, and see, must create the change.”** Other students talked about their motivation for the future and what they hoped to see:

**“I am so ecstatic to see this type of change going on in our country - a movement towards equality for those with disabilities and a shift in perspective that even though they might be different from other people, they are still capable of making incredible change and movement forward for our future.”**

“Personally, learning about the different gender/sexuality identities were very confusing, and **I'm still working to get a better grasp on the different classifications because awareness & education is key!!**”

“**Rather than giving these children fish, we must teach them how to fish.** By giving youth the efficacy to move up to the middle class, we can reduce the rate of chronic homelessness.”

### *Aspirations*

Students aspired to live in a place where all identities are welcome, and to create a movement that showed the benefits of having a diverse environment: “**I hope that the increase in Islamic religion practitioners in the world contributes to a positive change in the social image of this group; After all, who are we to prevent people from living their own lives? Shouldn't human rights be applied to everyone?**” Students who discussed topics they were motivated to learn more about, or to create a movement for, were also the students who aspired to become culturally competent, and to live in a world where everyone feels a sense of belonging.

### **Integration of New Information**

Research question three sought to determine how students are integrating the new information about minority identities into their global leadership worldview. Students provided 11 examples of integration in their initial blog posts, and 18 examples of integration in their responses. The final set of blog responses contained the largest number of responses that indicated students were showing intent to act or edit their beliefs. Integration filters include recall, editing beliefs, making decisions, and acting.

### *Showing Intent to Act*

Students who showed signs of choosing to integrate new information were the students with passionate statements and who voiced the need for others to become a part of a movement and represent their identity:

“Maybe it is our turn as leaders of the new generation to pave the way to end racism. **Racism is a huge problem, but one person making a step to end it is one step closer to it ending.**”

“Stereotypes are absolutely still formed about all races, but **we can debunk those stereotypes when we take the time to learn about someone who is different from ourselves.** We are in complete control of how we treat others.”

“Finally, I do believe that we can all contribute to religious freedom. **We do not necessarily have to practice or agree** with one another's religious beliefs; however, **we need to understand that there are many different cultures, and they deserve to be respected.**”

### ***Involvement with Minority Groups***

Students described their involvement with people of differing abilities and how that has impacted their perception of this identity. They also encouraged others to seek opportunities to build relationships with people who may have a different ability or class background:

“The tricky part about inclusion of students with disabilities is that everyone has a positive attitude about the idea, **but nobody is eager to step up and make it happen.** While I do think a child can receive great education from public schools, each child should be given the opportunity to pick which kind of school they want to go to. Having a low socioeconomic status usually does not allow you to have that choice.”

“Through my roommates, I have been able to have the opportunity to meet many members of the homeless community in our area and spend afternoons sitting and getting to know their story. **I think that this step is an important one because it reminds us that these people are humans too, and everyone needs to feel loved and appreciated no matter who they are.**”

### ***Career Choices***

Students also discussed the intent to carry new information over into their future careers. They were hopeful that this new information learned from the blogs made them more competent professionals, such as being more **“inclusive, accepting, and healing.”**

“As a future dentist, with hopes of working primarily with children and adolescents, and possibly practicing in New England, **I realize that I must have an educated perspective on gender identity in young people and the effects on the care I provide for them and special needs they may have.**”

**“When it comes to respect I want the people that I work with to be able to respect and treat each client that comes fairly.** To help with this is the understanding of respect there needs to be a dialogue of how to understand intersex people better.”

One student even acted via the blog site, correcting someone who “misspoke” about a disability:

**“As much I appreciate your post and what you had to present, I do feel the need to clarify that ASD is NOT a “disease.” It’s a disorder.”**

### **Information Deemed Irrelevant or Incompatible**

Some students deemed information irrelevant or incompatible. After using the deflective filters (prior experiences, perceived self-knowledge, cultural values, and history), they decided they were unable to actively evaluate the information or make connections with it. This type of

reflection can lead to self-doubt, hostility, conflict, and/or retrenchment to prior beliefs, values, and perceptions. Our data included only 7 statements about information students either chose to, or could not, evaluate:

### ***Retrenchment to Prior Beliefs***

“If someone does not want to be progressive towards bettering themselves, then **I do not have a desire to help them; I cannot, nor do I want to, imagine what it would be like** growing up and living in a cult; **I couldn’t believe that an entire religion** would be based off of suicide, abortion, cannibalism, and sodomy.” Other statements came from the perspective on non-traditional religious practices and male careers:

“Minority groups like this one are extreme, and although they shed light on an environmental issue, **I do not feel like this is truly a religion.**”

“To say the least, I do not agree with this religion and its views, but hey, “To each his own,” I recon. **I don’t think I view it as a religion, mainly because I am not sure how seriously the followers take their beliefs.**”

### ***Conflict***

Some students discussed information that was causing conflict with their current thoughts or mindsets:

“It would be difficult for a dude being in an industry about taking care of kids. **I bet a lot of people might think you are a molester or something.**”

“A male nanny seems like a strange job to me. Like [participant] mentioned above, **many may perceive them as a potential danger to kids.**”

Early posts showed a large number of reflective and deflective statements, as well as a willingness to edit their beliefs and act when it came to religion and ability or social status. Most

students who showed signs of driving a movement or acting on behalf of a minority identity discussed the homeless population and how they could advocate for children who lived in underserved communities. Additionally, students were the most reflective on concepts when they were able to connect with the information via their own experiences. The blog unit that contained the lowest number of integrative statements (or intent to be the voice for the minority identity) was the unit covering sexuality and gender roles.

### **Conclusions/Implications/Recommendations**

The intent of this study was to determine if blogging on minority identities within certain populations increased the cultural plurality of students in an advanced agricultural leadership course. Seventy-six blogs and 112 responses used phrases that indicated students were using deflective and reflective filters, as well as, integration of CQ toward multiple minority identities. The Sexual Orientation and Gender Roles unit not only contained the lowest number of blog submissions, but students published the lowest number of reflective responses. Additionally, students did not show the intent to act or make change within this unit. This finding is similar to that of Vincent and Austin (2020), where it was discovered that senior agricultural students were the least likely to interact with gay, black, non-agricultural students; yet, they were most likely to interact with straight, black, agricultural students. While the students who participated in this study were all college students, educators have still not discovered a way to begin a dialogue or create an environment where all sexualities are accepted in the classroom.

