

## 'My Unparalleled Experience': Narratives from the Leadership for Change Study-Abroad Program Participants

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**ABSTRACT** The purpose of this paper, guided by Appreciative Inquiry (AI) precepts, was to understand and interpret the live experiences of three (out of the five) University of the Free State (UFS), Qwaqwa campus first-year students who went on a short study-abroad program to some universities in the United States of America (USA). The three students, who come from historically disadvantaged backgrounds, made up the first cohort of 71 UFS students who were selected to undertake the groundbreaking and unexpected trip, which they described as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. The title of the paper derives from one of the participant's narratives which was titled: '*My unparalleled experience*'. Owing to the appreciative overtones of AI, we mainly highlight the positive aspects of their experience. These range from the delightful time they had and how they marvelled at the opportunity, whilst contrasting their real-life stereotypes with the study-abroad experience. The experience, ephemeral as it may be, seems to have amassed unprecedented or unparalleled gains for both the students as well as the institution. The researchers conclude by reflecting on the ways in which the experience both expedites and conveys personal growth and development.

### INTRODUCTION

*"International educational exchange is the most significant current project designed to continue the process of humanizing mankind to the point, we would hope, that men can learn to live in peace-eventually even to cooperate in constructive activities rather than compete in a mindless contest of mutual destruction.... We must try to expand the boundaries of human wisdom, empathy and perception, and there is no way of doing that except through education."* [From remarks on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the Fulbright Program, 1976]

The University of the Free State (UFS) is in the heart of central South Africa. It is situated in a largely rural province where poverty, illiteracy and disease hamper the tremendous potential of the land and its citizens. Like all South African universities, the UFS faces the challenges of racism, prejudice and exclusion. In February 2008, the Reitz residence on campus achieved international attention after a video of a mock initiation of five black staff members emerged. The video outraged black and most white South Africans and sent shockwaves throughout the world. It resulted in student protests and pressured the government and universities to re-

spond to overt and covert racism in universities. The UFS chose to respond to racism by developing new strategies for integration. Great success has been achieved with residences now largely integrated on a 50/50 basis for the first time since the early 1990s. However, making the sharing of accommodation space compulsory is not enough to address the root causes of racism, which is caused by a lack of exposure to, and an understanding of different cultures and backgrounds (UFS Website 2010).

As a result, the Study Abroad Leaders for Change initiative was started during 2010. The impact of this initial phase of the program on human transformation is clearly evident. Exposing students to positive models of racial integration will go a long way towards changing and enriching the minds of young leaders, who have committed to building a truly non-racial community during and beyond their university years. Started in September 2010, the first 71 UFS students were sent abroad for two weeks and given intense exposure to the academic, social, cultural and residential lives of students in the United States of America (USA). The benefits of exposure to cross-cultural and cross-border experiences have been confirmed by the first group of Leaders for Change upon their return.

The title of the paper derives from and stands out as a cameo of their experiences. The particular student titled her narrative '*My unparalleled experience*', which the researchers found appropriate as it is 'catchy' and original.

Study abroad for a few weeks, a semester or a year provides an intensive way to experience another culture and see other ways of living life (Landerholm, Chacko 2013). In search of global citizenship, Coryell, Spencer and Sehin (2014) posit that the global sociopolitical and economic climate require individual citizens to engage in informed and culturally sensitive coexistence. In concurrence, Horn and Fry (2013) attest to the fact that study abroad programs influence the extent to which participants become actively engaged in global civil society. Studies by Sharma, Rahatzad and Phillion (2013) and drew on multiple levels of data analysis to reveal that international cross-cultural field experiences promote a deeper understanding of colonial social relations and questioning of powerful neoliberal networks that perpetuate the status quo to disadvantage diverse and minority students. Findings of this study also indicate that through reflexive and critical dialogue students and teachers negotiate difference, engage with the self and other, and question their own knowledge and practices in sustaining colonial relations of privilege and domination with implications for classroom practice.

