

**AAPLAC:**  
**Association of Academic Programs**  
**in Latin America & the Caribbean**  
14th Annual International Conference  
February 20-22, 2003 - San Antonio, Texas

**Preliminary Results of Academic Exchange Programs:**  
**The Making of Global Citizens**

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FRIDAY, Feb. 21, 2003

Lyrics to an old song from the 'flower-child hippy' days of the 1960's acknowledged: 'if you smile at me I will understand, because that is something everybody everywhere does in the same language'. There is no mystery or misinterpretation in the gestures of laughing and crying for their meaning is universal. As the world seems to be getting smaller and borders and boundaries just a bit closer people across the globe are becoming more and more aware that we are all citizens of the same world and face many similar problems. Without any doubt, as long as there exists 'my' culture, the stronger the need is to learn about 'your' or 'their'

culture—the ‘other culture’.

### *Globalization in broad terms*

As long as man has existed so has the dream of a new and better world. Once a writer wrote, ‘for whom do the bells toll’? In one way or another we all are participating in the changes- the transformations of status, boundaries, language, behavior, and economy that are occurring at what appears to be a very rapid speed. The replacement of the notion of ‘nations’ is as challenging as was the creation of the concept of nationality in the past, that included the geographical definition of countries, as well as of languages, monetary systems, sovereignty and people.

As new economies seek wider inclusions in the world market, the more people from differing cultures are coming in closer contact with each. In the past events that occurred outside of one’s immediate environment, such as war, did not find its way to the attention of people living outside of the country or even region where the war was taking place. Today such happenings are readily found on television, in the newspaper, and on the Internet. The global community

can quickly be acquainted with world events and issues making what was once considered international or global appear almost more local as the majority of the people everywhere can hear and read about such events and feel them closer to them than ever before.

This expansion in communication has brought with it definite transformations that can be reflected within societies today. The world has been placed within a “global showcase” or arena. People everywhere can obtain information about the economy, culture, and goals of other people while at the same time they are being informed about their own. Being informed is one of the first important steps for critical knowledge and it is the beginning of awareness of the ‘*other*’ as it has now been inserted in the majority of the world’s people everyday lives.

The present day responsibility that schools, organizations, and media have in educating people about the changing social and cultural boundaries is crucial. The realization that people are the same, but they are different in that they are raised in different social, geographical and economical

environments need to be stressed and not taken as a barrier. The difference is an incredible invitation to explore beyond one's basic overall dominating mono-cultural values for becoming part of an innovative world where the key is to understand, respect and tolerate the differences among each other and to realize that others' reactions to life are not better or worse than one's own, they are just different, they are unique, and they are related to one's personal condition.

The need for a global integration that will enhance humankind and bring with it more tolerance, cooperation and unity among people in a world grown closer and smaller is desperately needed. In a broad sense globalization refers to the intensification of global interconnectedness, particularly the spread of capitalism as a production and market system. It also refers to innovations in technologies of communication and transportation, which are reconfirming social relationships spatially, temporally, and in terms of speed (McGrew 1992; Robins 1997; Tomlinson 1997). Interconnections are important. The technological revolution in communication, which built on earlier revolutions in transportation, has shrunk the world spatially and temporally only to form a big part of this 'globalization'. Telephone,

satellite, television and Internet enable information, images and emotions to be almost instantaneously transmitted around the globe. The concept of “globalization” is not new (Tomlinson 1997).

More and more it is heard said by people everywhere ‘I am a citizen of the world’. The demand to become ‘global’ has had it strength in the political and economical sectors of the world that seek for a market that is no longer limited by geographical boundaries. Economies are developing that generate new regions that stretch beyond the physical and cultural limits imposed and accepted decades ago by many of the nations of the world. This global need is no longer only economical, but it is social as well, especially as people far and wide become more mobile. Susan Shechn and Jane Haggus (2000) illustrate this when they describe the following social global occurrences:

...Tourists map space and culture in new configurations. Japanese honeymooners hold a second “white” wedding in Bondi, Sidney; Australians go shopping in Malaysia, Europeans holidaymakers seek sun and fun on the beaches of North Africa or Thailand and North Americans retire to the pleasant climate of the Caribbean.

