

# Preparing Engaged Citizens: Three Models of Experiential Education for Social Justice

**Chip F. Peterson**

*University of Minnesota*

*{Author's note: This article benefited greatly from the contributions of three people. Amy Sunderland of the Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs (HECUA) and Orval Gingerich of the Center for Global Education at Augsburg College helped me think about defining characteristics of the three sets of programs and about some of the key educational challenges they face. As the writing proceeded, Orv and HECUA's Jackie Geier shared with me a wealth of information about CGE and HECUA and their programs, then provided prompt and immensely perceptive feedback on earlier drafts. To all three, my heartfelt thanks.}*

## Introduction

Try an experiment. Ask some study abroad professionals, or faculty who have led study abroad programs, why they think their work is important. What do they consider to be the principal benefits that students derive from living and studying in another country? Then ask returned students a similar question.

My guess is that the answers of the two groups will be similar in most respects. They will talk especially about increased flexibility, self-reliance, emotional maturity, critical thinking skills, empathy, reduced ethnocentrism, heightened social concern, values clarification. That is, students, faculty, and study abroad administrators alike are most excited about study abroad because of its transformative power. This, we say, is

what education is really supposed to be about!

Now ask *why* study abroad so profoundly changes students. Where do they acquire these new outlooks and skills? I would predict that many respondents will allude only in passing, if at all, to the classroom. Some might mention more experiential components in the curriculum, such as internships; many will focus almost exclusively on such things as the living situation, serendipitous travel or other events, and social interactions with local people outside the classroom.

Your respondents might also mention some learning outcomes more clearly related to curricular components. Improved language skills are the most obvious of these, but it is not hard to think of others—for example, new understanding of the ways the United States acts on the international stage. But if you press the question of where students learned even these more “academic” things, it will turn out that much of the learning took place outside the confines of the courses themselves. Yes, classroom instruction contributed to improved language fluency, but much of the improvement came from informal practice on the street or in the living situation. Yes, part of the challenge to students’ previous world views came through their courses, but the lessons would probably have been far less dramatic and long-lasting had they not been driven home by conversations and events outside of class time, or by research projects or internships which, although part of the academic program, took students away from the ivory tower and into the world.

So, is personal transformation an inevitable outcome of living abroad? Can we count on incidental extramural experiences to work their magic on students, while we concentrate on what happens in the classroom?

The answer is no, for at least three reasons. First, even more traditional course objectives—which may involve something far short of personal transformation—are more easily achieved if we can actively involve the students in their own learning. When students seeking to understand another culture and society are surrounded by a learning laboratory, why not draw on it consciously and systematically for our teaching? If “experience is the best teacher,” why not harness it to teach more effectively what we want our students to learn? Second, not all experiences are equal. The design of a study abroad program can greatly influence the breadth and depth of students’ experiences. Well-designed housing arrangements, internship and service-learning opportunities, research projects, and field

assignments can immensely enhance students' learning. Finally, we must take seriously Dewey's caution that experience can be miseducative.<sup>1</sup> It can reinforce stereotypes, exacerbate prejudices, or lend itself to hypotheses that are never subjected to systematic reflection. Maybe experience is indeed the best teacher, but only when it is subjected to critical analysis.

## **Transformation by Design**

If study abroad is above all about personal transformation, and if that transformation is above all a product of experiences outside the classroom, why not make that transformation an explicit goal of the academic program? Why not build more of those life-changing experiences into the core of our learning strategies?

Certainly there is a long tradition of experiential learning programs abroad, although most initially were not academic in the narrow sense of the term. Non-credit programs such as the Lisle Fellowship or the early programs of the Experiment in International Learning jump to mind as examples. Most such efforts had explicitly social objectives: increase cross-cultural understanding, provide service to the less fortunate, promote international peace. As credit-bearing experiential programs abroad grew in number they drew heavily upon those pioneering efforts. Increasing numbers also began to focus not only on peace and cultural understanding, but also on justice. For a few, issues of power, privilege, and equity became the central focus.

The Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul have become something of a hotbed of transformative experiential education in the service of social justice. Three of the national leaders of such programming within the study abroad context are located there: Augsburg College's Center for Global Education (CGE); the Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs (HECUA); and the University of Minnesota's Studies in International Development (MSID). All three of these providers have missions and educational models that focus heavily on issues of class, power, and social justice. All of their programs are interdisciplinary, like the realities they seek to understand; all are thematically focused; and all employ social theory to understand the phenomena students are studying and experiencing as manifestations of national and global systems and forces.

The Minnesota culture has been propitious for the emergence of

study programs like those of CGE, HECUA, and MSID. Rooted in part in the labor activism and social democratic leanings of many of its early Scandinavian settlers, the state has a history of strong citizen participation, community concern for social justice, and populist politics. Feeding on that environment, Minnesota campuses have tended to spawn internship offices, service-learning initiatives, and alternative break travel programs in abundance. In the study abroad arena more specifically, Minnesota colleges and universities have been sending students since 1947 on one of the nation's oldest experiential education abroad programs, SPAN (Student Project for Amity Among Nations), a summer independent research program. SPAN and the generations of faculty who have led students overseas through it have helped legitimize and value field experience in the local academic community. The Twin Cities are also the base for two of the major national organizations offering service-learning for adult learners, Global Volunteers and the Global Citizens Network.

This is not in any way to suggest that CGE, HECUA, and MSID are unique. A number of other institutions operate one or more excellent programs of this type, often faculty-led. Moreover, many non-credit volunteer and service-learning programs share a good deal in common with the programs that are the subject of this article. Some consist mostly of the volunteer experience itself; others build in a good deal of critical analysis as well. Many of these may be found through the web site of the International Volunteer Programs Association (IVPA) at [www.volunteer-international.org](http://www.volunteer-international.org). Yet the fraternity of credit-granting program providers that define their mission in terms of this type of education is fairly small—the International Partnership for Service Learning, Goshen College, and the School for International Training jump to mind—and it seems safe to suggest that nowhere else in the US is there a comparable critical mass of such organizations as in the Twin Cities.

Although CGE, HECUA, and MSID have a good deal in common, each also has developed highly distinctive features; although all confront similar challenges, each meets these challenges in its own way. A comparison of the three can highlight some of the central pedagogical issues in experiential education, as well as the diversity of ways in which these issues can be addressed. We begin with a brief background sketch of the three organizations.

## The Center for Global Education (CGE)

The Center for Global Education offers five different semester-long programs in Mexico, Central America, and Namibia. Sophomores, juniors, and seniors are eligible. Most of its participants come from other colleges and universities throughout the US: Augsburg students account for less than twenty percent of CGE's enrollment. A second major thrust of CGE, although mostly beyond the scope of this paper, consists of programming short-term (one- to three-week) travel seminars, some for students, others for adult learners. Most of these involve partnerships with a sponsoring group such as a church, a labor union, a professional organization, or a college or university (e.g., a faculty development seminar). Sample topics include "Women in Health Care and Agriculture" (Cuba), "Sustainable Development and Peace: Comparisons, Contrasts, Lessons" (Guatemala and El Salvador), and "Challenges to Nation Building: Namibia After Twelve Years." An average of approximately eighty students participate in semester programs annually, in addition to over 500 adults in travel seminars. The core of the pedagogical approach in both types of programs is the model of popular education developed by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire.

Augsburg's first semester program in Mexico began in 1979, and the first short-term travel seminar to Latin America went in 1981. Those first experiments led to CGE's founding in 1982. CGE established permanent centers in Mexico and Central America in the 1980s and in Namibia in the 1990s. By now, over 8,000 adults have participated in CGE travel seminars to over 40 countries, and nearly 1,100 students have participated in CGE semester-length study abroad programs.

More detailed information on CGE and its programs is available on the World Wide Web at [www.augsburg.edu/global](http://www.augsburg.edu/global).

## The Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs (HECUA)

The Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs is a consortium of sixteen public and private colleges located primarily in the upper Midwest. Policy is set by a board of directors consisting of one representative from each member institution. With semester-length programs in

not only Guatemala, Ecuador, Northern Ireland, and Norway, but also in the Twin Cities, HECUA is the only organization among the three that sponsors both study abroad and domestic off-campus study. It also offers two January programs, one in Bangladesh and the other in the US South, and a non-credit summer internship program with upper Midwest non-profits. Although its programs are open to students from non-HECUA institutions, most come from within the consortium. HECUA has been expanding its programming to include short-term “embedded” programs as well as training for faculty in experiential education. A hallmark of HECUA’s programs is the rigorous theory-practice dialogue they seek to establish.

