

# The Impact of a Short-Term Study Abroad Experience

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## Abstract

To better understand the world and oneself, exposure and immersion in the world outside of one's typical daily setting is helpful. For university-level students taking prescribed coursework and also having to work a part-time job, having the opportunity to travel and learn afar over the course of a traditional semester can be challenging and prohibitive. As a result, short-term study abroad experiences led by university faculty can help students who desire a study abroad experience as a complement to their campus-based learning. The purpose of this investigation was to explore the impact a short-term study abroad to Costa Rica conducted during the 2020 winter session at a university in the USA had on nine students. Data sources included pre/post surveys, formal interviews, and reflective journal entries. A qualitative analysis of the data suggests these short term study abroad participants were cognizant of their privilege as they compared and contrasted the norms of their own lives with those of the people they worked for on their short-term study abroad. The students' perceptions of their experience were ones of accomplishment and pride. They left with a sense of empowerment and a call to serve others. Reflective learning is a crucial component to students' learning, especially when they are immersed in a different culture and country. During short-term study abroad experiences, students have the potential for transformative learning.

**Keywords:** Costa Rica, service learning, transformative learning, university students, winter session