### Conceptual Framework

Several studies considering study-abroad programs have adopted various paradigms. Michael Tarrant (2010) proposes the use of a Value-Belief-Norm approach for example. Yao and Hartnett (2009) use the Social Systems model with a view to assessing 'using a social systems paradigm, it assesses whether significant relationships exist between institutional input, the process of coordination, and the output of these programs'. Spiering and Erickson (2006) view the Diffusion model as appropriate for study-abroad programs. Appreciative Inquiry (AI), within which this study is located, has its roots in social constructivism, which views reality as socially constructed with multiple meanings. Put differently, social constructivism asserts that people use language and knowledge to create their world. As such, reality is a social construction, which implies that research that highlights

only problems, becomes the reality of only solving problems (Bushe 2011; Smith 2013). Instead of focusing on the disadvantaged background from which the students come, this study adopted a positive, optimistic and appreciative approach to their experiences. Drawing on the seminal work of Cooperrider (1999) cited by Smith (2013) who developed AI in organisational dynamics; namely, the Cleveland Clinic Project, this inquiry is about discovering new knowledge and new ideas about educational practice, using a productive and an appreciative approach. AI is a strength-based approach as it focuses on an understanding of the assets of an organisation. Framed in social constructivist thinking, AI developed into an established way of inquiring into organisations and change. This is evident in a number of texts, journal articles and research projects (Reed 2006).

Appreciative inquiry may be described as a philosophy and an orientation of change, which facilitates the actual practice in organisations and is based on the assumption that change can be achieved through focusing on strengths and successes and moving away from an emphasis on weaknesses and failures (Watkins 2011; Mishra and Bhatnagar 2012). As such, it is a strength-based approach as it focuses on an understanding of the assets of an organisation, as well as on the individual (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom 2003). Positive psychology emphasises these qualities and aspects associated with success and as such, AI parallels positive psychology by focusing on positive questions that result in positive narratives (Fritz and Smit 2008). Traditional approaches typically focus on defining and diagnosing the problem and coming up with solutions. AI starts with exploring existing solutions and focusing on what works, which allows for greater commitment from individuals to initiate change and create a destiny of choice and possibilities (Skinner and Kelley 2006).

The first assumption that underlies AI is the belief that every person has some unique talents and as such, does something right some of the time. The second assumption is that 'images of the future are created by social interactions among group members, and once these images are articulated and understood they can guide the individual and group action' (Skinner and Kelley 2006). It therefore inquires into what mobilises people into action, which is the third assumption of affirming the power of positive

thinking. Cooperrider and Whitney (1999:10) provide this view: 'Appreciative Inquiry is the cooperative search for the best in people, their organisations, and the world around them. It involves the systematic discovery of what gives 'life' when it is most effective and capable in economic, ecological and human terms. AI involves the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system's capacity to heighten positive potential. It mobilises inquiry through crafting an 'unconditional positive question'... In AI, intervention gives way to imagination and innovation; instead of negation, criticism and diagnosis; there is discovery, dream, and design. AI assumes that every living system has untapped, rich, and inspiring accounts of the positive. This 'positive change core' is linked directly to any change agenda, with changes never thought possible, suddenly and democratically mobilised. The Leadership for Change Study-abroad program can be couched within this conceptual framework as it views students as people with potential that may be harnessed and/or unleashed by mobilising an 'unconditional positive question...' In affirming the relevance of utilising AI in education research, a study by Shyuab, Sharp, Judkins and Hetherington (2009) found that the benefits included: providing a new outlook; avoiding stereotypes; empowering participants; and identifying good practice(s).

### **Benefits of the Study Abroad Program**

The discussions in this section are generally based on previous accounts of the study-abroad program. Along a trajectory that affirms and appreciates the students' potential to become, the experience provides a platform for them to create images of the future which are created by social interactions among group members. The discussions adopt a generally positive attitude aligned with the outcomes of the program, such as: igniting the need for education; launching one's career; one's personal growth and development; as well as making life-long connections.

### ***Igniting the Need for Education***

The following discussions are based on the report of a survey conducted by the Institute for the International Education of Students (IES) in 2002. Even though this program (being investigated in the current study) is for a short stay in

the US, the literature below will briefly discuss the broader benefits. After studying abroad, most students never view their education in the same way again. Viewed as a powerful experience, it often serves as a springboard for subsequent educational endeavours, including the decision to pursue higher degrees. More than 52 percent of respondents indicated that they had achieved a post-graduate degree, compared to the 9 percent of Americans obtaining graduate degrees as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau. More than 80 percent of respondents agreed that studying abroad had enhanced their interest in academic study (McMillan and Opem 2002).