HECUA’s roots go back to the late 1960s, when political unrest and racial tensions made it feel like cities were going up in flames and talk of the Urban Crisis was widespread. Faculty of some local institutions who felt that this was no time for business as usual established an off-campus community involvement program on the North Side of Minneapolis called Crisis Colony. Students lived in the predominantly African-American community, studied what was going on there, and worked within community advocacy groups. In 1971 representatives of a number of area colleges founded HECUA, and Crisis Colony evolved into its Metro Urban Studies Term, still one of the organization’s staple semester offerings. HECUA went into Scandinavia and Latin America in the 1970s, diversified program offerings in Latin America and the Twin Cities in the 1980s and 1990s, and has expanded to Northern Ireland, Bangladesh, and the American South in the past three years. Annual enrollment in HECUA domestic and study abroad programs averages about 150, with overseas programs accounting for more than half the total. Over the years nearly 3,000 students have studied through HECUA.

For more detailed information on HECUA and its programs see [www.hecua.org](http://www.hecua.org).

### Minnesota Studies in International Development (MSID)

MSID is a set of programs within a much larger array of offerings of the Global Campus, the University of Minnesota’s study abroad office. MSID currently offers semester- and academic-year options in four countries—Ecuador, India, Kenya, and Senegal—and will open an additional

site in Ghana in the fall of 2003. Its programs are open to juniors, seniors, graduate students, and college graduates. University of Minnesota students constitute somewhat less than half of MSID participants. MSID emphasizes deep cultural immersion through homestays and especially through grassroots internships in scattered rural and urban sites.

MSID grew out of a series of informal meetings in 1980 of a small group of staff and faculty who were concerned about where the next generation of development specialists would come from, and who were committed to creating an internship experience wherein students would have a chance to experience development from within indigenous development organizations. A 1981 grant from a local foundation provided the necessary seed money for a program that initially was faculty-led and involved a pre-departure preparatory quarter on the University of Minnesota campus. Beginning in 1997, MSID moved to its current model of instruction entirely in-country and by indigenous faculty. By now nearly 1,000 students have studied abroad through MSID, and annual enrollments are expected to surpass 100 by 2003-2004.

MSID is described in greater detail on the Global Campus web site, [www.UMabroad.umn.edu](http://www.UMabroad.umn.edu).

### Separate Organizations, Similar Mission

For sponsors of more conventional classroom-based study abroad, defining mission may be of secondary importance; what goes on overseas may be close to what goes on at campuses back home. But the more the philosophical and pedagogical underpinnings of the study abroad undertaking deviate from the mainstream, the more crucial it is to articulate a clear vision. CGE, HECUA, and MSID all have put much effort into defining what they are about. Deep discussions among faculty, staff, and other stakeholders in each of the three have produced important tools for structuring programs, selecting pedagogies, and choosing among potential new initiatives. Even though their mission statements were developed entirely independent of each other, they reflect common underlying values and have a remarkable amount in common.

*CGE mission:* To provide cross-cultural education opportunities in order to foster critical analysis of local and global conditions so that personal and systemic change takes place, leading to a more just and sustain-

able world.<sup>2</sup>

*HECUA mission:* HECUA activates the civic mission of higher education through urban learning programs and related activities that connect students, faculty and practitioners to address the most pressing issues of our time. HECUA is a leading organization that fosters intentional learning and collaborative action that equips students to become effective citizens and agents of change.

*MSID mission:* Minnesota Studies in International Development (MSID) is devoted to the preparation of culturally sensitive individuals who are committed to the concepts of justice and sustainable development for all societies in our interdependent world. MSID seeks to engage students, faculty, and staff, as well as the general community, in dialogue and reciprocal learning with people from Africa, Asia, and Latin America concerning local and global problems, with a particular emphasis on development issues. Through grassroots field placements, internships, and research experiences in development projects working within economically poor communities, MSID participants gain first-hand experience with the conditions, needs, and strengths of the countries involved with the program.

Mission serves as a rudder steering an organization. I would submit that all of the other parallels among CGE, HECUA, and MSID are, to one degree or another, a consequence of the similarities in values and mission among them. To the extent that another study abroad provider is driven by similar values and mission, its programs may well come to share many of the same hallmarks as those of CGE, HECUA, and MSID.

This is not to suggest that the three organizations have evolved entirely independent of each other. All are operating within the same larger context of the profession. All are active to one degree or another in such associations as NSEE (National Society for Experiential Education, [www.nsee.org](http://www.nsee.org)), or NAFSA: Association of International Educators ([www.nafsa.org](http://www.nafsa.org)) and especially its Section on US Students Abroad (SECUSSA, [www.secussa.nafsa.org](http://www.secussa.nafsa.org)), or the Forum on Education Abroad ([www.ForumEA.org](http://www.ForumEA.org)). All are influenced by changing thinking in study abroad and experiential education circles. Moreover, some information sharing and staff movement has occurred among them locally. Yet their origins were quite independent of each other, and the actual decision-

making processes have been entirely internal to each organization. Thus, the similarities in their trajectories might be instructive for other institutions wishing to promote learning experiences with objectives similar to those of CGE, HECUA, and MSID.

### **Spotlight on Pedagogy**

To some observers, CGE, HECUA, and MSID all might appear to be almost obsessed with pedagogy. They put much effort into defining and articulating their teaching approach, training their faculty to apply it, and sharing it not only with their stakeholders, but also with colleagues in the field. Visitors to any of the three web sites will be immediately struck by how prominent is the discussion of pedagogy. This is not surprising. Just as articulating mission clearly is more important to non-mainstream than mainstream organizations, so articulating pedagogy is more important when the educational model departs significantly from what is typical. Pedagogical issues should be discussed not only with home-campus faculty or advisers, but also with program participants. Students become better partners in the educational enterprise if they clearly understand what the program is trying to do and why it has chosen the methods it uses.

### **Honoring the Affective Dimension of Learning**

These programs are powerful. Students are exploring not only how the world works, but also where they fit into it. As HECUA puts it, “The student’s first intellectual task is to recognize that knowledge is a social construction with ethical and political implications. Careful examination of one’s own world view and its construction brings to light (and to question) patterns of behavior, fashion, consumption, common sense, and dominant metaphors accepted as normal. The pedagogue problematizes reality; the student learns to use theory as a tool for critical examination of reality as understood from various world views. The student also learns there are multiple ways of seeing reality in different societies. All models are not equal. Choice of action must be made within ethical parameters.”<sup>3</sup>

The field experiences in and of themselves have a powerful impact on students, and asking students to place their intellectual learning in the

context of personal ethics, to consider their own present and future roles as actors in the social dramas they are studying, adds to the emotional depth of their learning. The feelings aroused merit respect, for they are important to the learning process. All three providers are committed to whole-person learning that includes venues for exploring the deeply personal. CGE is most explicit on this score. Its educational philosophy includes “a commitment to both cognitive and affective learning. Students are asked what they feel and what they think regarding course content. Instructors try to strike a balance and avoid over-emphasis of either cognitive or affective learning.”<sup>4</sup> Although HECUA’s and MSID’s models place greater emphasis on the cognitive, both similarly provide spaces for students to express their emotions and to examine, both individually and collectively, what those emotions are telling them.

## Learning in Community

All three sets of programs emphasize the importance of group learning. The processing of experiences is crucial to experiential education, and although much of this can take place through writing assignments, all three organizations have found Socratic discussion crucial. Students need regularly scheduled times to analyze their experiences, try out alternative explanations, debate, and grapple together with the affective dimensions of what they are learning.

Faculty are an integral part of the learning community. All of the programs reject what Freire called the “banking model of education”<sup>5</sup> and instead employ what HECUA refers to as a “teacher-learner model,” in which both parties teach and both learn: “The relationship between teacher and learner is based upon ‘cognitive equality’—the idea that all people involved in the educational process are participants of social conversations; differences in expertise and experience have to do with time, dedication and method. In this view, teachers and learners are partners in the educational project and its broad purposes.”<sup>6</sup> The importance of the learning community is closely related to two other characteristics the programs share. First, enrollments are limited. Most programs have caps of thirty students or fewer. And second, each program has a common curriculum allowing for little or no choice of courses. If there are any options at all, they are likely to be between levels of language instruction or, per-

haps, between advanced language and a research project. Students in these programs value the sense that they are on a learning journey together.

Of the three sponsors, it is CGE which has placed greatest emphasis on this dimension. Group reflection is central to the pedagogical approach it employs, in which it likens the class to a Freirian "Circle of Praxis." CGE's summary of its educational philosophy includes the following: "Learning takes place in the context of community [...] In order to truly know others, learners must know themselves and the ways in which their feelings, actions, and attitudes have been shaped by their own community context. All community members need to increase their intercultural awareness and be trained in intercultural communications skills. Liberating education is most likely to take place in diverse communities which embrace difference and engage in analysis of issues related to power and privilege. Building communities of learners which meet the aforementioned criteria empowers learners and provides them with the skills necessary to be competent learners in broader cross-cultural community contexts."<sup>7</sup>

### Examining Multiple Perspectives

CGE, HECUA, and MSID are all committed to assuring that students analyze issues from many different angles. This they accomplish in at least four ways.