The final unit and set of blog posts contained the highest number of reflective statements, as well as the highest number of integrative filters. This tells us by exposing students to minority identities and other cultures over a period of time, they are able to develop a mindset that encourages action as they attempt to eradicate any negative stereotypes they may have. Blogging

on cultural plurality and minority identities could be an innovative and effective way to educate students on cultural differences, as well as, prepare students to enter the industry with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in a globalized workforce.

Participants showed the ability to critically reflect on minority identities and cultures. When students were given the tools to explore cultures that were different than them, they were able to enhance their knowledge of populations they will encounter throughout their lives, especially if they find themselves in a leadership role. Blogging proved to be an innovative tool to cultural exposure, and also gave participants an opportunity to exhibit their creativity when discussing sensitive topics. Future research should determine if this teaching technique encourages students to integrate new information and their experiences in their community.

This research merits further investigation to determine if students reached the final level of Bloom's Taxonomy: Creation. While this study was conducted to examine how cultural competency levels changed over the course of the semester, researchers are unsure if the students continually applied the concepts learned outside of the classroom. While they are given the knowledge and skills to lead outside of the classroom, it should be noted that no research has been conducted to determine if students who graduate from the class use this enhanced multicultural knowledge base to succeed in their careers or in an international setting. A course that contains an experiential-learning component could offer greater insight on how blogging and reflective thinking encourages a culturally competent mindset. Integration of new ideas is the ultimate goal of this class, thus a follow up study should be conducted (Brown, 2004).

## CHAPTER 3

### **A Phenomenological Approach to Understanding the Effects of Pre-Departure Orientation on Students Experiences Abroad in Morocco**

#### **Introduction**

Society is demanding employees and leaders to have a skillset that is applicable across cultures. Study abroad programs offer students' a way to gain those skills, but only if it is done effectively. Research indicates that workplaces and universities are "struggling to find effective approaches to foster such development in university students, expatriate managers, working professionals and members of the workforce in general" (Lokkesmoe, K., Kuchinke, K., & Ardichvili, A., 2016, pp. 156). With over 300,000 students traveling the globe in 2017-2018 (International Institute for Education, 2019), less than 50,000 studied in Africa and Asia, and over 150,000 studied somewhere in Europe. Additionally, 70% of students were white, and 67% identified as female. Less than 7% of study abroad students identified as Black or African-American, and approximately 10.5% students identified as Latino or Hispanic. (OpenDoors Report, 2019) Finally, only 2.7% of students who studied abroad in 2017/2018 were students in a college of agriculture (OpenDoors Report, 2019). This begs the question of how are colleges of agriculture across the U.S. encouraging students to enhance their multicultural skills when only a miniscule amount of students are traveling abroad to gain those skills (in terms of studying abroad). Moreover, with most students choosing to study abroad in a developed nation, they may not be encouraged to truly exit their comfort zones and evaluate how their own biases and experiences effect how they reflect on minority cultures and identities. The literature is still limited on the best methods to prepare to students to go abroad, and how to guide them through cultural development. Additionally, long-term cultural immersion experiences have steadily

declined since 2006 (International Institute for Education, 2019). With the development of social justice and global leadership courses in colleges of agriculture, agricultural students could be more inclined to venture into the unknown; explore a region of the world they otherwise would not have. Snodgrass, Morris, and Acheson (2018) described how a predominately white institution implanted a social equity course that encouraged students to explore different identities and cultures. While there was some initial pushback, when the instructor created purposeful content and generated meaningful discussions in class, students showed increases in their cultural competence. This type of course could be beneficial when preparing students for culture shock and cultural immersion. As educators we can better prepare students to travel across borders and assist them in enhancing their problem-solving skills, their critical reflection skills, and encourage their development of a more multicultural mindset. Pre-departure orientations and trainings could allow students to explore trials and tribulations they may face while abroad. Additionally, long-term cultural immersion experiences could become more appealing if students are prepared and given the tools to succeed at their university.

This study is intended to determine how several pre-departure orientations effected students' experience abroad. Exposure to the regions religion and cultural customs should be considered imperative when preparing students to travel. Through interviews, researchers were able to capture a glimpse of what should be included when preparing students for study abroad programs.

### **Subjectivity Statement**

This study describes the experiences of 3 students abroad who completed internships in Morocco. My intent is to start a dialogue in the agricultural sector as to how we can help students develop a multicultural mindset, especially when they are given the tools to be successful

beforehand. We live in a globalized society, and that will not change in the future. We can, however, as educators and mentors, prepare our students to be successful in a multicultural environment, because it is likely they will enter a situation where they are no longer in the dominant or majority groups. From my personal lens, it seems that if we're passionate about production agriculture in America, we can't be passionate about other ways of living and appreciate the beauty of other cultures. I, however, think very differently. Encouraging students to acknowledge and explore other cultures will only allow us to be better communicators in multicultural settings (when given the proper tools). While we may not agree with others' way of life, we can seek to understand it and hopefully adapt our practices. Everyone needs agriculture every day of their lives. Agriculture constantly pleads to be understood, and therefore I think it's important to understand where others are coming from, too.

While I hope to highlight the experiences and personalities of my interviewees, I acknowledge that my interactions and beliefs with participants could be present in these results. I spent 8 weeks in Morocco, 7 of them with all of my participants. I traveled with some of them on the weekends, and personally watched how they interacted and evolved during their cultural immersion experiences. I kept notes of how they acted during weekend excursions, how they navigated some of the difficult living situations, and how I believed they improved their cultural competence. I developed my own interpretation/beliefs about them outside of their interviews. We spent too much time together to keep from establishing that type of connection with one another. I used myself as the research tool; encouraging them to talk with me about things below surface level. While interviews and journal entries about my participants were important, I was also trying to capitalize on my time in Morocco. I watched how my participants communicated with individuals in the communities we visited, and used those interactions to alter *my*

interactions. I wanted to act as open and accepting as I could, even in a country where I was the outsider. I also wanted to know if the people I was traveling with and interviewing were doing the same. I *wanted* them to do the same. We had conversations outside of the interviews that could have had an impact on their experience. We discussed politics, religion, and other sensitive topics that impact our daily decisions. While I have no way of officially knowing if those conversations effected their experiences, I can make judgments given my personal relationships with them, and because of how much time we spent together.

I want to acknowledge the fact that I played a crucial role in the experiences of my participants, just as they played a role in mine. I injected myself into their cultural immersion experience, and maintained a personal relationship with two of my participants. While I hope I mitigated as much bias as possible, I am inextricably linked to my participants and their experiences.

