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Alternative Tourism and Development: Implications for International Study Abroad and Volunteer Programs in the Global South

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Alternative Tourism and Development:
Implications for International Study Abroad and Volunteer Programs in the Global South

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Abstract

Recent years have seen rising interest among Western travelers in the so-called “Global South” or “developing world,” especially through experiences that fall under the umbrella term of “alternative tourism.” Many travelers engage in this type of tourism through experiences in either one or both of alternative tourism’s most popular sub-genres: alternative study abroad and volunteer tourism. With many of these programs either implicitly or explicitly geared toward development, this paper discusses the possible development-related consequences upon the places in which they operate. It traces origins and causes of alternative tourism’s rise, and explains how it has come to be associated with development. Finally, it identifies two exemplary programs that could be considered models for how to use study abroad and volunteer tourism to achieve development and positive transformation for both travelers and the communities they visit.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Alternative tourism's rise to popularity in recent years has important implications for development. As a "genre" of tourism in which mostly Westerners travel mostly to developing countries, it resembles the similarly uneven flow of missionaries, development experts, government officials, NGO workers, and various other actors who have been involved in development projects in the Global South since the dawn of the so-called "Age of Development," which began in 1949 with President Harry S. Truman's inaugural speech, in which he "for the first time declared...the Southern hemisphere as 'underdeveloped areas' " (Sachs 2). The second section of this paper will attempt to classify alternative tourism, give an account of its rise, and discuss its relation to development. Finally, it will construct a profile of who is engaging in alternative tourism, giving particular attention to two of its important sub-genres, alternative study abroad and volunteer tourism. The following section will address some important issues that must be addressed before assessing the development-related impacts of study abroad and alternative tourism; first it will provide further clarification as to what is meant what by both "volunteer tourism" and "development." After this clarification, it will discuss the difficulty of quantifying a given program's impact and how the problem has been approached in this exercise. The subsequent section discusses the pitfalls of volunteer tourism from a development standpoint and then identifies two exemplary programs that have effectively blended both study abroad and volunteer tourism to avoid the negative impacts. This section is followed by a final concluding section that succinctly summarizes the connections that exist between alternative tourism, study abroad, and volunteer tourism, and the conclusions made

regarding how such programs can be most effectively constructed to have positive impacts on development in the places in which they operate.

II. THE RISE OF ALTERNATIVE TOURISM

A. BACKGROUND

For all countries across the world, tourism is an incredibly important industry, making up a huge share of money that flows into the country. International tourism is the fourth largest industry in the world, surpassed only by fuels, chemicals, and automotive products (Honey and Gilpin 2). Given the large amount of income tourism generates, it has been recognized as important to economic development. This is especially true for developing countries, to which international travel is becoming increasingly common. Mastny and Peterson aptly note that tourism is one of the only ways to participate in the global economy for many of the “49 so-called least developed countries” (19). Hoping that revenue from tourism will help them to relieve debt burdens, invest in infrastructure, pay for imports, and improve social services, developing countries have funneled large amounts of money into development of the tourism industry (Mastny and Peterson 18). These investments make sense, especially given the rising interest in the developing world as a travel destination, which not only is reinforced by, but also contributes to the explosion of what can be called “alternative” tourism. This umbrella term encompasses a number of different types of tourism that have appeared in recent years in the tourism literature, including green tourism, natural tourism, (435) pro-poor tourism, eco-tourism, ethical tourism, sustainable tourism, and volunteer tourism. Differentiating between these different sub-genres can be cumbersome due to the variety of ways they are defined across the literature and the fact that in some cases, scholars may actually be describing the same concept with different terms. At the very least, alternative tourism can be differentiated from mass tourism in that it is meant to have some sort of benefit upon the host culture that goes beyond simply inserting money into its economy.

Butler describes alternative tourism as a rejection of mass tourism, calling it one of the buzzwords of the 1980s (40). Similar to sustainable development, he notes, “it can mean almost anything to anyone,” (40) just like all of the sub-genres it encompasses. In Butler’s explanation of the term, it is perhaps best defined by what it is not, giving examples such as Atlantic City, Blackpool, and the Daytona Strip (40). Alternative tourism is “alternative to large numbers, tasteless and ubiquitous development, environmental and social alienation, and homogenization” (Butler 40). Essentially, it is more conscious of the negative effects of tourism on the host culture where it takes place; it has good intentions, but this does not mean that it is free of problems. Butler notes, for example, that “it is possible to almost completely avoid contact between tourists and locals...if this is viewed as a problem or a cause of social change” (41). This could be achieved by staffing so-called “tourist enclaves” with imported labor while encouraging tourists to stay within the enclave; however, some might see a lack of contact between tourists and residents as a negative impact “and complain of tourist ghettos,” while others might object to importing labor rather than hiring locals, and complain of “further alienation of resources for imperialistic playthings” (Butler 41).