First, all are comparative. It is important that students begin to sort out which phenomena are particular to the location where they are studying and which are manifestations of broader trends or of global systems. The CGE programs and most of the HECUA programs thus incorporate structured travel to other countries for the sake of comparison. Although the MSID programs and HECUA's Ecuador program involve no study in other countries, they do include field trips within the host country; and perhaps more important, their students all report on their internships orally as well as in writing so that group discussion can explore similarities and contrasts.

Second, all three sets of programs strive to assure that students hear many different voices. Looking at issues of globalization, for example, program faculty might arrange for students to hear from a corporate executive, a US trade representative, an environmental activist, an artisan whose

products have been displaced in the market, a labor organizer, a factory worker, and a community leader in a nearby squatter settlement.

Third, all of the programs help students experience multiple realities. That is, it is not enough to expose them to a variety of voices; they should also enter into a variety of settings. It is one thing to hear the voice of someone brought into the classroom as a guest speaker, and quite another to listen to that voice in context. It is one thing to study land tenure, read the statistics about rural land distribution, and hear the arguments about agrarian reform; it is another to visit a landowner on a large hacienda and then a campesino on a tiny mountainside plot of land. It is not only that intellectually students appreciate far more the nuances of the issues they are studying after seeing examples in the field; it is also that the field experience strengthens the affective dimension of learning.

Finally, all of the programs seek to examine the world through a variety of theoretical lenses. MSID, for example, looks at the history of development theory and asks students to consider their host country's and community's experiences in relation to modernization theory, dependency theory, world systems theory, etc., and in the context of the debate over globalization. CGE's model emphasizes analysis of social change and sustainable development exploring themes of globalization, nation building, racism, gender issues, and the environment. These themes and issues are informed by the historical context, liberation theology, development theory, and gender studies. HECUA's model is especially insistent not only on providing students with several different lenses, but also on deconstructing the very nature of theory and its relation to society: "Worldviews are social constructions and linked to systems of power. Any knowledge has historical, political, and economic context. The context intertwines the experiences of past generations into ongoing conversations."<sup>8</sup> It is essential that those multiple perspectives include some hitherto unfamiliar to the students. CGE, HECUA, and MSID bend over backward to assure that students especially hear voices that too often are muffled, those of the poor and the disempowered; that they get into settings rarely seen by tourists, or even by the more privileged sectors of the local population; and that they be exposed to theories, concepts, and assumptions that are rarely heard in the US, at least within the mainstream press and mainstream academia.

Although this insistence has sometimes led to charges of bias, the

sponsors respond that they are only seeking to compensate in some small part for the biases which have surrounded students all their lives. For, as HECUA suggests, “Dominant worldviews are not neutral or objective, and they do not serve people’s interests equally. In order for people to become co-creators of society, we must be critical recipients of values, ideas, concepts and worldviews. Understanding knowledge as socially constructed forms a fundamental element of the HECUA model.” The cognitive dissonance produced when students hear alternative voices, experience new social realities, and explore critical conceptual frameworks produces an extraordinarily pregnant learning environment.

### Stressing the Cross-Class As Well As the Cross-Cultural

Study abroad professionals generally agree that cultural immersion is a good thing. Different students may be ready for different degrees of immersion; but whatever the program format it is important that students experience local culture in some meaningful way. Yet there is immersion and there is immersion. Let us consider for a moment direct enrollment in foreign universities, a type of study abroad which is often touted—and justly so—for the high degree of cultural immersion it produces. Students in direct enrollment programs do become deeply involved in the host culture. They experience another academic system; they may live in university housing with local students; they tend to make many friends; and they hear local voices continuously. But it is fair to ask into whose realities are they plunging. What perception will they have of the host country and its problems if most of the voices they hear represent a small, relatively privileged slice of the national population? In contrast, programs of such providers as CGE, HECUA, MSID, or the School for International Training (SIT) intentionally cross class as well as cultural boundaries. For students from a country like the United States which tends to evade issues of class, the resulting awakening can be as powerful as the awakening to cultural differences. Just as students tend to return from study abroad in general with a much heightened sensitivity to ethnocentrism, so students tend to return from these programs with eyes and ears more sharply attuned to class issues in our society—as well as with analytical tools for better understanding them.<sup>9</sup>

## Using Internships As Study Sites

Most of the three organizations' programs include internships either as a required core element of the curriculum (all MSID programs, all HECUA domestic programs, plus HECUA's Ecuador and Northern Ireland programs) or as a one of the course options (most CGE programs). Although their approach to internships has many features in common with that of other study abroad programs, including their professional development goals, all three providers focus on other dimensions as well.

In the first place, internships should be related not only to the student's major or academic interests but also to the program theme, for the intern-receiving organization and the surrounding community become venues for exploring the issues of power, inequality, and social change that define the programs. For example, HECUA says about its Northern Ireland internships, "The organizations or grassroots groups with which the students work must have a program that addresses some aspect of conflict transformation, citizenship education, or social change. Students are expected to both learn from the host organization and contribute to its ongoing work and/or special projects."<sup>10</sup> That is, the mission of the host agency is as important in defining the suitability of a prospective internship as is the type of work the student will do. Some kinds of internships that would be considered excellent professional development experiences in another type of program—say, placements with an embassy or a corporation—would be of little interest to CGE, HECUA, or MSID.

Second, the internship setting is important. All three providers seek internships that bring students into direct contact with the social realities of the host country. Thus, even internships in social change organizations would be of little interest if they placed students in strictly middle-class office settings. Of course many internships involve a good deal of office work, and the host NGO may in fact be most interested in tapping students' skills in such areas as information technology or translation, but such activities need to be coupled with others that get students out into the community. MSID is especially adamant about this, as its program manual explains to prospective students: "We strive to assure that any field placement or internship will immerse you in the everyday realities of the country where you are studying. Your experiences should give you insights into the conditions of life for the great majority of the population which is

poor, not just for the privileged minorities who normally have the greatest contact with foreign visitors. This means that MSID seeks to arrange placements in rural areas or relatively poor urban neighborhoods and that, as a result, your living and working conditions may be rather austere.”<sup>11</sup>

## Orienting Students

The requirements for effective orientation in field-based programs differ in some ways from those in strictly classroom-based programs. Like the latter, of course, they must cover such topics as academic structure and expectations, logistics, cultural do's and don'ts, behavioral expectations, and health and safety. But other elements are more crucial to the success of experiential programs than of classroom-based programs. Reflecting the stress the former place on the learning community, for example, all three organizations include substantial group-building activities in their orientations. Given the amount and nature of interaction they demand with people of all strata and walks of life, the need to foster cross-cultural skills is even more crucial in these programs than in others. Moreover, training in field techniques—how to be an effective observer, how to ask questions, how to conduct informal or formal interviews—needs to begin early. And it is essential that students thoroughly understand the program's mission and pedagogical approach.

CGE conducts no in-person, pre-departure orientation, and although MSID and HECUA both hold a one-day orientation in the Twin Cities, non-local students are not required to attend. Not surprisingly, all three sets of programs devote the first week in-country to orientation—considerably more than many study abroad programs. This is especially important because all three draw their students from a variety of institutions, which puts severe constraints on pre-departure orientation. All try to compensate for this, partly by developing exceptionally thorough written materials.

Of the three, it is MSID which has most emphasized pre-departure preparation. Each country group has a paid mentor—a faculty or staff member or graduate student who knows the country intimately and is in continuous phone and e-mail contact with participants during the months prior to departure. The mentor not only answers students questions, but also begins e-mail discussions of the coming challenges. A returned student for

each country is hired to assist the mentor in this undertaking. Somewhat remarkably, the result is that a good deal of group bonding occurs before students even meet each other for the first time. In addition, MSID requires substantial pre-departure reading—not only about the country of study, but also about experiential education, development theory, and cross-cultural communication—as well as several writing assignments to be turned in to the on-site program faculty at the beginning of the program. This permits MSID to hit the ground running once students arrive in country, and lightens slightly the weekly in-country workload while still complying with the University's policies on student effort per credit.

### Setting the Stage for Each Field Experience

Program orientation is only one kind of preparation. Students also must be primed for each structured experience within the program. CGE, HECUA, and MSID all place the central responsibility for learning on the student, and this in turn places a parallel responsibility on the program to assure that students have the skills and knowledge necessary to make the field experience educationally effective. Some of this preparation is general—for example, training students in research methodologies, introducing them to techniques of informal observation, coaching them on how to conduct interviews in the new cultural context, and, of course, introducing them to theories for analyzing what they see, hear, and experience—and some of it is specific to the particular experience. Each structured experience is paired with background readings, lectures, and discussions on the locations the students will be visiting or working at, as well as the issues their visit or work experience is designed to help them explore. Learning goals for each experience are made explicit; students need to be told in advance how their experiences are to be processed. Clear instructions for papers or oral reports help ready them for what they should observe in the field, what questions they should ask, what issues and problems they should be thinking about, and what alternative theories they should be bringing to bear.