### **Statement of the Problem**

While benefits of cultural immersion are well researched, how to best prepare students for those experiences is less so. According to Brown (2004), individuals could retreat back to their prior beliefs and prejudices if they have a negative experience with an identity they have never interacted with or been exposed to. Additionally, with limited research surrounding best practices for sending students abroad, universities and organizations may not be developing individuals' multicultural mindsets before their cultural immersion experiences. Moreover, Deardorff (2015) discusses how international learning programs should offer a more holistic approach; they should be learner-centered and capitalize on the process of the experience rather than end-results. Students who participate in independent study abroad are given the opportunity to take charge of their own learning and development, but educators must do their part in

ensuring experiences abroad have positive impacts on individuals' cultural competence. Paras, Carignan, Brenner, Hardy, Malmgren, and Rathburn (2019, p. 23) determined that “significant pre-departure training provides students with a toolkit of skills for responding to cultural difference.” Within our own discipline, more information is needed on the effects of pre-departure orientations for students going abroad.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Brown's (2004) Processing Value Judgements Model was used as the framework for this study. According to the model, students take in new information (and this case, experiences) and use deflective filters: prior experiences, perceived self-knowledge, cultural values, and history, to determine if they want to evaluate the new information, or deem it irrelevant/incompatible (see Figure 1). Our hope is that they choose to evaluate the new information or experience and then critically reflect on the subject using reflective filters: anxiety, aspirations, self-awareness, motivation, and value-judgements. When evaluating the new information or experience, students make connections with the topics, and mentally resolve any conflicts they may have with the information. After critically reflecting on the information students either integrate the new information into their mindset and change their behavior to incorporate it, or they deflect the information and deem it irrelevant or incompatible. Information that is deflected will include statements that represent self-doubt, hostility, conflict, or retrenchment to prior beliefs/values/perceptions. This framework was used to determine if students were critically reflecting on their experience before and after it happened.

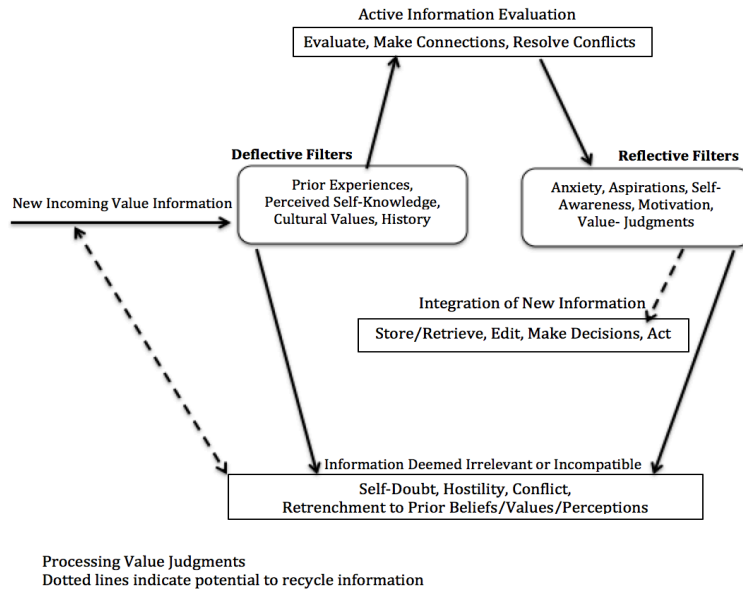


Figure 1: Processing Value Judgements

## Literature Review

Study abroad offers a variety of benefits: job employability, potential to work internationally, and can enhance employment desire for students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds (Pietro, 2019). However, the cons are rarely discussed. Outside of the resume building capabilities of study abroad programs, students may be choosing to travel not for academic enhancement, but for the desire to travel and just seeking excitement (Pietro, 2019). While some students want to travel abroad because they are using it to impact their academics and employability, we can still ensure that the excitement driven students capitalize on the opportunity to become more globally minded citizens. (Mukherjee, 2010) The desire to gravitate towards more student-centered learning/engagement methods has become popular among the literature (Nair, 2019; Wilson et al., 2019; Wulf, 2019). Additionally, how we can use those innovative methods to better prepare students to go abroad, or to just use newly learned concepts outside of the classroom?

Pre-departure training is a crucial part of a study abroad program (Paras et al., 2019). There is common notion among international education literature that students will develop intercultural communication skills so long as we send them abroad, but that is not the case (Deardorff, 2016). “Providing a pre-departure orientation that creates space for intercultural communication skills training is a vital component of the student’s ability to navigate various cultures that they will come into contact while they are abroad” (Hanson, 2017). However, due to limited time and resources, universities may not be employing these types of training with their students (Hanson, 2017; Fantini, 2004). Moreover, the lessons and activities that makeup a successful pre-departure training program ranges drastically in variety. (Costello, 2019; Paras et al., 2019; Hanson, 2017; Deardorff, 2016; Fantini, 2005).

However, one aspect pre-departure trainings and the advanced development of cultural competence have in common is critical reflection. Reflections offer students a way to synthesize and evaluate information, and consider topics they may not otherwise think about (Vandermaas-Peeler, Duncan-Bendix, & Biehl, 2018; Brown, 2004). While educators hope that all study abroad experiences will end with a positive outcome or experience, we must acknowledge that not all students are developed to the same level when considering cultural competence. Moreover, considering both Brown’s (2004) and Paras et al. (2019) findings, if students endure a negative experience or aren’t challenged to a high enough degree when they are abroad, they may have no development, or even retreat back to a lesser multicultural mindset. Critical reflection both before and after a cultural immersion experience can help students in the globally minded development process. “It is also important for educators to recognize that it is possible for some students to move backwards along the IDI continuum, and our fourth finding indicates

that written reflections provide meaningful information to educators about why this might happen” (Paras et al., 2019).

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to examine what types of training U.S. students engaged in prior to study abroad experiences, how these trainings impacted their ability to acclimate in the host country, and what role their identity played in their experience. Specifically, this study will be looking at the reflection, deflection, and integration of cultural knowledge before and after the international experience. The research questions that guided this study are:

1. How did participants’ pre-departure training effect their experiences abroad?
2. How were students using deflective and reflective filters prior to cultural immersion?
3. How were students using deflective filters and reflective filters, at the conclusion of their international experience?