Of the various forms of alternative tourism, volunteer tourism has become very popular among Western travelers in recent years. It is one of the fastest growing forms of alternative tourism, attracting over 1.6 million participants from around the world every year, most of them coming from Western countries (Mostafanezhad 319). Again, articulating exactly what this sub-genre entails is a subjective process, considering the many different ways alternative tourism is described and divided up in the literature. Guttentag points to the definition provided by Wearing, author of the “seminal” book on the topic *Volunteer Tourism: Experiences that Make a Difference*, as the most commonly cited

definition for volunteer tourism; Wearing writes, "The generic term 'volunteer tourism' applies to those tourists who...volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society or environment" (qtd. in Guttentag 538). Given this definition, volunteer tourism can encompass a wide variety of activities, from study abroad, to scientific expeditions, to gap years, to something more akin to mass tourism but with the added opportunity to volunteer. Given that the point of volunteer tourism is to improve the host culture, it would seem counterintuitive to have experiences that allow travelers to engage in mass tourism while also volunteering. This could almost be considered "fake" volunteer tourism because the volunteering experience serves as gimmick to help sell the rest of the experience rather than serving as the goal of the experience.

It is important here to emphasize the correlation that has been drawn between alternative tourism and sustainable development. Like sustainable development, alternative tourism rose to prominence in the 1980s (Butler 40) and demonstrates a commitment to addressing both social and environmental issues. It is generally accepted, despite the wide range of definitions, that sustainable development "strongly links environmental and socio-economic issues"; Hopwood, Mellor and O'Brien assert that the most common definition of sustainable development is that which appears in the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development' Brundtland Report of 1987 (4), which defines sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (UNWCED). Due to the connection between these two terms, many view alternative tourism and its different sub-genres as a driver of sustainable development. Although it

may be possible to achieve sustainable development through alternative tourism, it is important not to assume that this will always be the case simply due to the fact that they have similar objectives.

The rise of alternative tourism, in combination with sustainable development and a number of other factors, has contributed to this increased interest in so-called “non-traditional” destinations—most of them developing countries—among Western travelers. This is exemplified in a report by the United States Institute for Peace, which shows that as of 2007, a group of fifteen countries located primarily in Europe only accounted for 57 percent of international arrivals, down from 98 percent in 1950 (Honey and Gilpin 2). This is corroborated by data from the 2012 *Open Doors* survey of the Institute of International Education, which shows that between the 1989-1990 and 2010-2011 academic years, the proportion of U.S. students who chose to study abroad in Europe decreased from 76.4% to 54.6%, in favor of places such as Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Oceania. This second piece of data highlights the extent to which younger travelers have contributed to this trend. Studying abroad is increasingly seen as a vital component of a young college-aged student’s education. Colleges and universities tout the importance of studying abroad due to its ability to foster “global citizenship.” Also a buzzword of recent years, “global citizenship” is said to indicate that a student is more informed about the world and more sensitive to cultural differences, but as Barbour aptly notes, accruing these benefits in and of themselves is rarely the main goal of fostering global citizenship: the true goal of fostering global citizenship, which many colleges and universities declare forthrightly, is to help students compete in an international job market (66). With these kinds of motivations behind global citizenship, it makes the whole concept into somewhat of a farce; institutions whose true concern is to increase the employability of their students will not care to verify

whether global citizenship has actually been achieved. Global citizenship becomes synonymous with study abroad, which can simply be checked off a list as long as the student goes abroad. Study abroad thus becomes a product that colleges and universities must market to their students, with some institutions even boosting revenue by charging students full local tuition that is actually higher than the cost of their study abroad experiences (Barbour 67-68). As Barbour writes, "The competition for student dollars has established a higher education model that courts students as consumers and markets study abroad as a commodity, a resume-enhancing international experience that offers a competitive edge to those who are willing or able to leverage themselves further in order to purchase a stronger economic future" (68).

Ogden provides complementary commentary regarding this issue, describing how the more we view study abroad experiences as a product and try to cater to student demands, the more we risk generating more of what he calls the "colonial student" (37). The colonial student "typifies the U.S. university student who really wants to be abroad and take full advantage of all the benefits studying abroad offers, but is not necessarily open to experiencing the less desirable side of being there" (Ogden 37). The colonial student is eager to have new exciting experiences and learn about new cultures, but only rarely ventures from the metaphorical "veranda," and then, as Ogden notes, "only into well-charted territory" (39). The spread of the colonial student profile, which applies to a large portion of study abroad students, reflects the extent to which travel has become a commodity, especially when it comes to study abroad. The colonial student is a prime exemplification of the danger of viewing study abroad as a product; the colonial student does not really achieve global citizenship, but he or she is able to claim it simply for having studied abroad. The one possible benefit of this consumerist supply-demand model is that

student consciousness in relation to these issues is rising as a result of the trendiness of “sustainability” among younger generations from both a lifestyle as well as an academic perspective; careful consideration, however, must be made to ensure that study abroad providers’ sustainability-related changes are legitimate and thorough rather than superficial nods to students’ concerns.