## *Culture in the Intercultural Experience*

We are seeing that students of all ages are entering this global interconnectedness as they become increasingly more mobile and take advantage of the many travel opportunities that most academic programs now offer. Intercultural education over the past 10-15 years has become an important part of many undergraduate programs everywhere. And although exchange has been an activity that the more affluent students have been able to engage in some countries such as the United States have opened funding through for example, The Gilman Scholarship Program which is dedicated to providing broader access to study abroad to qualified undergraduate students of limited financial means. The goals of such program are many, but in broad terms intercultural education is seen as a highly specialized form of instruction designed to prepare persons to live and work effectively in cultures outside their own. Inherent to almost all programs is a focus on the stages of personal development associated with movement toward intercultural sensitivity in the domestic and international

context within intercultural relations occur.

In this paper I will address one of the aspects that has contributed in recent years, on an academic level, to a seemingly long lasting positive cultural integration among people from different cultures as a common shared feeling of having obtained 'global citizenship' and this is: education for the intercultural experience. International exchange programs today tend to ascribe to the idea that cultural encounters are a very important part of their programs and that these should deal with experiencing social practices in a foreign culture that produce meaning. They should concentrate on the symbols, rituals, and activities involved in the construction of everyday social reality. Geertz's (1973) view of culture which offers less emphasis on the structural dynamic of culture and instead emphasizes how culture, as meanings, values and ways of life, is formed out of the interaction between individuals and society is a cornerstone in most of the academic intercultural experiences today. Providing students with webs of cultural significance are important goals for obtaining a positive as well as constructive intercultural experience.

My experience with academic exchange and study abroad programs goes back 16 years with students coming to Puebla, Mexico. My participation in these programs with students who come to the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP) is as program director and teacher. I have followed students' acculturation process during and after the program. I have also monitored the readjustment period that our Mexican students go through when they return.

The exchange program I shall centre this paper about is a small program that takes place in The Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities within the BUAP where students are given individual attention as well as being incorporated into the mainstream of University classes and activities. For the first part of the study abroad experience students are given classes give them insight into understanding Mexican culture at large and generally and specifically the cultural aspects that pertain to the central part of Mexico and the state and city of Puebla in particular. They are introduced to this through an intensive orientation program lasting a

semester and that includes history, literature, and presentations related to specific topics offered by researchers, teachers people from the specific area and /or community. Such themes such as gender, indigenous peoples, national and local government, Mexican Popular Culture, kinship relationships, health issues, music in Mexico, only to mention a few are presented and discussed. Students are also given opportunities weekly to discuss and explore their feelings about their study abroad experience and in this way helping them to make sense of what may seem at any point during their stay as illogical, strange, foreign, not understandable and even scary.

Students are introduced to other Mexican students who are more or less their age and/or who are studying in many of the classes the exchange student will taking, or within another area of the university. The first 4 to 6 weeks students are very active attending cultural events, movies, parties, visiting museums and places around the city and taking excursions to nearby places. Many of these first 'amigos' (friends or pals) continue to be their friends during their experience in the host culture and many times will continue to be even when they return to their homeland.

Study abroad students live with Mexican families as opposed to living in dormitories such as the ones that exist on many university campuses all over the world—a sort of “international” living quarters, or international student ghetto that is likely to deprive the foreign student from directly mingling with representatives of the home culture. Our programs have taken great care to provide students with a ‘home-stay’ experience with a Mexican family and with this insuring a deeper, richer and more authentic cultural experience.

Before arrival students are asked to fill out a questionnaire that helps identify the kind of family experience they might desire. Then students are matched to a family that has some of the characteristics they feel important for their experience abroad. Some of these relate to living in a family with young children, with grandparents, where vegetarianism is accepted, where both parents work, where only the father works, where one of the parents might be a doctor or a lawyer, or factory worker etc. Students are given the opportunity to “try out the family” and the families the student

and changes may be made if either is not pleased with the match. Although the emphasis of our program is heavily placed on the foreign student's experience, we also take into consideration the other side of the "exchange" that exists for the receiving side -the Mexicans- who have contact with these students. Both host and visitor are given a valuable learning experience while each explore and learn about the other.

The outcome of an exchange experience can be one of the most valuable experiences that any human being can encounter in his/her journey to arriving at an understanding of the world and its complexity and of understanding one's self. Both these lessons are found in the exchange experience. This experience ensures a more realistic opportunity of joining peoples of the world together in constructing bridges that can be freely crossed and ultimately bring peace to a world that is so very far from it.