### **Methods**

A phenomenological approach was used to examine experiences abroad, as well as, personal perceptions of global leadership and cultural competence from students interning in Rabat, Morocco. Leedy and Ormrod (2001) state that the purpose of a phenomenological study is “to understand an experience from the participants’ point of view.” Reflective and deflective filters were used as *a priori* codes to determine how students were processing their new knowledge and experiences. This study explored the experiences of students abroad in Morocco and how they perceived their pre-departure training to affect that experience.

Semi-structured interviews were used for study two. Two interview guides were developed and interviews took place during the first two weeks of a participant’s trip, and then the final week of their cultural immersion experience. These types of interviews are beneficial in

a small-scale setting because the interviewees have the freedom to choose what they talk about, how much they say and how they decide to explain a topic (Drever, 1995). Since these interviews were personal, it was imperative that students had the opportunity to express themselves and have the ability to articulate their beliefs about cultural competence and its importance. Semi-structured interviews allowed them to have this freedom. Upon return to the United States, the interviews were transcribed and document analysis was used to code the transcripts.

### **Data Collection**

According to Barrett (2011), “Intercultural competence may not be acquired spontaneously by individuals, and it may not be acquired simply through exposure to and encounters with people from other cultural backgrounds. However, there is good evidence that appropriate forms of intercultural education can have a significant impact on the intercultural competence of young people.” The second study was conducted after a culturally immersive experience in Morocco. Tomlinson-Clarke and Clarke (2010) state “Cultural awareness and knowledge acquired primarily through cognitive learning may remain at an intellectual level and limit students’ abilities to develop cultural competencies.” A multitude of training methods are crucial in cultural competence development. These methods should build on each other as development continues (Sevig & Etzkorn, 2001; Tomlinson-Clarke & Ota Wang, 1999).

While in Morocco, semi-structured interviews were conducted upon arrival at the Moroccan Center for Arabic Studies. Interviews determined if students from other schools in the United States went through any training to determine their initial cultural competency levels. Their personal definitions of global leadership were collected, as well as their initial feelings about Morocco and its culture. At the end of their experience abroad, another semi-structured

interview was conducted. The final interview was used to determine if participants were able to critically reflect on their experience and alter their initial beliefs/perceptions that may have been stereotypical or incorrect at the beginning of their experience. Additionally, they were asked if their definition of global leadership and intercultural competence had changed after experience a new culture that was different from their own. “Cultural immersion training is an experiential reality that provides opportunities for participants to directly engage with individuals from cultures different from their own” (Ridley, Mendoza, & Kanitz, 1994). In a globalized world, these international experiences should help prepare students to traverse across cultures as they enter the agricultural workforce.

### **Data Analysis**

Using Brown’s (2004) Processing Value Judgments Model, the researcher identified reflective or deflective statements present in the interview transcripts. Interviews were recorded with a device and then downloaded on to a computer. Upon arrival back into the United States, all interviews were transcribed. The following *a priori* codes were used to describe participants’ experiences: Anxiety, Aspiration, Self-Awareness, and Motivation. For deflective statements the codes changed: Prior experiences, Perceived Self-Knowledge, Cultural Values, and History. The final set of *a priori* codes were used when students deflected information and deemed it irrelevant or incompatible: Self-Doubt, Hostility, Conflict, and Retrenchment to Prior Beliefs/Values/Perceptions. After transcripts were coded to determine if students were more reflective, deflective, or deeming information incompatible with their current beliefs, the researcher could identify how pre-departure orientation effected participants’ experiences abroad. Participants were given pseudonyms for the purpose of reporting their answers.

## Results

*A priori* codes were used to determine if students were using deflective filters and choosing to actively evaluate new information, if they were using reflecting filters and then choosing to integrate new information and experiences into their global mindset, or if they were deflecting the information and dismissing it as irrelevant or incompatible. Deflective codes are: prior experiences, perceived self-knowledge, cultural values and history. The reflective codes are: Anxiety, Aspirations, Self-Awareness, and Motivation. Codes were identical for both interview protocols. If students deemed information irrelevant or incompatible, then the following codes were used to analyze those statements: Self-Doubt, Hostility, Conflict, and Retrenchment to Prior Beliefs/Values/Perceptions. Bolded phrases are intended to highlight how the participant was using the filter in their discussion.

### Demographics of Interview Participants

**Cindy** was a 20-year-old white female who was pursuing an undergraduate degree at University of California-Berkeley. Cindy was a double major in Political Science and French. She was also minoring in Global Poverty and Practice. Cindy had never left the United States. Cindy had plans to take her career internationally and work with an NGO that benefited woman. She had the opportunity to work with a women's organization in Morocco that worked with underrepresented populations of Amazigh women. When I first met Cindy, she was very bubbly and ecstatic to be living in Morocco. She mentioned she had not done much research on places other than Rabat (where we were living), but after talking with other interns was she looking forward to weekend expeditions. I traveled with Cindy frequently on these weekend trips, and I saw her energy decrease quickly as her cultural immersion experience progressed. Cindy felt that her physical appearance affected her experience abroad. Cindy had light blonde hair, an average

build, and was around 5'2. Everywhere we traveled, she was catcalled or touched, and eventually it just made her want to stay home. During one of our weekend excursions, she ended up leaving early because she was tired of being talked to on the streets. However, I will mention that Cindy did not necessarily follow the *cultural dress code* of Morocco (cover shoulders, legs, and hair if necessary). She would wear shorts and tank tops in public. There were some occasions where I remember her wearing shirts that showed her midriff. She frequently wore leggings, which is uncommon because they are so tight. While I do not condone the way she was treated, there is a plethora of information discussing what women should and should not wear when traveling to a predominantly Muslim country. Cindy ignored that advice, and in turn received a lot of attention, especially from men. She grew tired of the Moroccan way of life and by the final 2 weeks of her trip, she was ready to get back home. Cindy did not have a good relationship with her host family, and this put a strain on her living situation, as well as on the relationship with the person in charge of our internships. Her lifestyle differences ended up not being compatible with her host family. Her host family also had children who wanted to learn English. Cindy had no desire to teach the kids, but her host family was expecting it. This was not made clear when Cindy moved in and made the living situation very tense. Between not being comfortable at home and not being comfortable going out, Cindy remained pretty stressed throughout the duration of her experience. At the end, however, she did say she felt more culturally competent and that overall her experience allowed her to view life from a different lens. She talked about how she was grateful for that opportunity because learning how others live in the world can be beneficial and enlightening.

Cindy's pre-departure orientation consisted of a semester long course that involved writing a research paper and doing continuous research about Morocco. The course required

Cindy to look into the dominant religion, current political movements, and how to stay safe when traveling abroad. She was also required to read a book about cultural competence and create another document that showed how she would develop her competence.