It is important to note here that not all study abroad experiences create colonial students; many are successful at truly widening the worldview of participants and making them more conscious of their place in a global community, thus making them “global citizens.” The rising interest in sustainability and sustainable development among the current generation of college students also helps to combat this problem, but it is also important to note that the term “sustainability” can also be used as a gimmick to market programs that in actuality do not promote sustainability. Nevertheless, it is true that just as there are many different types of tourism, there are many different types of study abroad. Among these varied study abroad experiences, those that could be considered “alternative” have become increasingly popular, thus reflecting the rise of alternative tourism in general. This idea that alternative study abroad *reflects* alternative tourism is not entirely accurate, however, because alternative study abroad *is* alternative tourism. This explains why younger travelers have been so influential in the rise of alternative tourism because many of them participate in alternative tourism via their study abroad experiences.

Looking further into the connection between alternative study abroad and alternative tourism, it is also true that certain alternative study abroad experiences could be considered volunteer tourism. This paper will give particular attention to experiences that could be included in both categories, looking at the implications that their rising

popularity may have upon “development” in the destinations or communities they purportedly serve. It will also analyze how the representations of and discourse surrounding these countries from the perspective of the Western world have helped fuel this trend, especially among younger travelers.

B. WHO IS PARTICIPATING AND WHY?

Before delving into how Western representations of the developing world have fueled this interest, it will be important to construct a general “profile” of the type of traveler whose behavior is relevant to understanding volunteer tourism and study abroad. The first half of this profile is the young age of the participants. Study abroad, as its name suggests, is meant for students; thus the age of the typical study abroad participant is young, most likely between the ages of 18 and 22. There are of course study abroad experiences for students in high school and graduate school, but even then the age of participants rarely seems to lie outside the range of 17 to about 30. Participants in volunteer tourism are similarly young, though the standard deviation in participants’ ages is definitely not quite as narrow as that of study abroad. Data on volunteer tourism shows that 56 percent of volunteer tourists are between the ages of 20 and 29 (Mostafanezhad 319). Another study from 2007 similarly found that 60 percent of “sending organizations” for volunteers reported that the majority of their customers are between the ages of 18 and 25 (Tourism Research and Marketing 44).

The second half of the traveler profile, given the goal of understanding the influence of Western representations of the developing world to itself, is a Western nationality. A 2008 report by the consultancy Tourism Research and Marketing claims that “the main supply of volunteer tourists would appear to come from the USA, with a further substantial

number from the UK, Europe, Canada, and Australia/New Zealand” (Tourism Research and Marketing 44). This reflected by the fact that out of the 324 sending organizations identified in the study, 100 of them are in the United States, 59 are in the United Kingdom, and 33 of them are in the rest of Europe (Tourism Research and Marketing 44). It makes sense that volunteer tourists most commonly come from countries in the “Global North,” such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and the countries of Western Europe, given that these are the countries that have relatively more affluent and privileged populations, and that the act of engaging in volunteer tourism implies a recognition or realization of one’s privileged position in the world. Study abroad in the general sense of “studying internationally,” is not necessarily as dominated by Westerners because of the fact that Western education is so sought after by students from around the globe; these students, however, tend to spend their entire undergraduate experiences “studying internationally” and thus do not represent the type of experience under analysis. The type of study abroad relevant to this discussion is that which lasts generally between a few weeks and a year, making the participant more akin to “traveler,” rather than a “temporary resident,” which is more suggestive of a student who spends their entire undergraduate experience in a foreign country. This second, more transient type of study abroad is dominated by Western students. To possess the ability to travel internationally is already a very privileged position to be in. As Mastny and Peterson note, only 3.5 percent of the world’s population travels internationally (12). Of this relatively small population of travelers, almost 80% are from Europe and the Americas, 15% are from East Asia and the Pacific, and only 5% are from Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East combined (Mastny and Peterson 12).

Establishing a general profile of the “typical” volunteer tourist or study abroad

participant allows a sort of “mini discussion,” particularly relevant to this demographic, within the larger discussion of how of Western representations of the developing world have affected trends in international travel. Hughes stresses the profound influence that representations have upon our conception of places, writing that “[representations] insinuate dreams and myths into the public perceptions of places which may come, in time, to stand, like icons, logos, or mottoes, as shorthand statements of their character” (qtd. in Downey 14). Representations have certainly been influential in shaping Westerners’ perception of the developing world, which is why it is important to take note of them.