The more demanding the field experience, the greater the preparation needed. At the extreme are the programs with the major internship components. HECUA's Ecuador and Northern Ireland programs both include not only an internship seminar as part of the internship, but also

courses closely tied to it: Building a Sustainable Democracy (Northern Ireland), Politics of Conflict and Transformation (Northern Ireland), and Community Participation for Social Change (Ecuador). And in the case of MSID the curriculum in the entire two-month classroom phase is designed to give students skills, knowledge, and perspectives necessary to be effective in the subsequent field phase: International Development: Critical Perspectives on Theory and Practice; Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Work; Country Analysis; and a language course.

## Designing Experiences

Whether an individual interview assignment, a small-team visit to an agency, an all-class field trip, or an internship, each experience has an academic purpose tied directly to the classroom and reading components of the program. Students not only should be trying out alternative theories in relation to their experiences, but also should be using field experiences to evaluate and challenge the theories.

The range of experiences that can be built into the curriculum of field study programs is vast. Assigned activities might consist of observation (e.g., visiting a particular neighborhood and trying to understand it just by looking and listening), informal conversation (interviewing a homestay mother on child-rearing practices), listening to an explanation (being guided through an NGO by its director), administering a survey questionnaire (asking door-to-door about use of French, Wolof, and other vernacular languages in a Dakar neighborhood), trying out a skill (haggling in a market using Spanish), formal research, participant observation, work (as in an internship), or a host of others. Moreover, the scale of the activity might be individual (each student interviews a different person about attitudes toward work), in small teams (one team of students in India visits a Hindu temple, another a mosque, a third a Jain temple), or by the entire group (a faculty-led field trip to visit a community erosion-control project in Guatemala).

In addition to serving the desired learning outcomes, activities must be sequenced to present students with incremental levels of challenge. Certain kinds of activity that are highly effective near the end of a program could be disastrous at the beginning. This is true not only academically—for example, the type of research techniques students are asked to

apply, or the type of intellectual analysis to which they subject their experiences—but also personally. Toward the end of the program students are asked to do things that would have been terrifying to them in the early weeks, and because of the staged experiences they have had in the meantime, they are able to rise to the challenge. HECUA, for example, designs small-team assignments to require an increasing amount of initiative by the student. Initially students might carry out field assignments built mostly around observation, later might do more interviewing on visits set up for them by the program staff, and in the last weeks of the semester might have to set up their own visits or find their own interviewees. By the end of a semester or year, students are doing things that they could scarcely have imagined at the beginning.

## Processing Experiences

“Learning is thinking about experience” is an aphorism aptly summarizing John Dewey’s approach to the relation between experience and education. Perhaps the key challenge in experiential education is to assure real depth of analysis as students process their experiences. Without wishing in any way to minimize the importance of preparing students for the experience and of selecting and structuring the experience to serve the learning goals, I would suggest that it is at this reflection stage that experiential education most fundamentally differs from mere experience

Techniques for achieving this processing vary both among and within programs, but all employ some combination of discussion and written assignments to achieve what Kolb calls “reflective observation.”<sup>12</sup> It is here that critical thinking skills are honed, here that the bulk of the theory-practice dialogue is achieved. Group discussion permits students to report on a variety of experiences and to explore together alternative interpretations. Writing assignments push students to articulate their ideas systematically.

Just as field activities may be structured at any scale, so the scale of analysis may be individual (e.g., a written report), team (e.g., an oral report to the class), or by the class as a whole (e.g., group discussion, or a written report to which each student contributes one part). Moreover, the scale of the activity need not be the scale of the analysis. For example, each student might be asked to write up an individual report on the same class

field trip; or, a team of students might write up a group report on patterns that emerge from their individual observations on their host families' management of household finances.

A few examples of writing assignments illustrate ways in which the programs structure analysis so as to link it to classroom study. The first two are from "Racism and Resistance in Southern Africa and the US: Struggles Against Colonialism, Apartheid and Segregation," a history course within CGE's Namibia-based program, Nation-Building, Globalization and Decolonizing the Mind.<sup>13</sup>

*Analytical Essay: After completion of both the urban and rural home-stay, write a brief essay using historical analysis describing the concrete legacies of the history of colonialism and apartheid. The paper should tie together your own observations during the homestays, interviews with host members and other contacts, and analysis drawn from the discussions and readings of historical documents.*

*Autobiographical essay: Using some of the testimonial literature read earlier in the semester as inspiration and model, write an autobiographical essay describing the development and evolution of your own understanding of race and racism. The essay should include a discussion of how the history studied in this course has impacted your own understanding of the issue. After putting yourself in the context of your own lived history and socio-economic position, you may choose to speculate what your position would have been during the US Civil Rights era and/or the liberation struggle in southern Africa. You may speculate where you see, or would like to see, your autobiography heading in the future.*

MSID assigns a number of what it calls Focus Papers. Three examples from different courses illustrate. The first is from the course on development:

*Who (the poor, the rich, government employees, foreign governments, multi-national corporations) benefits from, and who is harmed by, the developmental efforts you have seen? Is anyone completely left out? What development paradigm(s) seem(s) to be guiding (or justifying) these efforts.*<sup>14</sup>

The second example is from the area studies course:

*Class discussions and readings have emphasized the importance of religion—especially Islam—in understanding Senegal. In groups of three to four students, prepare a paper comparing and contrasting the role religion seems to play in the lives of your respective host families. How does this small sample seem to fit (or not fit) into national patterns as discussed in readings and class sessions?*<sup>15</sup>

The third example comes from the Applied Field Methods research methodology course, which is coupled with the research project in the second semester of the academic-year program:

*The spring midterm seminar includes a research progress report by each student and discussion of each project by the group. Take notes during these sessions. In a paper of no more than four pages, try to generalize about what has come out of the reports and discussion. What are some of the most common problems students are encountering? What strategies seem to be most hopeful for overcoming these problems and carrying the projects to a successful conclusion? What, if anything, are you going to do differently in your own project as a result of what you have heard?*<sup>16</sup>

An example from the Twin Cities-based Metro Urban Studies Term (MUST) illustrates HECUA's rigorously theory-centered pedagogy:

*Tri-Weekly Praxis Summary: ... There are three inter-related parts to this component (of a larger assignment) ... 1) Question/Issue: What critical problem, question or issue arose for you from the program these past two weeks? The question should relate specifically to our class discussions, to reading, field or integration seminars, to your internship, to your PA group or to social change generally. If more than one question came up, feel free to note them. 2) Analytical Framework. Discuss your question connecting the readings and your experiences to your question. Use a helpful analytical/theoretical framework from one or more of our readings. 3) Discuss how and why this framework (lens) is useful to you. Why did you choose this as opposed to another framework? What limits and benefits does this framework offer you (how did it help you with your question and how*

*didn't it)? Who might this framework benefit or marginalize? Don't necessarily try to fully solve or answer the question you've raised. The purpose of this is critical reflection, integrating theory and experience (practice), not problem-solving.<sup>17</sup>*

As background to this and other assignments, the program provides students with this discussion:

*What is a critical question? For every reading seminar you are required to write 3 critical questions. They should span all the articles assigned if possible. They are very important because they will often be used to drive discussion of readings. This is not an exhaustive list of types of critical questions but they should give you some guidance. 1) Questions that compare and contrast ideas and arguments between and among readings. 2) Questions that probe the underlying assumptions that an author uses to make his or her argument. 3) Questions that illuminate the strengths, weaknesses and contradictions of an author's argument. 4) Questions that assess the internal consistency and observational consistency of a theory, argument, set of ideas. For example, a theory should be internally consistent (the elements of an argument should not contradict each other) and be observationally consistent (although some theories try to get beneath the level of appearances and are difficult to test in a measurable way). 5) Questions that ask discussants to integrate or apply theory with/to practice/experience (your internships, field speakers and your own life experiences, etc). 6) Questions that invite discussants to think about the implications for yourself, other individuals, social systems and society at large. 7) Questions that integrate and link arguments from current readings with those we have read together at a prior time or those you have read before MUST. 8) Questions that invite discussants to assess how the readings influence their sense of where they stand on issues and their role as participants in society. These should be questions that you really think ought to be asked of a reading and that you would like to have discussed in class.<sup>18</sup>*

## Incorporating Unplanned Learning

Although the pedagogical approach revolves principally around structured experiences, students' serendipitous experiences during social activities, homestay conversations, community events, or weekend travel also provide important raw material for learning—both cognitive and affective—just as they do in more conventional classroom based study. Students need space to reflect, collectively and individually, on such experiences.