**Angelica** was a 19-year-old white female who was pursuing an undergraduate degree in journalism at New York University, with hopes to work in international journalism. Angelica was originally from Greece, and had been living in the United States for 2 years. She had traveled internationally, but only in Europe and the U.S. Angelica was interning with Morocco World News, working as a writer. She had to complete a story that would be published at the end of her internship. When I first met Angelica, it was difficult to build rapport. She was not interested in small talk, so it was difficult to begin conversations. She did not elaborate on her answers in the interviews, and it almost seemed she did not want to be participating. As both of our trips progressed, we became a little closer. However, around week 3, Angelica tried booking an early flight back home. She hated Morocco and the way she had to live. She was not a fan of the people or how people shopped for the groceries and other goods (in open air markets). When traveling on the weekends, Angelica did not like the hostels and thought they were very unclean. She was also struggling at her job and her living situation was difficult because she refused to eat after 6 PM. Her and Cindy were roommates, and dinner was normally served between 7-8. So, instead of eating traditional Moroccan cuisine, she would buy fruit or a snack from the market and not eat dinner. She ended up not leaving early, and around week 4 she had begun to adjust. She started to explore more on her own and enjoy our weekend travels. We hiked Mount Toubkal together, which she mentioned was one of her favorite experiences. By the time her final interview came around, Angelica was much easier to talk to and she said she enjoyed her cultural immersion experience.

Angelica's pre-departure orientation consisted only of what her host organization, Moroccan Center for Arabic Studies, gave her. This consisted of a pamphlet that discussed fun facts about Morocco, and they also gave her online resources to explore before she arrived in Morocco.

**Nora** was a 21-year-old white female who was attending the University of Sussex in the United Kingdom. Nora was majoring in international psychology, and has big dreams of being the international psychologist for the United Nations. She discussed how this psychologist works with federal employees, doctors without borders, and anyone who lives abroad or works in under-developed regions. When speaking with Nora, I could tell she was very passionate about helping people and wanted to dedicate her life to just that. Nora frequently volunteered abroad with various organizations, and also participated in international service-learning opportunities. Nora loved to talk; it was easy to build rapport and have in-depth conversations with her. Nora told me about her previous trips to Africa: in Zimbabwe and Mozambique. She stated that's where she fell in love with the idea of working as a psychologist for the United Nations or a large aid contributor. I didn't have the opportunity to travel with Nora like I did Cindy and Angelica. Nora lived on the other side of the city, which I found interesting because she gained a different perspective than that of my friends. Nora also traveled by herself a lot more than other interns, so I loved hearing about her weekend experiences! When I initially met Nora, she sounded and acted (in my opinion) culturally competent, and when I interviewed her a second time, it seemed she had only made greater strides. Nora rarely mentioned any negative attitudes or experiences she had in Morocco. She was constantly finding the good, and if something did seem strange or uncomfortable, she always mentioned how the Moroccan culture may just be different than her

own. From my own perspective, Nora showed the most intercultural growth during her experience. However, that was not measured so it is from my perspective and mine only.

Nora had traveled extensively, and Morocco was the third African country she had visited. Her pre-departure orientation was minimal; it consisted of online resources, pamphlets and brochures. However, she felt this did not hinder her experience because she had already traveled abroad several times, specifically in Africa.

### **Deflective Filters Used During Interview Protocol #1**

Individuals use deflective filters when their first encounter new information. Deflective filters are prior experiences, perceived self-knowledge, cultural values, and history. If they choose not to evaluate the information, then it is deflected and not integrated into their global mindset, thus deemed irrelevant or incompatible. It is our hope that students will use these deflective filters and then choose to actively evaluate the new information.

### ***Pre-Departure Training***

Participants used their perceived knowledge to determine how they felt about their cultural immersion experience. They may have been using information they used in their pre-departure orientation or from their previous international experiences. Angelica and Cindy used knowledge they had gained from pre-departure orientation.

**“So, I read a lot about their culture through a website that they kept on like, sharing with me. In terms of like communications, relationships, like the culture, kind of like history a bit. I know about the main region in general, like, political situation and stuff like that. I know about their religious practices.”-Angelica**

“I did a lot of research this past semester on like the Islamic feminist movement, here especially, and **I think Morocco is like, really cool in what they’ve, like in the steps**

**they've taken compared to other Islamic countries in the Middle East and African region.** I want to say that's like a Moroccan value.”-Cindy

“Other than that, **I had to do a lot of research on safety stuff** for my parents because I've never traveled by myself, and that like, freaked them out so, I had to do a lot of like, **“these are the immunizations I get and, this is where I'll be and this is how safe it is”**, and things I need to watch out for and like, **getting everything prepared so that they're at ease and I'm at ease.**”-Cindy

### *Mindfulness*

Nora emphasized the Moroccan culture, stating they were aware of many cultural differences, and that they were going to mimic those traditions as best as they could, so as not to be disrespectful as a tourist:

“I'll definitely, since I'm the guest, **I'll definitely stick to their values and act the way that the locals do as well**, and not put myself like as an outsider, just like go with the flow I guess.”-Nora

### **Reflective Filters Used During Interview Protocol #1**

Initial interviews were conducted within the first seven days of their arrival to Morocco. When participants utilize reflective filters in their dialogue, it should allow them to integrate this new information or experience into their global mindset. Reflective filters contain statements that highlight: anxiety, aspirations, self-awareness, motivation, and value judgments. Students either use these filters to make change or act, or they deem it irrelevant or incompatible. After reflecting on the information at hand, they can store/retrieve the information, edit their habits, make decisions based on this new information, and act on the new information.

### *Emotion*

Participants discussed anxiety when referring to money and lifestyle differences, such as eating habits, how they worship, and how they spend their free time:

“**Probably money because I don’t have that much of it.** And, I know things aren’t expensive here, which is great, but **I also tend to like get scammed** and people have been really nice and it hasn’t been that big of an issue but I’m hoping I can, I can stay and like experience everything.”- Cindy

“The one thing I noticed as soon as I got here, because I live with a host family, is that **they eat every meal together and it’s sometimes difficult to eat food at the house without them?** Like, if I wanted to eat by myself it’s kind of hard, and that is not something I ever had.”-Cindy

“I feel like mainly **the religion**, I think, is the **biggest difference** which also includes like **the way you act, the way you can’t act, the way you dress, you talk, you look**, like so basically the religion.”-Nora

### ***Honeymoon Stage***

Cindy described movements that they aspired to be a part of, as well as, discussing what they thought was necessary to improve their cultural competence.