One of the most notable aspects of Western representations of the developing world as a whole is that it is incredibly saturated with neoliberal rhetoric. From travel literature and journalism, to hotel brochures, to promotional materials for study abroad, these destinations have come almost to be seen as products to be consumed by prospective travelers, even those with altruistic intentions like volunteer tourists. According to Barbour, the use of neoliberal rhetoric in contemporary women’s travel literature and study abroad promotional materials has led to what she succinctly summarizes as “a mainstreaming of neoliberal attitudes that depict travel as a commodity primarily valuable for its role in increasing the worth of U.S. American personhood” (3). Barbour gives extra attention to the New York Times bestseller *Eat, Pray, Love: One Woman’s Search for Everything Across Italy, India, and Indonesia*, arguing that this book and others like it have turned travel into a commodity and made self-discovery into the prime motivator for international travel (2). This self-centered motivation of self-discovery is reminiscent of one of the main selling points of study abroad for many universities: the ability to become a “global citizen,” which will supposedly give students an advantage on the international job

market. Even volunteer tourists, who would assumedly have less self-centered reasons for traveling abroad, tend to be highly motivated by the personal benefits they expect to receive from the experience. Chen's study of the motivations of volunteer tourists who took part in a 2008 expedition with the Earthwatch Institute to the small Chinese village of Mao Jia Getai found that a "desire to help" was the least frequently cited as a motivation for traveling among the eleven possible motivators to choose from. The top motivator was a desire to "interact with locals/culture," followed by the desire to have an "authentic experience" (Chen 439). This data, which Chen says is corroborated by previous studies, illustrates the selfish, consumerist, aspect of volunteer tourism. Another illustrative example comes from the website Voluntourism.org, which writes the following about volunteer tourism: "This may be the first time that you have ever considered combining travel and service. Prior to this you may have been unsure that these two experiences, and the joy and fulfillment associated with them, could be synergized and harmoniously blended into one consumable opportunity" (qtd. in Clost 110). Here there is no attempt to hide the fact that the act of engaging in volunteer tourism is an act of consumption. The traveler pays for the experience to volunteer, expecting to receive the feelings of benevolence and self-confidence that come with it.

Returning for a moment to Barbour's discussion of the memoir *Eat Pray Love*, the book is incredibly relevant to the rise of interest in the developing world by volunteer tourists and study abroad participants, and reveals an added dimension to the profile of the typical volunteer tourist. The book, which came out in 2006, was a New York Times best seller, and in 2010 became a major motion picture starring international superstar Julia Roberts as Elizabeth Gilbert, author of the memoir. The reason the book is so significant to the discussion of volunteer tourism and study abroad in particular is the fact that it is

obviously targeted toward women, and the two sub-genres of alternative tourism are increasingly dominated by women. In a World Youth Student Educational Travel Association survey of over 8,500 young travelers regarding their last main trip abroad during the preceding year, over 71% of respondents were female; this statistic is simply based on response to the survey alone, before the type of international travel is considered (Tourism Research & Marketing 49). When it comes to respondents who indicated volunteering as their purpose of travel, the likelihood of a respondent being female shoots up to 84%, corroborating previous estimates that women account for between 60 and 70% of participants in volunteer tourism (Tourism Research & Marketing 49). The dominance of females is also seen in study abroad, where 64% or more of study abroad participants have been female for every school year between that which began in 2001 and that which began in 2012 ("Open Doors Data"). The influence that this book and the larger genre of women's travel literature has had upon today's generation of internationally savvy young women cannot be underestimated; Barbour gives the anecdote of asking a group of U.S. undergraduates she accompanied on a trip abroad in Greece about whether any books, movies, or other media had affected their decision to study abroad. The most popular response was *Eat Pray Love*, and of the group, all of the students had either read it or were in the process of reading it, with the exception of one student, who also happened to be the only male in the group (Barbour 4). This is significant considering the fact that Gilbert, the protagonist of the novel, did not even travel to Greece, traveling instead to Italy, India, and Bali.

Another important aspect of Western representations of the developing world is the frequent use of Orientalist rhetoric in these representations. Orientalist rhetoric refers to Edward Said's theory of Orientalism, detailed in his book of the same name, published in

1978. In *Orientalism*, Said looks specifically at how Europe has represented the Middle East, or the Orient, according to a process of “othering” in which the “self” and the “other” are posed against one another as direct opposites (Downey 26). Quoting Said, Downey notes how this has created “distorted dichotomies such as ‘powerful and articulate’ and ‘defeated and distant’ ”(26). Scholars continue to apply these dichotomies to any process of “othering” or “setting oneself off” performed by any Western country in relation to any non-Western country (Downey 26). Common themes that emerge in Western representations of the developing world include these countries’ supposedly heightened authenticity, exoticism, tranquility, impoverishment, and backwardness, among others.