Collective reflection takes place mostly in the context of class discussion. Faculty actively encourage students to bring relevant individual experiences to discussions of each topic. They also build in some less rigidly scheduled time for students to recount and analyze experiences not necessarily related to the current topic.

Like many experiential programs, as a vehicle for individual reflection all of the CGE and MSID programs and some of the HECUA programs assign journal writing. The use of journals poses some special challenges. It is a type of writing unfamiliar to many students. Moreover, the term itself may carry a lot of baggage, not only for students who have never written journals before, but also for those whose previous journal writing has been for a different end. Particularly common are the tendencies either to produce straight narrative or simply emote. All of the programs that use journals have thus developed clear, written guidelines for their writing. All also ask students to hand in their first installments early in the semester so that faculty can provide prompt feedback, especially to students who may be on the wrong track.

The programs' instructions for writing journals have evolved over the years through a combination of trial and error, exposure to literature on the subject, and interaction with colleagues in the field. Those of MSID, which has the most elaborate guidelines among the three providers, are illustrative. Initially, MSID simply assigned "journals." Carefully-worded instructions sought to ensure that each entry included both description and analysis and was intellectually rigorous. Experience soon revealed two problems, however. One occurred in spite of the guidelines and the other because of them. Despite the guidelines many students continued to produce straight narrative. And because of the guidelines and their emphasis on social science analysis, some students never dealt

with the affective side of what they were learning, or explored seriously how it related to their own lives.

A few years ago MSID thus put together a faculty task force at the University of Minnesota to rethink the use of journals in the program. In the subsequent overhaul, two changes proved especially important. One was almost laughably simple: each entry is now required to have a title. This helped move students away from diffuse what-I-did-last-week narrative. The other was more elaborate: Journals are now categorized into two types, and students are asked to turn in a certain number of installments of each. One retains essentially the old instructions for a kind of writing heavy in social science analysis. Each entry is likened to a small academic paper but whose topic is grounded in an experience and chosen by the student. The instructions for the second type describe a type of writing that focused on the student's personal journey. Entries are to explore emotions, changes in worldviews, reflections on ethics, and thoughts about what students' learning means for the way they wish to lead their lives. Writing styles can be less formal and more creative than in the first type of writing. To distinguish the two, MSID renamed the first Field Observation Reports (thanks to a suggestion from the director for one of HECUA's Latin American programs) but initially retained the name "Journal" for the second. On-site faculty soon reported that students were now doing much better with the Field Observation Reports but that many Journals still lacked the desired depth of analysis. When an MSID staff member commented on this problem during a site visit to the India program, one student hypothesized that the problem lay in the term Journal and suggested substituting Personal Observation Reports. MSID followed the suggestion, and astonishingly, the mere change in terminology made a difference. Today the students speak of FORs and PORs without seeming to think of either as a journal, and each year when MSID reviews the program, faculty in the field advocate retaining both types of writing.

### From US Faculty-led to Locally-based

All three sets of programs began with faculty leaders from Minnesota. Within a very few years, CGE and HECUA both moved to resident directors and faculty, however. MSID persisted with rotating faculty leaders for much longer, although from the beginning it had con-

tracted in-country staff for program administration (including the negotiation of internships and homestays).

For experiential programs like these, the shift from rotating faculty leadership to long-term resident directors and faculty seems almost inevitable, partly because knowledge of, and contacts in, the local community are far more important for organizing an experiential program than a strictly classroom-based program, and partly because high turnover impedes cumulative improvement in pedagogy. The typical Ph.D. program, either in this country or in others, does little to equip future faculty as experiential educators. There are exceptions, of course, and there are also some untrained faculty who have all the right instincts. But for most, the learning curve can be very steep in the first year. If there is not a second year, the knowledge gained will benefit the program only marginally.

The three organizations agree that stable leadership in their programs has been essential to the steady academic improvement they have experienced. Investing resources in training produces a longer-lasting benefit when staff and faculty are stable than when they rotate. Since moving to systems of resident directors, the three organizations all have developed, quite independently of each other, a pattern of organizing biennial workshops or retreats lasting one to two weeks. Resident directors from all the sites come together to compare notes, discuss pedagogy, and interact with Minnesota-based staff and faculty.

Since making the transition to resident staff and faculty, HECUA and MSID have depended entirely on host-country nationals for instruction and on-site program administration. Although CGE initially selected mostly North Americans for its center directors and key faculty, today it, too, is moving toward local leadership. If not inevitable, it is at least not surprising given the philosophical underpinnings of all three organizations. If the aim is to expose students to local voices, they should hear them not only in the field but also in the classroom. And if the programs are not to mirror the international power relationships they seek to help students understand, it makes sense to place responsibility for delivering them in the hands of host-country scholars.

## **Common Challenges, Varied Responses**

Field-based programs that purport to explore social issues face many common challenges. In some cases CGE, HECUA, and MSID have devised similar responses, in others, quite different responses.

### **Articulating the Educational Model**

These are difficult programs to describe quickly. It takes few words to convey the basic nature of an integrated study program; one just needs to say that it's sort of like being a foreign student in the United States except that a student is going to apply the credits to his or her degree program back home. It is easy to get across the essence of an intensive language program or a classroom-based area studies program, but students and even faculty on home campuses often find it harder to relate experiential programs to educational models they have previously known, or to grasp fully the civic mission of these particular experiential programs.

Unsurprisingly, then, CGE, HECUA, and MSID have all put a great deal of effort into articulating what they are about. The task is twofold: to arouse interest and to establish credibility.

Attracting interest means finding quick ways to catch the attention of students, study abroad advisers, and faculty. Although important, program location must be secondary in this effort. It is mission and pedagogy that distinguish these programs from others. The three providers all strive to develop a language that can convey their essence to students and faculty. Program publicity has employed such phrases as "Out of the Classroom and Into the World" (HECUA), "Education for Life" (CGE), "The Quest for Justice in a Globalizing World" (MSID), or "Community-Based Education" (CGE). HECUA literature prominently displays the slogan, "Academic-Community Partnerships for Social Change." Other phrases have proved useful in face-to-face conversations with faculty. CGE staff like to speak of "giving students access to primary sources." MSID staff have found that faculty resonate when they speak of "theory-practice dialogue," describe MSID as "operating in the zone of interface between anthropology and political economy," or draw an analogy between field study in the social sciences and lab sections in the natural sciences.

Establishing credibility requires thorough documentation and thor-

ough evaluation. This is, of course, important for study abroad programs of any nature; in view of the lingering suspicions in some circles about academic rigor in experiential education, it is doubly important for this type of program.

CGE, HECUA, and MSID all have program manuals designed to convey clearly program objectives, structure, academic content, pedagogy, assignments, and grading system. As discussed below, they also evaluate their programs thoroughly. In addition, all three have sought to develop systems for US faculty to visit the programs. Augsburg faculty visit CGE sites through participation in a faculty development seminar or by sponsoring a short-term travel seminar to one of the sites. Faculty from participating colleges who send substantial numbers of students to CGE semester programs are invited for a discounted program visit. A HECUA Fellows Program takes groups of faculty from member campuses to program sites for a combination of program observation and a pedagogical seminar. MSID encourages and funds side trips for site visits when faculty are going to be in the same part of the world, and also sometimes takes a faculty member or two along on staff site visits.

### Establishing Institutional Fit

The need for the right language to describe the programs is linked to another challenge: how to help other colleges and universities determine whether a program merits approval or perhaps formal affiliation. The first step, assessing academic quality, is not much different for experiential programs than for others. Every institution has its own approach, and the documentation provided by the programs plus the experience of past students usually provides enough information for institutions to make an informed judgment. But once satisfied that the quality meets its standards, any institution considering affiliating with the program or including it on an approved or recommended list must also assess what niche the program fills. What does it offer that is different from others already on the list? How does it help meet institutional goals?

Here again what needs highlighting are the qualities that make these programs what they are: goals, structure, content, pedagogy. One useful exercise might be for the institution to stack up a program against the institution's mission statement, which is likely to mention words like

justice, service, critical thinking, or contributions to society. Another might be to think about the variety of learning styles represented on the campus and to ask whether the array of study abroad programs speaks to each of those styles. Experiential programs sometimes fire the intellect of students who have hitherto not quite connected with their college learning experience—just as they can prove difficult for some students who have been very successful in conventional classroom settings.