“Just like patterns and attention to detail that seems to be pretty universal and standard. I think that’s really cool and **something that I wish America had.**”-Cindy

“You have to just like, **completely open yourself up and neglect like, stereotypes** and really do your research because it’s that, that kind of stuff isn’t easiest to find. **The easiest thing to find would be the loudest voices.**”-Cindy

Angelica and Nora discussed why they aspired to visit Morocco, and what they would be doing. Angelica also mentioned their future career plans as it relates to international work:

“I really wanted to visit this place for a long time now and I thought it will be cool and it will be that, kind of impressive like, for my resume and to actually visit a place like this and get to stay in here. **It’s kind of a region that has a lot of political interest and sort of like cliques with what I’m doing.**”-Angelica

“I’ve decided to do this because I’m really passionate about kids. And, I wanted to **experience another experience in Africa because I just love it.**”-Nora

### *Open-Minded, Accepting*

Participants described their motivation to go into their cultural immersion experience with an open mind, as well as, what they hoped they could represent if roles were reversed and Moroccans were visiting their home:

“The course was designed to give you enough context to think about your organization critically, and **to not go into it being like, “this is the most amazing thing I’ve ever done! And, I’m like, solving all the world’s problems.”**-Cindy

“So from what I’ve seen right now like **my host family is really welcoming** and they’re all like there to like take care for us, ask us if we need anything, help us go places. **This is what my family would do.**”-Angelica

### **Information Deemed Irrelevant or Incompatible during Interview Protocol 1**

If students deemed the new information or experience irrelevant or incompatible, then they did not actively evaluate the new information or reflect on. This may happen because students are uncomfortable with the situation, have internal or external conflict with the information, or they may decide it is not compatible with their current values and beliefs.

### *Lifestyle Differences*

Cindy discussed several conflicts they encountered when first arriving to Morocco. Both conflicts took place at their home-stay and at their internship office:

“I’m vegetarian and that came as a shock to them. And there’s this weird like, they cut up a whole bunch of vegetables this morning at breakfast and **set them all out in front of me and like “here, because you’re a vegetarian.” And there’s this weird like, you should cook for yourself, but we’ll help you, like whatever.** So, I get that they don’t really know how to act.”-Cindy

“It’s also weird to me **that it’s a feminist organization** and it’s, that there are three staff members on site and **two of them are men and one of them is a woman. So, it’s a little weird,** but yeah.”-Cindy

### *Uncomfortable*

Angelica described their issues with drastic cultural differences when first arriving to Morocco. Angelica also stated they had never heard the term “intercultural competence.” Difference of religion and customs played a role in their deflection.

“Like I’ve seen like, women circulating around like all covered. I don’t know like, only men sitting in the coffee shop... **the men are like, kind of being weird with us,** like when we’re walking. Yeah, **things like that don’t really happen in my country or in the United States.**”-Angelica

### **Deflective Filters Used During Interview Protocol #2**

Cindy used several deflective filters in their response below. They integrated their **prior experiences** from an American standpoint, as well as their own **cultural values and history** to describe their cultural immersion experience.

“So, I feel like it opened my eyes to the way, like, a lot, like a **huge proportion of the world lives and thinks that isn’t really broadcasted, or like we don’t really learn about in America**. And I think my training did help a lot to give me like a background and context. **It’s given me like, a new idea of like, who exists in the world**, because when you come from one place, especially a place like America, that tells you from the day you’re born that you live in the greatest country in the world, it’s hard to see other countries, and to **realize that people live completely different lifestyles and are still like awesome**, and still like live, and survive, and you know, thrive.”-Cindy

### *Open-minded, Accepting*

Angelica described what it was like to overcome cultural limitations, both when moving to the United States from Greece, and then coming to Morocco. Although challenging, she remained open-minded throughout her experience: “I saw that there are a lot of **differences in terms of culture and like, limitations**... but here was even more evident because African culture with the European are very different.” Angelica also stated she felt more culturally competent at the end of the experience: “Now **I feel more comfortable in a different cultural environment**.”

Nora discussed changing their behavior in order to be respectful of the Moroccan culture. This was the only participant to show signs of making the decision to act in a different way so as not to disrespect the people around them:

“I think that just **always remembering that it’s different in this culture**. So like the little things, like just going to the beach, and just knowing **that it’s not correct to just go in your bikini and just act like it’s normal, because it’s a different culture** and they don’t see it the same way. I think, I think that just the **most challenging part is just to remember that it’s not like you’re used to**.”-Nora

## Reflective Filters Used During Interview Protocol #2

### *Self-Awareness*

Participants become more self-aware at the conclusion of their trip abroad. Cindy described several experiences that showed they integrated new information and experiences into their global mindset.

“The saddest thing is that I don’t know Arabic... I think that’s like a mark against my cultural competency for Moroccan culture... I feel like I understand and I like, know what’s going on, but **I don’t feel like I’m like integrated into it if that makes sense...** So I don’t understand it to the point where I’m a part of it, **but I understand it as well as you can from being on the outside.**”-Cindy

### *Self-Confidence*

Nora exuded increased self-confidence and self-awareness after their cultural immersion experience. Not only did they discuss enhanced multicultural team working skills, but the also the ability to travel independently and navigate the world with more confidence and cultural competence.

“I think just living for five weeks, or even just a little period, in a country which has such different traditions and cultures, I **think it enables you to be able to work in different situations as well.** It helps you just **broaden your mind, like just think outside the box and just adapt to different cultures** equally well.”-Nora

“I think for me, the most challenging parts of this trip were the traveling... It was the one place where **you actually had to figure everything out by yourself, and just leave, and just rely on yourself.** I’ve certainly learned a lot about how to travel by myself more,

and how to just be spontaneous and just go with it. **Don't worry too much, and I'm sure that helps in different cultures as well.**"-Nora

## **Information Deemed Irrelevant or Incompatible**

### ***Lifestyle/Physical Differences***

Cindy was the only individual to negatively deflect information in the second interview protocol. Due to their physical appearance, at times the participant felt unsafe and this was a difficult situation for them to navigate:

**"I look completely different than everyone here. I stick out to the people here. So, I get a lot of looks from, from everyone, from both genders, and it was like, there's always a, like I always get tense around like, men in particular,** because they like say something, or like move towards you, or like follow you sometimes. So, that was really hard and I actually found like, when people ask me about this experience, **I have to tell myself not to talk about that, it, because if I start talking about like the men, and like, feeling safe here and stuff, then I like, it'll just consume my narrative** of like, the time I spent here."-Cindy