In addition to the profound influence that representations have had in facilitating Western travelers’ interest in the developing world, it is also important to note that there is a more practical, technological reason that can help to explain the rising interest. In the age of globalization, international travel has never been easier, especially for the English-speaker from the West. Advances in technology and connectivity allow travelers to plan and pay for their entire travel experience from the comfort of their own homes, making travel planning incredibly easy and convenient. According to the Travel Industry Association of America, the number of online bookings for flights and other travel-related services increased five-fold during the three year period of 1997-2000 (Mastny and Peterson 11-12). In addition, accommodations and experiences that are attractive to Western tourists, who expect a certain standard of hospitality and comfort, are becoming increasingly common in even the most remote areas of the most underdeveloped countries as these countries respond to the demand for such top-notch accommodations and services. These more practical considerations are important to keep in mind when

analyzing the blossoming interest in developing countries among Western travelers.

III. SETTING UP THE ANALYSIS

A. PROBLEMATIZING TERMS

What is problematic about the term “volunteer tourism,” as we have similarly found with “alternative tourism” and “sustainable development” is that it is actually quite broad. Volunteer tourism can come in many forms, leading to a wide spectrum of consequences for volunteers, community members, and host organizations. Some programs are more vacation-oriented, with only shallow engagement between volunteers and the community, while others are heavily volunteer-oriented, such as service-learning trips, which are run not only by universities in a study abroad context, but by all kinds of organizations. Another program may be mostly educational but include a limited opportunity to volunteer, while yet another may be highly service-oriented but less committed to education, which requires organization and instruction via readings and facilitated critical thinking and reflection. All of these factors depend on the ethos of a given organization in regards to international service, development, and education, as well as where and how these individual subject areas overlap. Even two organizations that share the same goal, such as sustainable development, can still approach this pursuit in very different ways. Some may pursue development chiefly via education, which could be a theoretical decision as well as a practical decision; the organization may believe that simply exposing students to a radically different experience through discussion and engagement with community members and leaders (whether or not students volunteer in an orphanage or help build a community center) is more conducive to education. Another possibility is that this organization decided, given the local context and conditions, that actual volunteer labor is not necessarily needed; rather, sustainable development may be better achieved by foreign visitors who, through this educational experience, may be inspired to become international

advocates for the organization's cause or the greater cause of sustainable development in general. The second organization may believe that development is best achieved—in general or in a given place—through volunteering, showing more concern for the completion of projects over whether or not volunteers truly learn anything or “take anything away” from the experience. This shows the variety of ways that different organizations can pursue the same goal, which is made even more complicated when organizations' respective interpretations of “development” are considered. The extent of variation in volunteer tourism organizations is further revealed when organizations with other priorities, such as making money, are considered. It may seem counterintuitive for an organization that facilitates international volunteering, an altruistic act, to be chiefly concerned with profit, a selfish act; however, given the rising popularity of volunteer tourism, the incorporation of volunteering into the experience may be more of a profit-enhancing gimmick than a reflection of the organization's altruistic intentions. The differences between these organizations in intentions will result in differences in their impacts.

In recent years, the concept of development has come under fire, with many scholars calling for the emergence of a “post-development” regime. They view “development,” both conceptually and as a state goal, as highly Western-centric. In their opinion, “development” implies that a country's progression through time is linear and that current occurrences and phenomena are a result of an accumulation of previous occurrences and phenomena from the past; according to this mode of thought, everything possesses a linear narrative. This is opposed to a non-Western view of time as more cyclical, and where “cause” and “effect” are not always as clear and events do not necessarily accumulate over time to cause other events. To believe that metaphorically

moving “forward” is the only way to achieve development denies that there may be other “directions” to take in achieving this goal. Critics of development as it is commonly conceived sustain that it is blinding us to many possible methods of achieving true progress that have been overlooked due to this dominant mode of viewing the world.

As prominent post-development thinker Wolfgang Sachs laments,

The mental space in which people dream and act is largely occupied today by Western imagery. The vast furrows of cultural monoculture left behind are, as in all monoculture, both barren and dangerous. They have eliminated the innumerable varieties of being human and have turned the world into a place deprived of adventure and surprise...Moreover, the spreading of monoculture has eroded viable alternatives to the industrial, growth-oriented society and dangerously crippled humankind’s capacity to meet an increasingly different future with creative responses (4).

Creative responses are needed in order to solve the problems of our world; our ability to come up with such responses, according to Sachs, has been severely limited due to the narrow conception of “development” that currently reigns.