*Acculturation process - the process of becoming a 'global citizen'*

The overall process of acculturation that the majority of exchange students living and studying in a foreign country/culture go through on their way to becoming what many of them have called an ‘integrated, global person or citizen’ pertains strongly to emotional development. It appears that the intensity of this process seems to insure long lasting feelings that these students have about themselves being ‘international or global’ and motivates them to either work upon graduating from college in some activity that requires them to use a ‘global focus, view or perspective’.

At the beginning stages of an intercultural experience when students live in a foreign country/culture they are exposed to many new and differing experiences most of which are of great intensity. The task that challenges students the most is that of trying to make sense of the world—from within the new world they are experimenting. Students come in contact almost immediately with what is referred to as ‘intensity of emotions’. Intensity of emotions is considered to be one of

the three main aspects that comprise the intercultural experience (Brislin et al. 1986). The other two are knowledge areas that incorporate many cross-culture differences that exchange students find hard to understand and the other are related to some of the bases of cultural differences, especially concerning how people think about and evaluate information. Culture shock, defined as the emotional reactions to the disorientation that occurs when one is immersed in an unfamiliar culture and is deprived of familiar cues has been an organizing psychological concept in intercultural relations since the term was originally coined by Cora DuBois in 1951 and popularized after Kal Oberg's 1953 speech in Brazil appeared in *Practical Anthropology* in 1960 (as cited in Paige 1993).

Culture shock is not a singular event. It occurs as part of a broader culture-learning process (Paige 1993; Storti 2001). This process and progression through the different stages of personal development, challenges one's sense of self, cultural identity, and worldview. Accordingly foreigners can, and most will, experience intense psychological stress at some point or another. Similar stress arises as individuals return to their home cultures. The realization that one has

become marginal to the host culture fosters the expectation that one will be able to be in the centre when at home. Intercultural immersion can be very emotionally powerful. Significant risks are involved when dealing with a new culture as one moves outside the comfort zone of their own cultural surroundings.

Hence intercultural education is considered a very intense experience for a number of reasons. Its content can be difficult to grasp and its process demanding. 1) This type of education requires that the learner reflect upon matters with which they have had little firsthand experience. 2) Unlike more conventional approaches to education, which tend to emphasize depersonalized forms of cognitive learning and knowledge acquisition, it includes highly personalized behavioral and affective learning, self-reflection, and direct, sometimes frontal experience with cultural differences. 3) 'Learning-how-to-learn', a process-oriented pedagogy (Hughes-Weiner 1986), replaces learning facts, a product-oriented pedagogy, as a major goal. 4) Intercultural education involves epistemological explorations regarding alternative ways of knowing and validating what we know, i.e., the meaning of truth and reality.

In the intercultural framework, human reality is viewed as socially constructed (Berger and Luckman 1967), a function of perception and of culture, of group membership (Singer 1987), and something which varies considerably across human communities. In this vein, learners study the impact that culture, race, ethnicity, gender, politics, economics, and other factors have on the perceptions of the world, which individuals and groups come to hold. Finally, these inquiries lead logically to the idea that cultures are social interventions, which address, in vastly different ways, how basic human needs are met and how meaning in life is derived. Cultures possess their own validity. Making judgments about them is hazardous when the criteria for evaluation come solely from another culture.

Inevitably, learners struggle with these ideas. The uncertainty and ambiguity surrounding truth, knowledge, and perception can be disturbing to them. The searching self-appraisals are painful and difficult. Moral certainty about rightness and wrongness becomes less absolute; undeniably it is a common phenomenon for learners to find themselves becoming temporarily immobilized in a state of extreme

cultural relativism, hesitant or unable to make judgments. Put simply, intercultural education, the task of becoming multicultural citizens of a global community as a function of its content and pedagogy, is psychologically challenging.

Academic foreign study abroad programs are instrumental in producing students who feel they have evolved into 'global citizens' as they help build healthy and successful attitudes about the other culture and at the same time broaden the student's awareness about their own cultural identity. One of the most important barriers to achieving intercultural integration has been ethnocentrism.

Effective academic exchange programs help students conceptualize and deal with the experience of becoming multicultural, which is defined as the capacity to integrate alternative cultural frames of reference into one's life and function effectively in two or more cultures. Acquiring this capacity requires a 'paradigm shift', which can be defined as a cognitive, behavioral and affective shift from one's mono-

cultural, ethnocentric frame of reference.