## **Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations**

The experiences of participants indicated that purposeful pre-departure training could have an effect on the quality of a cultural immersion experience, as well as, students' ability to critically reflect on new information and experiences. Participants who had more strenuous training and preparation before departing on their trip concluded that their training played a major role in their ability to enjoy their experience abroad. Additionally, students who used more reflective statements in their discussions were also the students who had purposeful pre-departure trainings. Furthermore, participants who completed extensive training more passed

critical reflection, and discussed the need to integrate new information and experiences and thus were trying to act in a way that would respect the Moroccan culture and people. Nora showed signs of drastically enhanced cultural competence, such as altering her own way of living in order to integrate into the Moroccan culture. However, Nora was the only participant who had ever been to Africa and also had extensive international travels before her Morocco experience.

While this study offers insight on the importance of preparing students to travel abroad, it fails to address the needs or experiences of multiple identities. This in itself generates a discussion around why white students are still the predominant population participating in study abroad experiences and encourages us to find more ways to be more inclusive in our recruitment efforts to encourage students of color and other backgrounds to travel abroad. Finally, a novice researcher conducted these studies, and no peer coding took place. These findings are my interpretations only, and I acknowledge that this is a limitation. Incorporating member checking and peer coding could allow for more robust data that offers a more internal view of the experiences of these students who go abroad.

Further research is recommended to better understand what types of instructional methods and pre-departure trainings have the greatest effect on students' cultural immersion experiences. Moreover, a more diverse set of participants (both racially and by gender) should be utilized in order to explore the needs of multiple identities that may be participating in cultural immersion experiences. Additionally, it is recommended that this type of research be conducted in other regions of the world in order to determine if different training is needed depending on the country and/or culture the student will be immersed in.

## CHAPTER 4

### **Conclusions**

Currently, students in agriculture account for less than 3% of students studying abroad (Institute for International Education, 2019), and students are less willing to explore cultures and identities that are different than their own (Murphrey, Lane, & Cherry, 2016). This becomes problematic as nations continue to enter globalized states, and leaders do not have the necessary cultural competence to lead across political, economic, and culture barriers. The purpose of this study was to discuss ways educators and mentors could better prepare their students to lead across all types of barriers, both inside and outside the traditional classroom. Through innovative teaching methods and describing the experiences of students abroad, this study was intended to shed light on how educators can implement some of these global education strategies to help their students develop a more multicultural mindset.

Blogging on cultural plurality shows promise as an effective instructional method when promoting a global mindset. It allowed students to explore and reflect on an array of identities they may not have otherwise encountered. Deardorff (2011) states that guided, intentional reflection plays a substantial role in individuals becoming more culturally competent. By utilizing blogs (online reflection), it gave students an outlet to critically reflect on information and determine if they were able to process it further. Students demonstrated the use of deflective and reflective filters by relating information they learned or experienced to their previous experiences, personal beliefs, and also showed signs of enhanced self-awareness. Several participants discussed their reactions to information, and described how the culture they found themselves in influenced that decision or reaction. This is a similar finding to Atilas et al. (2017), where researchers discussed how culture impacts the way we respond in certain situations.

Additionally, Brown (2004) discusses how are experiences shape who we are and how we process new information, which also corroborates how students responded to blog posts and to situations experienced in Morocco. Students of several different races and two genders positively reacted to new information they learned in an advanced leadership course, and therefore they should the intent to be more inclusive in their everyday life, both personally and professionally. This further corroborates Vincent's and Austin's (2020) idea that increased diversity and inclusion can lead to a more positive, creative environment. Snodgrass et al. (2018) also described how when students are exposed to identities different than their own in a safe space where sensitive questions can be asked, they are more likely to explore the identity below surface level and develop a more positive mindset towards that identity. By doing this, it can lead to decreased prejudice and stereotypes (Snodgrass et al., 2018). The final research question sought to describe how students were using deflective and reflective filters, and integration of new information, after their cultural immersion experience in Morocco. While change in cultural competency was unable to be measured, participants did seem to be more confident in their abilities to interact with different cultures and 2 participants left Morocco feeling positive about their experience. While Paras et al. (2019) states that pre-departure orientation is a crucial part of study abroad programming, only 1 participant went through guided, interactive, long-term pre-departure training, and yet she was the only participant who used Incompatible/Irrelevant filters during her final interview. Therefore, further research is needed to explore what types of pre-departure orientations are beneficial when preparing students to go abroad. Students used filters and integrated new information based on their experiences during their stay, as well as discussed how their mindsets evolved throughout their stay in Morocco.

## **Implications**

Although the findings of these studies cannot be generalized to the population, they do provide insights to advance this line of inquiry and raise questions for further exploration. We know that critical reflection plays a major role in how students choose to take in information, whether they choose to ignore it, or acknowledge and act on the new information (Paras et al., 2019). Critical reflection has the utmost potential to encourage a global mindset when done effectively (Deardorff, 2011). An innovative/non-traditional instructional method allows for students to take control of their own learning, and assists them in exploring their own cultural biases (Clack & Ellison, 2018). In turn, this encourages students to reflect on their own identity and helps them gain a better understanding of the world around them.

A large portion of study abroad literature tells us that if we send students abroad they will come back with a multicultural mindset and skills that benefit them throughout the duration of their lives. However, we must ensure that students are prepared with an open mindset that allows them to view the world from more than one lens (Paras et al., 2019; Snodgrass et al., 2018). Instructional methods, like blogging, that showcase the beauty of other cultures and identities allows students to gain more lenses, which will then help them have a positive experience abroad. Pre-departure orientations play a role in how students experience a culture, and therefore, we know that in order to best prepare students for cultural immersion they should have purposeful training beforehand. This training can take on many looks, whether it be blogging on minority identities, or a semester long class that has students complete strenuous research and explore the word they will be traveling to. Both methods require resources that all universities may not have. Therefore, educators should continue to develop methods that will promote a

multicultural, global mindset that allows our future leaders in agriculture to succeed on a global platform.