The anthropologist Franz Boas is definitely a forward thinker in this regard with his theory of cultural relativism, which gained popularity in the first half of the twentieth century (Ferguson 154). Boas’s work was a reaction to the idea of social evolutionism, which dominated development thought at the time. Social evolutionism, which propagated this idea of “progress” that current proponents of post-development thought are so critical of, essentially sustained that “human history was animated by a single great principle of directional movement—evolutionary ‘development’ ” (Ferguson 154). Society was believed to “evolve” over time; according to this line of thought, all societies were headed in the same direction, developed independently of one another, and any differences between two given societies were viewed solely as differences in their respective levels of

development (Ferguson 154). Boas was critical of viewing societies in this way, problematizing evolutionism as ethnocentric and empirically flawed due to its singular interpretation as to what constitutes a “higher” society (Ferguson 154-155). According to Boas, different societies should not be compared to one another but understood and studied “in their own terms” (Ferguson 155) so as to acknowledge and understand that there is a wide variety of ways to go about meeting humans’ needs.

Despite the influence of Boas, development as it is widely understood clings to this idea of a linear, evolutionary narrative. Ferguson sees the postwar period as highly influential in solidifying this perspective, noting that

in the process of decolonization, a strategically vague story about development came to provide an ambiguous charter for both retreating colonial bureaucrats *and* for ascendant nationalist rulers...This charter, a broad vision that came to be shared by a wide set of transnational elites, framed the ‘problems’ of the ‘new nations’ in the terms of a familiar...developmentalist story about nations...moving along a predetermined track out of ‘backwardness’ and into ‘modernity’ (158).

Development became institutionalized in the United States under the Truman administration with the establishment of official “development agencies” and “development aid programs” (Ferguson 158). In 1960, with the release of Walt Rostow’s *Stages of Economic Growth*, this transition back to social evolutionist notions of linear stages in development was solidified in the dominant development discourse. Rostow mapped out the different stages that a society goes through, starting with “Traditional Society,” which could be summarized as a society based on communalism, kinship ties, and subsistence agriculture (Rostow 4-6), and progressing through the other stages to reach the final stage: “The Age of Mass Consumption.” This stage is characterized by mass production of goods; it is a stage in which people have disposable income and consumption

goes beyond basic needs. In addition, urbanization increases and the now economically “mature” state, begins to concern itself with issues of social welfare (Rostow 9-11). This outline posits industrialization and economic growth as the drivers of development, an idea that permeates dominant development discourse to this day.

The movement of post-development thinkers who oppose this dominant viewpoint, however, continues to strengthen. To some extent, alternative forms of tourism and study abroad have been rooted in this movement. As sustainability and social responsibility become more trendy and mainstream, however, the power of the claim to “alternativeness” has been somewhat diluted. Another term that has been diluted—or in the case of post-development thinkers, has always been inherently flawed—is “development.” Given this fact, “development” will be interpreted quite broadly in this paper, referring not only to improvement in terms of economic growth and prosperity, but also to improvement in a wide variety of realms, such as the social, psychological, and spiritual. After all, development is purportedly founded in the desire to improve the lives of people, a pursuit that does not take place solely in the material realm. Crabtree, for example, notes the often overlooked benefit of “witnessing, the catharsis of sharing stories, the ability of our presence to draw attention to forgotten places and situations, the way one project can be a local catalyst beyond our visit and unrelated to our intentions, and the deep significance of accompaniment through living and working side by side” (61).

Paul Robinson, who spent fifteen years as the director of the Human Needs and Global Resources (HNGR) study abroad program at Wheaton College of Illinois, also stresses the importance of “accompaniment” in pursuing development work: “It’s not about us doing things for other people, it’s about us learning things from other people and with other people and accompanying each other in our journey towards wholeness—our

journey towards living rightly and justly” (“Interview”). The HNCR program attempts to promote “holistic development,” the definition of which highly resembles the conception of development that this paper explores. As Robinson describes it in an interview,

I think, to me...the old Hebrew word is ‘shalom,’ and it means living not only in peaceful relationships, but in right and just relationships with everything from our spiritual beings, to the cosmos or the created order or the world itself, to other people, to ourselves. That’s why we say ‘holistic’ because it’s *whole* living; it involves relationships on every level (“Interview”).

According to this definition, development work thus becomes less about imposing knowledge upon other places and people, as it is largely understood to be, but rather a process of mutual learning, leading to transformation and the betterment of people on both sides of the interaction; as Robinson states, “when I use the word ‘better,’ it means people have better nutrition, they have better access to health care, they have better access to education, all of those kinds of things, but it’s not necessarily from a Western perspective” (“Interview”).

Another study abroad practitioner with whom I communicated—professor Thomas Klak, now located at the University of New England—had very similar things to say in regards to development. Like Robinson, “development” for Klak is all about reciprocity and mutual exchange. During a telephone interview, he described his efforts to create a “dialectical relationship” between the university and the destination so that both students and members of the host community would feel a “spirit of partnership” rather than a one-sided typical service scenario (Klak). Klak has published a number of articles and studies elaborating on his over ten years of experience leading study abroad trips and conducting research in the country of Dominica; his commitment to reciprocity and mutuality is

evident in these materials as well. In summary, there are many similarities between Robinson and Klak in regards to their opinions on development, which translates into how they have each conducted their respective programs. Although my conversation with each was initially motivated by a hope of gaining a better understanding of how volunteer tourism and study abroad are carried out in a practical sense, the programs that each man is involved in have come to be incredibly important to this project. My research into volunteer tourism has led me to believe that these two programs—although not perfect in every way—are exemplary in their ability to avoid the various negative effects of volunteer tourism, which will be described in the fourth section of this paper. First, however, there will be a brief discussion explaining how individual programs came to be the object of focus and detailing important considerations to keep in mind when attempting to judge the impacts of these programs.