### Matching Curriculum with Degree Requirements

The question of fit has another dimension. Individual departments must determine which courses satisfy which major requirements, and institutions must make a similar judgment concerning liberal education requirements. In addition to assessing individual courses, occasionally an institution or department might consider a program as a totality in relation to a particular degree requirement. For example, one member institution has accepted virtually all of the HECUA programs as satisfying its “Global Search for Justice” capstone requirement, while two other institutions apply HECUA programs toward their Peace and Justice majors.

The key challenge in this matching process is how to mesh program curricula that are expressly interdisciplinary with campus structures and degree requirements that are organized along disciplinary lines. Although the task falls to the home institution, the program provider plays an important role.

The very manner in which the provider lists its program courses can make a difference. No approach is inherently best, and the three providers have adopted different models. CGE has chosen to assign disciplinary rubrics to many of its courses—say, Sociology to one, Political Science to another. This facilitates acceptance of a course toward the corresponding major but may make the case more difficult to make to other majors. MSID’s choice to list all of its non-language courses under a more discipline-neutral Global Studies rubric has assisted students from a wide variety of majors in making their case but has meant that no single department feels so strong an affinity to a course as does the cognate department in CGE’s model. HECUA, as a non-degree-granting consortium, has the luxury of not having to use course numbers or rubrics of any kind. Instead it leaves it up to each member (or non-member) campus how to credit the

courses. Some campuses may use interdisciplinary rubrics, whereas others may assign each course to a discipline. Member institutions as a result may feel more curricular ownership of HECUA programs and their courses than do institutions connected to MSID or CGE programs. On the other hand, the array of solutions can seem bewildering to HECUA as it attempts to develop coherent systems for working with its members. HECUA has developed a section of its web site just to track, institution by institution, the uses to which students can put its programs, or any specific course offered as part of a program.

The interdisciplinary nature of the program courses, and the fact that virtually none have exact counterparts on the US campus, means that matching is labor-intensive both for the provider and for the campus. Departmental approvals that are easy for more standard discipline-based courses often require closer scrutiny for these. The program sponsor may be asked to provide more extensive documentation or to send a representative to a departmental meeting. Sometimes it is the sponsor who must approach the department in the first place to request consideration of a course.

## Confronting the Trend toward Short-term Study Abroad

The trend toward increasing numbers of short-term programs in the study abroad world raises special questions for organizations like CGE, HECUA, and MSID. Is it legitimate to complement their semester and year-long programs with shorter options? How well can the organizations' learning goals be met in shorter periods? How much can students really change in three or four weeks?

CGE has long been committed to providing short-term travel seminars not only for adults, but for students as well. Each year it arranges short-term programs for some twenty colleges, including Augsburg itself. The short-term programs are guided by the same vision and pedagogy used in the semester programs. CGE's long experience with such programs is encouraging. For many participants even two or three weeks of exposure to conditions and issues they had heretofore scarcely thought about have fundamentally changed the way they view the world. CGE's travel seminars in Central America unquestionably contributed to making

the Twin Cities into one of the national hotbeds of opposition to US policy in Central America during the 1980s. The transformative impact of the alternative winter and spring break programs that the University of Minnesota YMCA has operated for years provides further evidence of the potential of short-term programming. HECUA more recently has initiated pilot projects with shorter-term programming. It has added two J-term offerings, Development and Community (Bangladesh) and The Civil Rights Movement: History and Consequences (Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi), and is looking at the possibility of May-term programs as well. HECUA is also starting to experiment with programs on contract for member institutions, as is MSID for departments. This model, similar to something CGE has long used, puts the organization's on-site staff, faculty, facilities, and pedagogical model at the service of the contractor. In MSID's case, these are within the broader context of a Global Campus undertaking to design May Intersession programs aimed especially at freshman and sophomores in the hope that many use them as stepping stones to longer experience before they graduate. (So far the evidence suggests that this does indeed happen, although the percentage of freshmen and sophomores among participants has been lower than hoped.) What is still a matter for debate is whether enough pedagogical integrity can be maintained in programs initiated and led by campus-based faculty to consider them to be "true" CGE, HECUA, or MSID programs.

If very short-term programs can raise participants' consciousness about inequities and injustices, and even their commitment to action toward addressing them, it is still clear that semester and year-long programs will produce a far greater nuanced understanding of issues. Students in such programs have the time to deepen both their familiarity with local conditions and their theoretical sophistication for analyzing them. On the other hand, short-term alternatives can attract something nearer a cross-section of undergraduates, including many who would have lacked the courage or interest to consider a semester or year option. Although welcome, this phenomenon also poses challenges to on-site staff and faculty accustomed to working with students who already resonate with the organization's mission and pedagogy.

## Managing Student Expectations

Many students find these programs and their pedagogical approaches quite different from what they have known in the past. All of the providers are cognizant of the danger that students will select them for the wrong reasons. Their descriptive materials, advising, and orientation all strive to bring expectations in line with what the programs can actually deliver. MSID, for example, includes in its acceptance packets and its student handbook a sheet summarizing what the program is and is not and urging students to think carefully before applying. The providers all hope home campus faculty and study abroad advisers will help them combat especially the following expectations:

*Misconceptions about experiential education:* Students may think that “experiential” means unstructured or academically undemanding. It is important to establish an early understanding that these are not programs for students to “do their own thing.” Schedules of activities are highly structured, and a great deal of reading and writing is required. Commitment is essential, not only to the academic program and to other participants, but also to the homestay family, the host community, and perhaps the intern-receiving agency. One or two students with inappropriate motivations can greatly affect group dynamics, as well as the program’s reputation in the community.

*The need for answers:* At the opposite extreme from the student seeking liberation from structure is the student who expects answers from the program. Given the complexity of the realities studied and the insistence on examining those realities from multiple perspectives, it is just as likely that in the end students will feel less sure about how the world works, or about what sorts of public policies are desirable, than they did at the beginning. This is as true of the activist ideologues as it is of the blissfully unengaged. From very early the programs seek to instill in students a tolerance for ambiguity. They must be able to savor questions rather than insist on answers.

*Insufficiently aligned learning goals:* A certain number of application essays always suggest that the writer wants simply to “learn about another culture” or to “improve my Spanish skills by immersing myself in the language,” or to “get practical experience in my future profession.” Occasionally a chat with the student about program objectives, content,

and pedagogy is necessary before making the admission decision

*The desire to 'help':* Some applicants apply a 'save-the-world' mentality to these programs. Application essays often speak of the desire to "help" people less fortunate than the applicant. Although the values lying behind such statements are laudable, students need quickly to adjust their goals and even their vocabularies, for the "helping" paradigm impedes the development of authentic symmetry in relationships with the host society. As all of the providers tell students in orientation, and remind them periodically throughout their time abroad, phrases like "working with" or "learning from" lend themselves far better to reciprocity and mutual respect than does "helping." CGE speaks eloquently for all three organizations: " 'First world' learners should be encouraged to analyze tendencies to want to 'fix' other people's problems and should explore alternative responses. (Aboriginal woman in Australia: 'If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, let us walk together.')"<sup>19</sup>

## Fostering Learning Communities and Cultural Immersion

There is an inherent tension between the desire to build strong learning communities and the wish to immerse students as deeply as possible in the host culture. All three organizations seek to accomplish both, but some tradeoffs are unavoidable. How can a reasonable amount of immersion be achieved without attenuating the power of the learning community, and vice versa? The nature of the tradeoffs varies from model to model.

In keeping with its Freirian pedagogy, CGE has opted to place the greatest emphasis on learning community. In each country students live and take classes together at a CGE center. They eat and breathe dialogue about program themes. Field visits expose students a good deal to local life and culture, of course, but most of these take place also as a group. How can CGE programs achieve a reasonable amount of cultural immersion without diminishing excessively the power of the learning community?

CGE has addressed this dilemma by building a number of more individual experiences into its model. All CGE programs, for example, include short-term homestays. These generally take place early in the

semester so that students and families can continue their contacts on their own afterwards. The bonds between them often become strong. To provide further opportunities for individual immersion, in recent years nearly all of the CGE programs have also added internships to the course offerings and have created optional, non-credit volunteer opportunities.

At the opposite extreme from CGE, MSID has opted for the model that places the greatest emphasis on cultural immersion and consequently poses the greatest challenges to building strong learning communities and assuring that experiences are continually subject to rigorous analysis. As in HECUA's Ecuador and Northern Ireland programs, field placements and internships are at the core of the MSID programs. Unlike those programs, however, after the two-month classroom phase MSID disperses most of its students to new locations (with new homestays) in villages or small towns. Although MSID staff and faculty are convinced that in-depth rural experiences are essential to a development-focused program like this, the use of scattered sites means that MSID, unlike HECUA with its defining urban focus, does not have the luxury of running the internships alongside classroom sessions.