Study-abroad students return home with a greater vigor for academic pursuits and a renewed interest in lifelong learning. Nearly 63 percent of students said that the experience had influenced their decision to expand or change their academic majors. In fact, nearly 90 percent of students indicated that their experiences abroad had influenced all their subsequent educational experiences. For example, Julia Reinhard Lupton (IES Freiburg 1983) -attributes her then position as Associate Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of California-Irvine to her experience abroad. She avers: 'The language, research and living skills I learned in Germany continue to sustain me now in my career as a professor. I always encourage my undergraduate students to consider including study abroad in their academic plans, since I know what a difference it has made in my own life'. For those students who have studied abroad to improve or develop foreign language skills, experiencing a language firsthand in the streets of a foreign city, in a local university course or while living with local roommates made an indelible impact on their foreign language skills. Nearly 35 percent of the students who studied a foreign language abroad still use a language other than English on a regular basis (twice a month) (McMillan and Opem 2002).

### ***Launching One's Career***

It is reported that listing a study-abroad experience on one's resume can also enhance one's chances of job success. Having taken the initiative not only says something about one's academic achievements, but also about one's personal ambition and determination. More and more employers are seeking out culturally aware and

experienced employees who can work effectively in an increasingly global workplace. Our statistics show that the influence of study abroad on future career goals and choices is profound, especially for those students who participated in an internship while abroad. Kathleen Turaski (IES London 1992), a University of Georgia graduate, wrote that her internship at The National Portrait Gallery in London was the impetus to return to London in 1995 to attend St. Martin's for a Masters in Communication Design (McMillan and Opem 2002). She attributed the international experience to a driving force in her design and career.

Furthermore, internships are an unrivalled way to experience local culture in the workplace and to improve foreign language skills, as well as to diversify one's work experience. Of the 596 students who responded that they had interned while abroad, 70 percent agreed that the experience had sparked an interest in a career direction they ended up pursuing after their experiences abroad. It is becoming increasingly popular to intern while abroad. Eight out of ten students who had interned abroad said that they had acquired skill sets that influenced their future career paths, such as working for a multi-national organisation, getting a job overseas or volunteering internationally. "My semester abroad launched me into a personal and professional involvement with Spain that has already lasted 25 years. A political science lecture in Madrid about U.S. and Spanish involvement in an obscure war in Sahara led to a graduate fellowship in Spain and North Africa, which led to work as a foreign correspondent based in Spain," wrote Gary Abramson (IES Madrid 1978) (McMillan and Opem 2002).

### *Personal Growth and Development*

Study abroad influences student learning and personal development (Carsello and Creaser 1976; Kauffmann and Kuh 1984; Kuh 1995; Limburg-Weber 1999/2000 all cited in Spiering and Erickson 2006). Beyond affecting career or educational direction, one of the most significant and intangible impacts of studying abroad is the participants' increased understanding of their own cultural values and biases. Eighty-two percent of alumni said that they had developed a more sophisticated way of looking at the world as a result of studying abroad. These same individu-

als were more likely to seek out a greater diversity of friends, and long after their study abroad experiences ended, they are still finding that it affects their life choices and values (McMillan and Opem 2002).

In addition, students who study abroad acquire a unique set of skills that distinguish them as future world leaders; leaders who have the understanding and skills to navigate effectively, humanely and positively across different cultures. Although change and living in a foreign culture can be overwhelming at times, it can also put into motion significant personal growth. More than 96 percent of students surveyed indicated that they believe studying abroad increased their self-confidence. Over 97 percent said the experience enabled them to learn something new about themselves and served as a catalyst for increased maturity. Jason Thornberg (IES Vienna 1994) wrote that although it has been nearly ten years since he was a student in Vienna, there is not a single day that goes by when he does not feel the impact of his experience abroad. "The time in Vienna fundamentally changed how I view the world. It has allowed me the ability to view the world and its issues from several perspectives. Secondly, the friendships I made in Vienna, with both Americans and Viennese, remain some of my most cherished relationships". Study-abroad programs take students through a cultural and academic experience from the inside out. Students explore issues related to globalisation, development, poverty, and social inequity from many different perspectives. When they return to the US, students almost always see things differently; they can put themselves in someone else's shoes more easily and have a more nuanced understanding of the world (McMillan and Opem 2002).

These programs typically offer language study at the intermediate and advanced levels and/or beginning instruction in a less commonly taught language spoken by the local community. Courses incorporate formal classroom instruction, discussion, and field exercises designed to enhance student engagement, while improving oral and written competence. Select programs are taught all or in part in the target language. By using language skills in daily life, students on the programs discover that they not only can survive but flourish in another country. They also afford participants an opportunity to improve, learn, and refine decision-making and problem-

solving skills. Students studying abroad find themselves in new situations all the time. When students manoeuvre through uncharted territory and convey their needs and thoughts using new language and intercultural skills, they gain confidence. These skills are transferable to other aspects of life, both personal and professional.