Learners struggle as it is no quick and easy task to become multicultural. The uncertainty and ambiguity surrounding truth, knowledge, and perception can be disturbing to them. Moral certainty about rightness and wrongness becomes less absolute; undeniably it is a common phenomenon for learners to find themselves becoming temporarily immobilized in a state of extreme cultural relativism, hesitant or unable to make judgments. Put simply: Intercultural education, the task of becoming multicultural citizens of the global community as a function of its content and pedagogy, is psychologically demanding!

I have gathered many comments, reflections and stories, taken from interviews, questionnaires, journal & diary writings, letters and specific papers that students have shared with me during, at the end of, and after their study abroad experience in Mexico. Their experiences in Mexico lasted for the most part a year for the majority of the students 12 months and 6 months for others. The majority of the students were from North America (USA and Canada) and a smaller number, but not less important, from Europe. I have

chosen comments made by 12 ex-students who have now graduated from college. Seven of the 12 students chosen here have done some kind of voluntary work (community service such as in the Peace Corp. or in a Christian mission's groups etc.) for a year at some point within the first 4 years upon graduating from college. Most have returned to a 'developing country' in Latin America to work, and the remainder has dedicated a year of energies to working with an NGO. Others teach in a public or private school within the US where they teach Spanish and multicultural skills. All report that their study abroad experience has been an advantage when finding a job and it has helped them to get the position they have today.

From these 12 students I have chosen several of their comments to illustrate the acculturating process described above and to point out the strong feelings they have about becoming part of an international community or global world and not from just one country or nationality. All the students have expressed the great trials and tribulations of the experience abroad as they have mentioned the enormous leap they have taken through the looking glass to arrive to the other side and understanding the complexities of

‘acculturating’ and the great learning experience they went through.

Student’s names have been omitted as I told them they would be. I hope that through their words they may describe with more clarity the journey they undertake when they go for an experience abroad as they become multicultural citizens of a new global world.

Having sat through many history classes (now in various languages), I have often heard the phrases ‘the past is a foreign country’ used to describe the sometimes phenomenal differences between the past and present. Thinking of this phrase, I instantly can relate to my experience in Mexico, where my past literally is a foreign country (the US) and where my future is as well. But taking this phrase out its literal sense, I can also compare the dramatic differences between who I was when I arrived to Puebla with who I am now, what actually occurred and the steps, people and situations I fell into along the way that have made this experience so life-changing and made me come to know that

I am a member not only of the US, my homeland, but of Mexico and in extension of the whole world...yesterday I was talking with a compañera (companion, or classmate) from the Institute where I study and she asked me what I thought of my University's Study Abroad program in Puebla, academically speaking. I had to answer her honestly that the study abroad experience I received was NOT an academic one. It was a CULTURAL experience with academics playing a very small role. The cultural experience ranges in part from getting used to 'Mexican' time as opposed to "American" time, to getting used to entering bathrooms marked "M" (which for me, after 9 months, I still do with hesitation)?

I mean, I can't even count the number of times I have been exuberantly happy or unbelievably sad. Although I have been more happy than sad, the study abroad experience definitely encompasses both: the sadness of being far from the things and people you know and love and the wonderful happiness of getting to know and love new people and things just as much and realizing that here or there we are all the same only we paint our worlds with different colors that is what culture is, and that we all live in one same world and

should strive to understand this sooner than later.

The memories you make are up to you. The experiences you have depend on your choices. That is why it is so hard to tell someone what study abroad is like and it is why I am glad that I didn't know much before I came. Part of the experience, in my opinion, the most valuable part, is learning it all for yourself: how it feels walking into a house of strangers to live with them a year, how embarrassing it is at first to speak Spanish in front of everyone, how much courage it takes to make friends, how close you will get to other students in your exchange program (even if at first you didn't like them), and how your heart might break when you realize it will all be over in a week. Realizing that people everywhere have common experiences that make one, but at the same time they live their lives through different cultural tints and flavors—but when looked past these you realize we are all global citizens and must learn to appreciate each other and tolerate the differences.