### **Recommendations**

I recommend that future research explore a more diverse population in both promotion of cultural plurality through blogging, as well as determining how pre-departure orientation effects students' experiences abroad. In both studies, the predominant population was white females. Incorporating other identities (especially other genders and races) would allow for educators to further identify ways to create intentional social equity courses that create opportunities for students of all backgrounds to increase cultural competency. Vincent and Austin (2020) describe how diverse groups tend to be more creative and efficient, yet over 70% of all students studying abroad are white (OpenDoors Report, 2019), and over half of them are going to Europe. Therefore, it may be a fair assumption that students participating in a study abroad program, with individuals different than themselves, compared to those studying abroad in homogenous groups, may be having different experiences in another culture.

Additionally, I recommend that after students participate in diversity courses they should then complete an experiential-learning component to determine if classroom content effectively prepared them to go abroad or work in their communities. Other innovative instructional methods should be utilized to determine if they are more or less effective when attempting to promote cultural plurality. Moreover, these studies should be expanded to determine if results differ by region. It may be beneficial to know what diverse instructional methods other universities are implementing when encouraging students to develop a global mindset, as well as determine how other universities and programs prepare their students for an international experience.

I also recommend that blogging on cultural plurality be studied to determine the impact on behavior; more specifically, if students are actually implementing the knowledge and interpersonal skills learned in class. This type of instruction could be beneficial when preparing students for a cultural immersion experience, especially if they are not required to participate in any pre-departure training. We know that pre-departure orientation does have an effect on individuals' experiences abroad (Paras et al., 2019), so blogging could allow for a more positive, developmental experience (Deardorff, 2011). Creating a course with purposeful lessons that are genuinely intended to expose students to different cultures or identities (like the advanced leadership course) could play a major role in the promotion of a global mindset.

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## Appendix A

### UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA CONSENT FORM A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN A CULTURAL IMMERSION EXPERIENCE

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**Co-Investigator:**

**Maddison Holder**  
**Graduate Researcher**  
**ALEC Department**  
**maddison.holder@uga.edu**

You are being asked to take part in a research study that will be used to fulfill the requirements of the master's thesis at the University of Georgia. The information in this form will help you decide if you want to be in the study. Please ask the researcher(s) below if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

***Purpose of Study:*** The purpose of this study is to determine how pre-departure training effects the students' cultural immersion experience, and, how their feelings about the importance of global leadership and education.

***Eligibility:*** You are being invited to be in this research study because you are enrolled in college in the United States and fall into the age range of 18-25.

***If you agree to participate in this study:***

- We will record two interviews. The first interview we will be discussing your pre-departure training and your feelings about global education and the Moroccan culture. The second interview will be revisiting your thoughts about the training you participated in and your feelings about Morocco and its culture. Additionally, we will discuss your Photovoice submissions. These interviews should be no longer than 1 hour each.
- The interviews will be recorded so that they can be transcribed once the researcher returns to the United States. Data collected from the interviews will be published in the researcher's thesis project. The recordings will be destroyed within 5 years.
- We will ask you to take themed photos. You will have approximately 6-8 weeks to take photos.
- After the completion of the interviews and photo submissions, there will be no more communication about the study.
- Total duration of your participation should be no longer than 6 hours

Participation is voluntary. You can refuse to take part or stop at any time without penalty. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your experience at the Moroccan Center for Arabic Studies.

There are questions that may make you uncomfortable. Questions pertaining to your perceptions about the Moroccan culture will be asked. Additionally, questions about your preparations before

leaving for the trip will be asked. If any of the questions asked make you uncomfortable, you may withdraw from the study.

Your responses may help us understand the importance of pre-departure training and how it can affect cultural immersion experiences for students from the United States. Additionally, the information you disclose could benefit researchers in the social sciences field who study global leadership, education and cultural competence.

We will take steps to protect your privacy, but there is a small risk that your information could be accidentally disclosed to people not connected to the research. To reduce this risk, we will code your interviews and photo submissions. Your name will not be attached to the final research project. Therefore, your identity should be kept confidential.

De-identified information obtained from this research may be used for future studies (or shared with other researchers) without obtaining your additional consent. All professors are members of a graduate committee and can be reached at anytime if you have complaints about the research process.

Please feel free to ask questions about this research at any time. You can contact Dr. Anderson at [jcanderson@uga.edu](mailto:jcanderson@uga.edu). If you have any complaints or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the IRB at 706-542-3199 or by email at [IRB@uga.edu](mailto:IRB@uga.edu).

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Please keep one copy and return the signed copy to the researcher.**

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Protocol - 1st round**

As a reminder, you have the right to decline to answer any of the questions or withdraw from the study without consequence to you.

#### **Prior Experiences**

1. Please state your: name, age, school you're attending, year in school and major.
2. Have you traveled abroad before? Where and for how long?
3. What will you be doing in Morocco and why did you decide to participate in this experience?
4. How long will you be in Morocco?
5. Are there any other students from your school here?
6. What are you most excited about related to this experience in Morocco?
7. What are you most nervous about related to this experience in Morocco?
8. How is the Moroccan culture, values and beliefs similar to your own?
9. How is the Moroccan culture, values and beliefs different than your own?
10. What do you plan to do in order to navigate those differences throughout your stay here?
11. What types of preparation was required by your school in order for you to participate in this experience?
12. Do you feel like your school adequately prepared you for this experience? Explain.
13. What types of preparation did you do on your own to prepare you for this experience?
14. How would you define global leadership?
15. How would you define Intercultural competence?
16. Do you plan on doing any type of reflection while abroad? (blog, journal, audio diary, etc.)

## Appendix C

### Interview Protocol - 2<sup>nd</sup> round

As we discuss your experience, if you have a picture that represents your answer, please share them at that time. Remember, you have the right to decline to answer any of the questions, withdraw any picture, or withdraw from the study completely without consequence to you.

#### Integration or Deflection

1. What was your favorite part about your stay in Morocco?
2. After participating in this experience, how would you now define global leadership?  
Intercultural competence?
3. If you participated in training or preparations before you left for this trip, do you believe it adequately prepared you for this type of experience? Why or why not?
  - a. If no participation in training, do you believe it would have been beneficial if you had done some type of preparation before leaving for your trip?
4. After participating in this experience, do you believe you have become more interculturally competent? How?
5. If you created some type of reflection process for yourself, how did that help you in terms of building intercultural competence?
  - a. If you did not reflect, do you wish you had? Why?
6. Did you have an experience this summer that made you use critical thinking skills and tested your intercultural competence? How did you navigate the situation?
7. What was the most challenging part about being in a country and culture that is so different from your own?

8. Do you believe your training and this cultural immersion experience combined enhanced your intercultural competence and allowed you to develop a global mindset?