### *Making Connections*

Beyond opportunities for personal growth, students consistently say that one of the most important and influential reasons they chose to study abroad was to make new connections, both international and from the USA. No matter how much time has passed, many of the friendships alumni formed abroad still remain strong. More than 52 percent still keep in touch with friends they made while abroad. 'I continue to remain in contact with four other friends from when I studied abroad' remarked Gail McKee (IES Vienna 1965-66), 'even though we all live in different states, and it has been more than 30 years since I have seen two of them'. The shared experience of living and learning abroad often creates a life-long bond of friendship. In fact, 63 percent of students who studied abroad in the 1950s and 1960s are still in contact with friends they made overseas. Four percent of all respondents even married someone they met while abroad. Participants also found that their host countries made a powerful enough impression on them that nearly 60 percent of those surveyed have returned to the country where they studied, many visiting not only friends but the host families they lived with while abroad. 'My housing circumstance was the best part of my experience', wrote Ivy Howell (IES Salamanca 2002). 'It made lasting ties to Salamanca that were hard to leave. I will say that my host family truly made my experience memorable.'

The impact and influence of a study-abroad experience is clearly dynamic and far-reaching. What is hard to quantify, however, is not how studying abroad changes an individual, but how the world benefits from those who study abroad. Alumni responses to the survey indicated that they are involved in a myriad of different vocations and activities that, in many ways, directly relate to their study-abroad experiences. For example, they feel that they are making a difference teaching English in China or working for an environmental agency on the island of Kyushu and

return to their study-abroad locations each year with a group of high school students or complete a Master's degree at the University of Bath. Hundreds of others, because of study abroad, live their lives beyond their borders. Few other experiences in life have proved to have such a profound effect on academic, professional and personal development as study abroad. Between academic directors, in-country lecturers, and program staff; other SIT students; homestay families; and program contributors, students form a large network of people during their study-abroad experience. Some students may call upon their in-country professional contacts soon after the program's conclusion, perhaps in pursuit of a Fulbright or Watson scholarship; others stay in touch with homestay families for decades; and still others form lifelong friendships with their peers (McMillan and Opem 2002). These relationships can be deeply enriching. Through narrative inquiry, the article presents and analyses stories told by three first-year students at the Qwaqwa campus of the University of the Free State, who went on a short study-abroad program to some universities in the USA.

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

*Approach:* For the purpose of this study, data were collected through the use of narratives. Human beings have lived out and told stories about that living for as long as we have been able to speak and then we have talked about the stories we have told for almost as long. These lived and told stories and the talk about the stories are some of the ways in which we fill our world with meaning and enlist one another's assistance in building lives and communities. What feels new is the emergence of narrative methodologies in the field of social science research. With this emergence has come intensified talk about our stories, their function in our lives, and their place in composing our collective experiences (Clandinin 2006; Clandinin 2007; Clandinin and Rosiek 2007). Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) further view narrative inquiry as ubiquitous because human beings have lived out and told stories about that living for thousands of years. What feels new is the emergence of narrative methodologies in the field of social science research (Clandinin and Huber 2010). It should be borne in mind that the narratives have adopted an appreciative trajectory.

## Participants

Five students who were selected as the first cohort to undertake the study-abroad trip to some USA universities were requested to write narratives of their experiences. No specific themes were suggested to them. By so doing, they were allowed free reign to write what came to mind. Therefore, the narratives constitute an undiluted account of their experiences. It should be pointed out that only three of them submitted their narratives: BG Molaba, a twenty-year-old female BSc first year student; T Nkohli, a twenty-one-year-old BEd male student and OS Hangane, a female twenty-one-year-old BSc student. All three are from African households and may be classified as previously disadvantaged individuals (PDIs). Owing to an unprompted request by all three, the names used are pseudonyms. It may be argued that the use of their real names would constitute recognition and an inerasable documentation of their life experiences. In an attempt to observe ethical obligations, we requested them to fill in and sign consent letters authorising the use of their real names. As Carey (2011) notes, deciding whether to use real names or pseudonyms is akin to finding oneself between a rock and a hard place. This assertion cautions researchers to consider the matter carefully.