B. QUANTIFYING IMPACT

The original goal of this project was to evaluate the development-related impacts of volunteer tourism and alternative study abroad on the countries in which these experiences take place; however, upon further research, this turned out to be quite an ambitious goal given the lack of statistics in relation to alternative tourism. The statistics on volunteer tourism that do exist refer to the trend as a whole and not in relation to specific countries. Although many countries collect data on inbound visitors or on tourists' purpose for visiting, I have yet to find a country that designates a separate category for volunteering, which tends to fall under the "other" or the "vacation" category. In regards to study abroad, although various universities and research institutions keep track of students' chosen destinations, there is little data on the type of programs these students

choose, aside from program duration. Another obstacle is the difficulty of quantifying the development-related impacts of tourists due to the fact that development is a highly multi-faceted concept that includes both economic and social indicators. Additionally, given my inability to travel to these places to conduct original research, any impacts discussed would simply be conjecture as to how tourists' presence relates to any observed changes in economic and social indicators. Thus, this project came to narrow its focus upon individual programs, which will be discussed from a qualitative perspective rather than a quantitative one.

In the literature on alternative tourism, there are many studies that assess effects of these experiences on the tourists, but there is a lack of analysis as to the effects of these tourists upon the host communities, especially according to any concrete economic or social indicators. Those that do exist tend to consist of surveys of locals in the community of the perceived impacts of tourists upon their home. Although the perspectives of the locals is incredibly important to consider, it does not provide a complete picture of the impact of travelers' presence in these communities. In a case study conducted in Tijuana, Mexico in which 134 local residents responded to surveys on their perceptions of foreign volunteer tourists in their community, researchers found that locals in Tijuana generally approved of the volunteers' presence and impact; however, they also found that those respondents with higher levels of education were more likely to recognize negative impacts (McGehee, Gard, and Andereck 47). This finding points to the fact that impact assessments must go beyond simple surveys of perceptions, because there are factors—in this case education—that affect respondents' cognizance of certain impacts. This is incredibly true when analyzing the perceptions of travelers as well. Too often, however, studies of travelers' perceptions do not thoroughly question many respondents' claims to have

achieved cross-cultural understanding or transformation as a result of their experience, simply taking these statements as adequate proof. As Zavitz and Butz write,

[t]he volunteering literature provides numerous examples of authors uncritically accepting volunteers' assumptions that their own feelings of closeness to members of a host community indicate mutual understanding between hosts and guests...We read these less as examples of meaningful interpersonal experiences, than as a projection of mutuality established by intergenerational and trans-cultural relations of power (432).

Zavitz and Butz also acknowledge the dearth of studies that exist in relation to locals' assessments of "self-development, trans-cultural understanding, and social or environmental development"—purportedly the goals of volunteer tourism—noting that the situation in itself "reproduces in the literature a privileging of the Northern touristic subject and a commensurate indifference to the perspectives of 'local hosts' " (417).

Another problem with the literature on alternative tourism—particularly volunteer tourism—is the problem of unquestionably accepting statements made by returned volunteers, who often have not been prompted to sufficiently reflect on their experiences in a critical manner. In some ways, these studies are beneficial in that many programs do not include any sort of opportunity to volunteers to reflect critically on their own purpose for being there, especially not in regards to the question of how they as individuals fit into a structure of global power relations, or whether their travel experiences may actually be reinforcing notions of Western superiority, thus only deepening the North-South divide. Those programs that do provide opportunities for reflection tend to shy away from encouraging participants to think critically in this regard; their presence seems to be validated by their good intentions. Many volunteers come away from their experiences satisfied that they were able to "make a difference" by having completed whatever task

they were assigned, yet they have often put very little thought into whether this task was actually needed or even beneficial to the community.

A report by the Center for Social Development at Washington University on the “Perceived Effects of International Volunteering” suffers to some extent from this problem of uncritically accepting volunteers’ statements. The report surveyed alumni who volunteered with two different volunteer-sending organizations: Cross Cultural Solutions (CCS), which uses service to promote cross-cultural understanding, and WorldTeach, which has the goal of promoting education in developing countries (Lough, McBride, and Sherraden 3). In the section containing a summary of its conclusions, the report reads:

Consistent with other research, these analyses suggest that international voluntary service (IVS) has the potential to positively affect volunteers and their host organizations. International volunteer service positively affected volunteers’ cross-cultural understanding and career path, in many cases transforming their lives. The majority of volunteers also believed they made a significant contribution to the host organizations and communities, including transferring a specific skill or providing money, time, or resources. The vast majority of volunteers did not believe that their presence in the community caused problems, and nearly all believed the community desired their services (Lough, McBride, and Sherraden 5-6).