Thinking back over these last nine months, I know that I would give anything for another nine, anything to stay here where I have learned so much about who I am. I think about how much I have grown and changed and I wonder what it will be like when I get home. I can't believe how the tables have turned. My past is a foreign country. But I highly doubt my Mexican experience is over. Voy a regresar. (I will return). - May 1999

When you leave to go on a Study Abroad you know that you and a lot of other stuff in your life is going to change—it's just that beforehand it's impossible to know how or what that means. Finding out is the fun part...which can be really exciting and exhilarating, but also frustrating and lonely. Like anything else, each person walks his or her own unique set of experiences, so there's no way I can tell you what to expect or what it will be like. But even if I could I don't think you'd really want that, cause like I said above, finding out is where you grow as a person. ...another piece of advice: don't let the fact that you're suppose to be having this

amazing year, enjoying everything, and loving life make you feel like you've lost you're right to feel drained, frustrated and even down. It's all one big huge connected ball of experiences and feeling that rolls along and somehow gets called a 'process'. It's all there. Becoming bicultural is never easy, but I can assure you now that the year has passed that it is possible and the outcome is wonderful. You see the world through a new perspective and you understand more than ever before that people are the same everywhere---we laugh, cry, bleed and starve and hope in the same way. I definitely feel more one with everyone I met, and tend to be much more respectful and caring. - June 1997

I am sure you won't fully understand how much you've changed until you get to the US and see how your lives were before. But looking back on my time here, I remember something that happened on Christmas morning that really sticks out in my mind. I felt lost and lonely, that I was stuck in the middle of a very difficult place and didn't know what I could do. I was crying because I could see that my life had changed and I didn't know what it meant. It was then, in that

moment, that I realized something which helped me get passed the tough times of the year and accept the change: I had nowhere to run to hide from what was happening; I had to face up to all of it. Somewhat ironically, that realization comforted me. I felt strengthened by knowing that hanging on tight was something I was gonna have to do, and that it wasn't gonna be easy, but that I would be worth it". - June 1998

As these last 9 months rapidly come to an end I am quick to forget that it hasn't always been so much fun and there have been times when all I've wanted to do is leave. But I did it. And I'm very proud of myself. What has impacted me the most this year? I will never forget my experiences working with the children in a federal school in Cholula. I feel very fortunate to have been their Maestra and although they don't realize it they have taught me more than I have taught them, These children took me to me, to myself, to my inner feelings and I re-explored childhood and meaning of life all over again. I saw that although our skin color was very different, just as our customs and traditions are, not to forget to

mention the language, we all had many, many things in common...we all live on in this world and we share all sorts of aspirations and desires. I begin to truly understand the meaning of loving one another, tal como somos (just as we are) and how important it is to get past those basic and sometimes partially correct but limited stereotypes. I realized so many things about getting along and seeing past the differences of culture and getting to the inner most core of who they are ---who we are—and enjoying those differences.  
– May 1998

How in the long run has this experience abroad influenced the lives of some of these students who did an exchange to Mexico? The following are some of the comments students made to this question.

Yes, my time in Mexico has impacted my career path. I am currently a high school Spanish teacher. I speak Spanish everyday and I frequently share my experiences in Mexico with my students. I let them know that students in Mexico are just as human as they are, and as students anywhere on this

planet are. - September 1997

After living a half a year abroad in Mexico and finishing my degree in England I decided that I did not want to work in history anymore, but in sociology, and in a Latin American context. I am now pursuing a doctorate in sociology and am doing my research about Mexico and Latin American in general. My goals involve looking for integrating with people-students and in the culture in general. Studying abroad has clearly demonstrated to me that there are other worlds that are so close by, that if we don't take advantage of them we may miss them and never see the meaning of culture and humanity. My time spent abroad has helped me to understand myself and my home culture better as well as situate me in the world I live in...making me much more a multicultural member of the world. – June 2001

After graduating from university in London and spending

some time in my parent's homeland in Italy I came back to America, Latin America. My experience here brought me to some important conclusions as well as it gave me a *compañero* (companion/partner) to walk the road of life with and a job that may not pay much in British pounds, but that I love. When one goes abroad you begin to stop making stereotypical judgments and you begin to see why people make those judgments. Being in Mexico and Latin America in general has made me more patient and tolerant. I had to understand time, space and living in a much different way than ever before. Time change helped me to be more flexible and I felt a real sense of community in Mexico, a sense of living, loving and working. My experience abroad broadened my horizons and the transitions of life that I have experienced since have been made very easy. My experience abroad has made me have respect for culture as well as for people. Cultures vary immensely and although people may seem also to vary, we are all the same. In a kind of universal way I feel more akin and joined to everyone, as I understand that we all have problems and worries and that we are all swimming in the same fish bowl. - June 2002

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