## Methodology

According to Clanindin and Huber (2010) most narrative inquiries begin with asking participants to tell their stories, either in one-to-one situations or in groups. In one-to-one situations, participants are asked to tell their stories in a variety of ways: by responding to more or less structured interview questions; by engaging in conversation or dialogue; and by telling stories triggered by various artifacts such as photographs or memory box items. In group situations, two or more participants meet together with the inquirer to tell stories of their experiences of when they have lived through similar situations. In this study, three students who were selected and underwent a two-week, study-abroad program (to some universities in the USA) were requested to create text telling of their lived experience. Each of the students went to a different university. The three universities involved were Cleveland State University (T Nkohli), Minnesota (BG

Molaba) and Minneapolis (OS Hangane). They presented their lived experience in the form of written texts. Narratives in the current study were analysed using narrative analysis. One point of departure for narrative analysis is that when we narrate, we put forward a message about the understanding or meaning we receive from (or attribute to) our experiences. An essential assumption within narrative analysis is that storytelling serves the purpose of creating meaning from one's lived experiences (Atkinson 1997; Czarniawska 2004; Riessman 2008, all cited in Blom and Nyrgen 2010).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Anderson et al. (2006) observed that while the specific outcomes established for study-abroad program vary from institution to institution, academic and intercultural competencies are common to virtually all programs. Academic competency focuses on the specific discipline studied, while intercultural competency relates to the broad goal of enhancing students' appreciation of differences among cultures. The news that the particular students made it to the list evoked feelings of surprise, joy and pride, as well as in their next of kin. Hangane stated that "*Some part of me still could not believe it, so I kept asking my friends to pinch me, and see if I was dreaming*" and considered it to be the "*the greatest opportunity of her life*". Nkohli viewed himself as one of the "*ambassadors who will represent the UFS in America*". This was also confirmed by Molaba who stated that they were expected to "*be ambassadors but also the mirrors and representatives of ourselves as individuals, our university and its satellites, our communities but mostly of our families and all the people who are by our sides constantly.*" This indicates a shift towards assuming responsibility on behalf of others and rendered them susceptible to thinking about what they should say and do, and most importantly, whether this would be in line with expectations. In such a state, the locus of control becomes external. Thus, depending on their conscience and the degree to which they believe in expectations, certain behaviours will be suppressed whilst others will be condoned. The question of who has power arises and it seems to accede to the Foucauldian aspect of the analysis which, according to Hunter (2010), seeks to examine multiple voices and to draw out

which voices were silenced and which were powerful. In this instance the external voice seems to be more powerful.

The narratives further indicated that the students benefited both culturally and educationally. Lee et al. (2012) assert that over and above multicultural or cross-cultural experiences, study abroad programs contribute to creative cognition or thinking. Because the students were divided into smaller groups, they also experienced some cultural diversity at a local level. Molaba indicated that in her group, they were the most balanced with 5 black students and 5 white as well as 5 female and 5 male, from the Basotho, AmaXhosa, Afrikaans and English speaking cultural groups. She further mentions that in the USA they also interacted with different intercultural communities including the Chicanos, Latinos, and African Americans. Nkohli indicated that he was exposed to a number of activities that taught him much about cross-cultural interactions and how to create effective diverse networks. Most importantly, he learned about ‘communication strategies that support effective interaction across people with differences’. Nkohli got to know more about the gay and lesbian culture. In his opinion, the community [he visited in the USA], has adapted to their differences with regard to their sexual orientation, whereas in South Africa, there is still much discrimination against people of such sexual orientations. Unfortunately, he does not suggest what he thinks should happen about the situation in South Africa. Chieffo and Griffiths (2004), as well as Spiering and Erickson (2006) concur that it has become important for individuals to possess firsthand experience with other cultures, whilst Doyle et al. (2010) notes that the study-abroad program in higher education acts as a means of developing desirable intercultural skills and understanding among students. This seems to be a universal tendency. An American student who went on a study-abroad program to Italy indicated that: ‘The most important thing is the importance of thinking more globally and being aware of other cultures ... not being caught up in American ignorance’ (Doyle et al. 2010). A study by Davis et al. (2014) supports the view and evaluated attempts to provide all students with a global perspective and in-depth intercultural awareness by utilizing new resources to bridge a deeper understanding.