MSID has addressed this challenge through several strategies. Pre-departure preparation, on-site orientation, and exercises during the classroom phase all emphasize group building. Once students are in the field, they are encouraged to visit nearby interns on weekends and to become involved in substantive discussions of what they are learning. Most important, MSID systematically builds points of student-faculty contact into the calendar. The need for these is most acute in the second semester of the academic-year option, when students spend most of their time in the field. The semester begins with a research seminar in early January before students return to their internship sites. In February a faculty member visits each student in the field. In March students return for a week in the capital to nurse along the research project—they often need computer time or must visit libraries or research archives—followed by a mid-term integrating seminar. This sequence is then repeated, with a faculty site visit in April, a week to wrap up the research papers in early May, and a final seminar at the close of the program. These contact points provide opportunities for faculty to collect student papers, hand back graded assignments, and troubleshoot as needed concerning internships, homestays, or adjustment problems. They also are precious teaching moments

when faculty push students to compare their experiences, contextualize them, connect them to concepts and theories, and reflect on what they might mean for the way they will live the rest of their lives.

HECUA's tradeoffs vary more from one program to another than do those of CGE and MSID. All semester-length programs house students separately from each other—in Latin America with families, in Northern Ireland and Norway with host-country students in dorms. The Northern Ireland program, like those of CGE, arranges for short-term homestays. (In order to increase community involvement, some Twin Cities students have urged HECUA to find housing within the communities where their internships take place.) Compared with CGE's programs, HECUA's study abroad programs tend to make more use of structured small-team field assignments, although they often also introduce issues through field visits by the whole class. Finally, all of the domestic programs plus those in Ecuador and Northern Ireland involve half-time, eight-credit internships. These run through the entire semester, so that students are able to bring their experiences back into the accompanying seminars on a continuous basis.

HECUA places an especially strong focus on community engagement and developing long-term, deep partnerships with community organizations. Internships are the most important dimension to those partnerships, but not the only one. Students' learning and work are tied into a larger whole which can include long-term research projects and resource sharing between HECUA personnel and the sites. For example, HECUA has been part of a team of organizations and institutions that came together on the West Side of St. Paul to create the Jane Addams School for Democracy. Every year, several students on Twin Cities programs work in internships at the school and related organizations, and meet regularly as a group with students from other schools and internship supervisors for readings and discussions. In addition, HECUA staff, students, and alumni have written grants and carried out programs together with community organizations and local high schools that seek to address issues in that neighborhood.

## Respecting Faculty Diversity

Most academic departments on US campuses leave choice of teaching approach in the hands of individual faculty. In contrast, CGE, HECUA, and MSID have built their identities around sets of educational

principles. Each organization consequently must manage an inherent tension between the desire to respect individual and cultural differences among faculty and the need to assure that all programs incorporate the defining elements in the organization's pedagogical model. Each has reached some kind of accommodation between absolute imposition of a model and pure *laissez faire*.

The tension has both an intellectual and a personal/cultural dimension. On the intellectual front, at issue is the role of the faculty's own preferred perspectives for understanding the themes of study. The programs seek to be interdisciplinary, but instructors have typically been trained in one or possibly two disciplines. How can the strengths of that discipline serve the program without its perspectives coming to dominate? How can a program assure that an economist will bring in theories and concepts also from political science or geography or sociology or anthropology?

The programs also seek to expose students to a variety of ideological perspectives; yet individual instructors and program directors have their own ideologies. Knowing the inherent power differentials between instructor and student, how can they feel comfortable sharing their opinions without seeming to impose them?

The solution requires faculty training, as well as a sharing of experiences among programs. Faculty retreats, site visits, and faculty handbooks or other materials on pedagogy help instructors and program directors structure appropriately the program and its individual courses and set the right tone in their interactions with students. Guest lecturers and field visits should be selected to assure adequate representations of disciplinary and theoretical perspectives radically different from those of the instructor or program director.

Faculty vary not only in their intellectual perspectives but also in their cultural and individual characteristics. How can we reconcile that diversity with the relative uniformity of the pedagogical model? When does insistence on adherence to certain pedagogical principles and learning goals cross a line into a territory of cultural imperialism? Suppose we are in a country where the local academic culture is built around concepts of teacher authority and the use of straight lecture. How can we assert that we want students to immerse themselves in local culture, but not its academic culture? Or, to take another example, HECUA's Bangladesh program director reports that, coming from a culture which eschews con-

frontation and prescribes indirect modes of communication, he is struggling with the notion of an open exchange of ideas and frank expression of disagreement. If he were to apply HECUA pedagogy to students in his own country, he says, the group would be torn asunder.

Although these sorts of dilemmas can never be resolved entirely, they are generally less acute than might be expected, thanks to a natural filter. Anyone who does not resonate with mission and underlying values probably will be unhappy or ineffective or both in directing a CGE, HECUA, or MSID program. If the individual's fit with organizational values and mission is good, personal and cultural differences will generally prove surmountable. Moreover, directors in these programs are usually quite bicultural. Most have studied or taught in the US and understand where both the students and the program are coming from.

The dilemma can become more acute in the case of program faculty other than the director. Often the program contracts a moonlighting professor from a local university to teach a particular course or a major portion thereof. Individual instructors of this sort spend most of their time working outside the auspices of CGE, HECUA, or MSID, so they are less immersed in the sponsor's educational philosophy. Nor do budgets permit them to attend staff retreats back in the US. Each organization must depend on its in-country director to work with such faculty, reinforced by site visits from home-campus staff or faculty. Over a period of years many of them become more enthusiastic about experiential education. At the same time, the programs usually make an effort to cut resistant faculty a reasonable amount of leeway.

## Assessing Learning and Assigning Grades

In many respects, faculty assess student learning much as they do on campuses in the US. Syllabi clearly describe grading systems and what percentage each component contributes to the final grade. Programs vary in the relative roles they assign to exams, small writing assignments, term papers or other substantial pieces of written work, contributions to class discussion, etc., but all unambiguously define those roles. The same A-F grading scale is used as on most US campuses. Faculty feel the same unease about the whole grading process as do US colleagues and fret just like them about how accurately they are measuring real learning.

At the same time, two interrelated challenges which face all faculty loom larger in these programs. One is the student complaint that the instruments used to measure learning are inaccurate. “I have learned so much in this course; how can you give me a C?” (There is often a grain of truth to such complaints, as any honest faculty member will admit.) These programs confront students with realities as they occur in the field, with all their ambiguities, rather than realities already structured for them by readings or lectures. How can a faculty member value one interpretation over another when there are no right answers? This objection is not unlike that to essay exams compared with multiple-choice. It may be grounded in a particular stage of student development that, fortunately, most participants have already surpassed before they apply to these programs. But it also must be acknowledged that the learning goals and pedagogical approaches can elicit some discomfort even among students who perceive on-campus grading as mostly fair. After all, they purport to value the affective dimension of learning, they exhort students to engage themselves personally with what they are studying, and they seek to prepare students for a kind of behavior (community involvement, cross-culturally sensitive interpersonal relationships, etc.). “How can you grade a journal? Who is to say that the feelings/opinions I express in a discussion are less valid than those of others.”

The issue can be addressed partly by explaining clearly the basis for assigning grades. MSID, for example, lists the specific grading criteria for FORs and PORs: relevance to the MSID curriculum, quality of description, quality of analysis, use of theory-experience dialogue, evidence of growth, quality of writing, and fit with MSID’s writing guidelines. Although students may not be convinced of it, faculty in the field report resoundingly that it is possible to distinguish good from poor work even in journals or other less traditional kinds of assignments. It is not that some conclusions are inherently better than others, but that analysis can be deep and sophisticated or shallow and naïve—and the difference is fairly obvious to a listener or reader.

The related challenge is the imperfection of the relationship between assessment instruments and actual learning. Again, this occurs on the campus also, but faculty in these programs observe evidence of learning that is less accessible to classroom instructors. What do you do with a student whose writing is poorly structured or inarticulate but who

demonstrates in other ways so much growth in understanding? How do you take into account the qualitative research skills that you have seen students develop, such as interviewing or participant observation? Conversely, what do you do with the student who writes wonderful papers or exams on principles of cross-cultural communication but who you know is applying none of them to relations with host family members or with workplace colleagues? Although these problems can be addressed in part by the program design and in the explanation of the grading scheme, they can never be fully resolved to the instructor's satisfaction.

### Evaluating Programs

Although CGE, HECUA, and MSID may be more assiduous than most program providers in their evaluation procedures, there is nothing out of the ordinary in the techniques they employ: student evaluation forms (albeit unusually thorough), directors' reports, site visits by US faculty and/or staff, discussions at the retreats for on-site program directors and home-office staff, review of evaluations by faculty committees (HECUA, MSID) or deans (CGE) of the home campus or organization. Compared with typical approaches to study abroad program evaluations, those of these providers unsurprisingly include more focus on pedagogy; however, on the whole they tend to replicate tried and true evaluation approaches in study abroad generally.