Educationally, participants indicated that they had learnt valuable lessons for the South

African education system, including their own institution. Participants mentioned that the program afforded them the opportunity to broaden their academic horizons. Molaba had this to say about the University of Minnesota: ‘*Minnesota is a fantastic state and beautiful too, with a lot of history intertwined in the people’s everyday lives; it is laid back, and the people are extremely friendly. After all this touring we went to the University which left me completely open-mouthed because of its vastness and nearly flawless academic structure. There are around 60 000 students in this university, and all from diverse societies, backgrounds, countries, etc. It has more than 140 undergraduate majors and more 160 study fields. Almost anything you can think of is a study field; for example, they have “Urban and Youth Studies, Mortuary Science, and Individualized Studies!” In our country we have only a handful of certain fields of studies a person can choose from and they all have to make sense. For instance, we do not have gender studies where the particular class has gays and lesbians, let alone a lecturer that teaches it. Also, the university happens to be spread across the greater majority of the river i.e. the Mississippi river; it is also divided into the east and west banks. One consistent tradition they have is that every freshman does a photo scavenger hunt! So we were running around this unknown and intimidating (for me, that is) territory looking for computers in one of its libraries and looking for someone at the Coffman building (all student fraternities have offices or rather comfortable meeting areas here) trying to find anyone who we could teach how to say ‘Hello’ in our native languages. The university has around a thousand different student fraternities; some of them are a bit absurd, such as the knitting fraternity or group. Some are pretty cool, such as the ones for the different ethnic groups at the university, which I think is very accommodating, since the university has such a diverse community. And it also promoted and encouraged a sense of belonging, especially for groups that catered for challenged individuals, such as students who are paralysed or with any disability. The most noticeable feature of the whole place was the respect, almost reverence, love and devotion the students, educators and the whole community had for their university.*

The experiences Molaba alluded to above are consistent with the view expressed by Mazy-

ck (2014: 1)) who claims that 'international education provides a space for students to contribute to the learning process through the lens of their own identity and cultural realities. The experience of studying abroad allows an individual to analyze the commonalities and differences between domestic students and citizens of the world'. The benefits of exposure to cross-cultural and cross-border experiences were, in fact, confirmed by this first group of Leaders for Change upon their return. Activities they engaged in included:

*Serving as the peer mentoring crew of the gateway first year welcoming and orientation program in the following year; serving as mentors in well-being and academic peer advising programs; playing leading roles in campus community service programs; initiating dialogue and leadership development programs on campus, in residences and in student life generally; and being available for election as members of executive committees of student associations and for student governance structures.*

It should be noted that the students learnt valuable lessons in respect of infrastructure, academic offerings, diversity, how feelings of ownership are expressed and a sense of belonging, as well as the relation between the various units of the university and society. The researchers view the scenario depicted above as a true form of mutual and reciprocal co-existence. This implies that the students are more likely to appreciate the concept of co-existence. Students further committed themselves to making a difference when they came back to the UFS. A 'commitment to act' presupposes and encapsulates facets in respect of the launching of one's career, as well as personal growth and development. Even though we noted the positive effects on students' personal and academic experiences, what was missing in the narratives is the creation of connections for future interactions. The researchers are not in any manner suggesting that they had not made any. Study abroad programs possess immense potential in creating, augmenting, and cementing communication across political, religious, educational, cultural and economic divides (Hirschhoff 2013).

### CONCLUSION

Through the narratives of the three students who undertook a study-abroad program to three

different universities in the USA, the researchers observed that their experience was consistent with 'learning as transformation' prescripts. According to this view, learning is seen as a process that affects the whole person by reorganising their experiential field and knowledge. Learning as transformation changes the capacity of a person to act and behave differently. It modifies their patterns of thought, their interpretations, judgments and corporeal. The researchers at this stage cannot argue for the discontinuation of the program at the UFS. This is consistent with what authors who do not only note the increasing study-abroad activity among institutions of higher learning, but posit that the importance of such programs is also increasing. The researchers predict that students will possess a heightened level of confidence and self-esteem; sensitivity towards oneself and others; an appreciation of diversity; become more assertive; and experience broadened parameters in respect of thought and action. The study, as is the case with many others, succinctly embraces sentiments espoused in the introductory paragraph of this article. Study-abroad programs serve humanity.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The researchers recommend that the program be diversified and allow a situation where different lengths of stay are considered instead of two-week visits. Students may further be placed at universities or faculties that present academic programs that are linked to their fields of specialisation. The researchers are of a view that such matches would further deepen interaction as students would be exposed to curriculum aspects relating to their respective fields of study.

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