There is, however, a special challenge that none of the three organizations feels it has yet addressed successfully: how to tie evaluation processes directly to mission. Yes, student evaluation forms include some questions about how they have changed as a result of their study abroad, but these are completed at the end of the semester or year abroad. If CGE, HECUA, and MSID purport to be preparing students for a life as change agents, what is really needed is systematic long-term follow-up on program alumni. All three organizations feel guilty about not having found the staff resources to do a systematic study of what their alumni are doing several years later, and how they assess in retrospect the impact of their off-campus study experience. This is a Ph.D. dissertation waiting to be written.

## **Conclusion: Preparing Students to Serve Justice**

Finally, we return to the very core of the three organizations' missions. All express, in different words, a commitment to arming their participants with the knowledge, empathy, and analytical, cross-cultural and interpersonal skills that can support a life of what is now fashionable in academic circles to call civic engagement. CGE seeks to involve students in "a pursuit of knowledge for the express purpose of creating a more just and sustainable world." HECUA says, "The HECUA project is ultimately and explicitly an ethical project. The ethical dimension of HECUA's educational purpose, therefore, is to promote civic responsibility by providing students with theoretical tools and experiences that allow them to understand critically their own society and the roles they have in it." MSID's on-site directors are fond of exhorting students to think of what it means to "think globally and act locally."

To serve effectively these goals, from beginning to end, programs should engage in re-entry preparation. Students must be continually pushed to think of how their own lives relate to the conditions that they are studying. What does a commitment to justice and sustainability imply for their future roles as consumers, as citizens, as parents, as professionals? As members of a privileged class within an hegemonous world power, how does their own behavior contribute to, or challenge, systems of domination and oppression? In short, how will their learning through CGE, HECUA, or MSID affect the way they lead their lives?

As an aside, even in more traditional classroom-based study abroad this is not a bad way to approach re-entry. Too often we focus just on reverse culture shock, which we portray as a sort of temporary pathology that we must help students work through, rather than one of the most pregnant learning moments students will ever pass through. Or perhaps we stress career planning: how can I use my new knowledge, skills, and perspectives to get an interesting international or intercultural job? Both of these are important, of course. But the dimension that CGE, HECUA, and MSID stress can give them richer meaning. Much of the discomfort felt in re-entry is a positive sign. Yes, of course, students need to re-learn how to function effectively in the milieu to which they are returning, but we can also hope they never will again feel so comfortable in it as they once were. By helping students think about how they can harness that dis-

comfort to become effective change agents, we can stress the positive in re-entry and charge it with excitement.

All three organizations have been thinking increasingly about what their missions imply for alumni services. CGE has long published a rich newsletter for its former students but is only beginning to consider other ways to connect. HECUA has been experimenting with community engagement and learning circles to help alumni put their learning to work back in their home communities and campuses, as well as developing an online journal. MSID has inaugurated a listserv to encourage alumni to continue the conversation about development and social justice, as well as to exchange information about current events in their countries, keep up to date on the evolution of MSID itself, and connect with each other. Some alumni of CGE semester-long programs have participated in one or more of its short-term travel seminars for adult learners. HECUA is considering the possibility of organizing travel study programs specifically for its alumni.

At the core of all of this is the conviction that study abroad, however transformative it may be in and of itself, is only one step within a process of lifelong learning. The initiatives described in the previous paragraph represent a tentative groping for effective ways to support that process over the long run. In the short run, while our students are in college, it is easier. We can actively encourage returnees to build on their study abroad, not only with related follow-up coursework but also with off-campus work, study, or volunteer activities that permit them to continue their intellectual and affective journeys—but now exploring issues of inequality and justice in our own society. On those campuses where the study abroad office is totally separate from internship, service-learning, or other domestic off-campus offices, we can seek to build ongoing links to them.

Just as it has been said that disciplines might be less usefully thought of as acts of God than administrative conveniences of deans, so the jurisdictional split between the domestic and the international on some of our campuses is rooted not in the student experience but in administrative motives. The power of the learning outcomes does not break down according to the venue of study; consider a year's internship on the Navajo reservation versus summer school in Winnipeg. Students move back and forth comfortably between the domestic and the international. CGE, HECUA, and MSID have all found, for example, that their programs tend to attract students who have participated previously in

local service-learning programs or alternative break travel programs in the US, and some of their recruiting strategies explicitly target students who have studied or volunteered off-campus. Many students return from overseas with the uneasy realization that they now have a more sophisticated understanding of how their host societies work than of US society. Several MSID students over the years have taken an entire additional semester to participate in HECUA's MUST or City Arts programs; others have sought out internships that immerse them in the social realities of poor inner city neighborhoods.

There are additional reasons for study abroad offices to forge close ties to offices or faculty involved in off-campus study and service. The two types of offices face common issues in organizing and executing their programs, and they stand to gain a great deal from each other's expertise and involvement. Augsburg faculty who are deeply committed to community service-learning, often in the context of their own classes, have contributed to CGE's development. In redesigning courses, training on-site program directors, or developing instructional models and materials, MSID has tapped time and again the expertise of experiential education practitioners in the University of Minnesota's Career and Community Learning Center. HECUA has benefited immensely from being one of the few major study abroad providers that also operates domestic off-campus study semesters.

All three organizations owe their existence to visionary faculty who believed that higher education should be relevant, that the academy had a responsibility to the community and the wider world. CGE's founders asked what the social mission of the church implied for the way Augsburg engaged its students with life. HECUA's founders could not bear to watch academia fiddle as the North Minneapolis ghetto burned. MSID's founders asked how the university could respond to growing disparity between the world's have's and have-not's. Although their educational models and program locations have evolved over the years, their visions remain true to their founders.

Like similarly oriented efforts of other institutions around the country, in seeking to help students not only to understand the world but also to act in it, CGE, HECUA, and MSID provide a kind of education that prepares students for life in general. After all, after we graduate we must do most of our learning outside the structured classroom setting. Real life

brings information to us in messy forms. We need to be able to make sense out of ambiguity, to apply critical thinking to problems as they come at us, to ground our behavior in ethical understandings, to be capable of action even in the absence of certainty, and not to be immobilized by the seeming enormity of problems. Preparing students for this is a tall order, and the results always fall short of our ambitions. But to make the effort is an ethical imperative of liberal education.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>John Dewey, *Experience and Education*, (New York: Macmillan, 1938), p. 25.

<sup>2</sup>All three of these mission or vision statements appear on the respective organizations' web sites, whose addresses are noted in the organizational descriptions of the preceding section.

<sup>3</sup>From "HECUA's Teaching-Learning Approach," at <[www.hecua.org](http://www.hecua.org)>.

<sup>4</sup>From "CGE's Educational Philosophy," unpublished paper, Center for Global Education, n.d.

<sup>5</sup>Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New Revised 20th Anniversary Edition, (New York: Continuum, 1999), pp. 52-53.

<sup>6</sup>From "HECUA's Teaching-Learning Approach," at <[www.hecua.org](http://www.hecua.org)>.

<sup>7</sup>From "CGE's Educational Philosophy," unpublished paper, Center for Global Education, n.d.

<sup>8</sup>From "HECUA's Teaching-Learning Approach," at <[www.hecua.org](http://www.hecua.org)>.

<sup>9</sup>For a recent discussion and extensive bibliography on the subject, see Bernice Lott, "Cognitive and Behavioral Distancing from the Poor," *American Psychologist*, Vol. 57, No. 2 (Feb. 2002): 100-110.

<sup>10</sup>Internship section of Northern Ireland program description at <[www.hecua.org](http://www.hecua.org)>.

<sup>11</sup>From "Managing Expectations" section, page 7 in MSID Program Guide 2002-2003, unpublished booklet. This guide is updated annually; the most recent version is available on the web as a PDF document within the MSID program descriptions at <[www.UMabroad.umn.edu](http://www.UMabroad.umn.edu)>.

<sup>12</sup>David Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience As the Source of Learning and Development*, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1984), pp. 68-73.

<sup>13</sup>Quotes are taken from the Program Manual for 2002-2003, Center for Global Education, unpublished booklet, November 2001, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup>Course description for International Development: Theory and Practice, MSID Program Guide 2002-2003, *op cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>15</sup>Course description for MSID Country analysis, *ibid*, p. 25

<sup>16</sup>Course description for Applied Field Methods, *ibid*, p. 29.

<sup>17</sup>"Tri-Weekly Praxis Summary," unpublished handout used in Metro Urban Studies Term, HECUA, n.d.

<sup>18</sup>"What is a Critical Question," unpublished handout for Metro Urban Studies Term, HECUA, 2002.

<sup>19</sup>From "CGE's Educational Philosophy," unpublished paper, Center for Global Education, n.d.