Although the authors make sure to subsequently note that this is a study on the *perceived* impact rather than an analysis of actual impact, there is still a sense that volunteer’s claims have not been sufficiently questioned. Not all of the statements began with qualifying phrases such as “the volunteers felt” or “the volunteers reported,” as exemplified by the statement: “International volunteer service positively affected volunteers’ cross-cultural understanding and career path, in many cases transforming their lives” (Lough, McBride, and Sherraden 5-6). There is no indication in this statement that a volunteer’s claim to have increased cross-cultural understanding or experienced transformation has been

questioned. What exactly constitutes cross-cultural understanding? What does the volunteer understand it to be? How has the volunteer been transformed? Is this transformation evident in their actions in addition to their statements? It is completely valid to *feel* transformed or enlightened, but has this experience truly translated into meaningful action? Oftentimes, beliefs do not always translate into action. As one study on the behavior of sustainable tourists found, “research indicates that while 70-80% of tourists state their high concerns for eco-social components of holidays, only about 10% convert this concern to purchasing decisions” (Budeanu 502). Thus, it is likely that although travelers may legitimately believe themselves to have been “transformed,” this transformation may not actually play out in any concrete way—via their behavior, for example. For this reason, verbal claims should be taken with a grain of salt, realizing that analyzing behavioral changes is the best way of quantifying true impact.

Despite these shortcomings, there is some value to studying volunteers’ perspectives, especially in a comparative setting. The differences in perceived impact between alumni of Cross Cultural Solutions and alumni of WorldTeach helps to give a picture of what kind of programs may be *relatively* more effective at achieving the goals of volunteer tourism, always keeping in mind, however, that surveying volunteers should not be the sole method of quantifying impact. When asked to assess their overall effectiveness, alumni of WorldTeach were more likely than CCS alumni to agree that they “had a specific, needed skill,” “transferred useful skills,” and “made a lasting contribution” (Lough, McBride, and Sherraden 20). As the study notes however, this result could be explained by the inherent differences between the two programs (20). Unlike CCS, “WorldTeach volunteers are in the community for a longer duration, are highly integrated, and frequently speak the host-country language. These qualities provide volunteers more

opportunities to transfer skills to those in the host country” (Lough, McBride, and Sherraden 20). CCS is notably more “vacation-oriented” than WorldTeach, as becomes evident with a comparison between the two providers’ websites. Whereas WorldTeach offers programs that last for a full year, one semester, or a summer, CCS allows volunteers to travel for as little as one week (*WorldTeach*; “FAQ”). WorldTeach is also committed primarily to education—meaning that all volunteers go into the experience because they want to teach—while CCS offers a variety of volunteer opportunities including tutoring, childcare, working in healthcare, caring for the elderly, and others, depending on the destination (*WorldTeach*; “FAQ”). WorldTeach also has stricter requirements for its participants, only accepting volunteers who are English-speaking, above the age of 18, and who possess a bachelor’s degree at the time of departure, with the exception of the summer programs for which the third requirement does not apply (“Apply to WorldTeach Volunteer Programs”). CCS, on the other hand, allows children as young as 8 to participate if accompanied by a parent (“FAQ”). The websites also differ greatly in the amount of attention given to leisure and recreational activities. WorldTeach focuses primarily on conveying the responsibilities and daily life of volunteers to prospective participants, while CCS focuses a lot on the leisure and recreational opportunities for volunteers to take advantage of when they are not working (*WorldTeach*; *Cross Cultural Solutions*). It is quite obvious that CCS markets itself toward more casual volunteers who would be more likely to refer to their experience as a “vacation,” while participants in WorldTeach would probably not refer to their experience in this way due to the length and the nature of the program, which gives them legitimate teaching positions at schools around the world. It becomes clear, based on this comparison between the two programs, why alumni of WorldTeach were more likely to report having more of a perceived impact. This confirms

the obvious—that stricter application requirements, a longer length, and a deeper commitment required of volunteers, tends to have more of an impact than programs that are less rigorous in this regard. It was through these observations, in combination with my discussions with Paul Robinson and Thomas Klak, that I was motivated to analyze each man's respective program, ultimately coming to the conclusion that these programs should indeed serve as models for appropriate engagement with the developing world through either study abroad or volunteer tourism. My analysis and conclusions regarding these programs will be preceded by a discussion of the negative impacts of volunteer tourism, which begins the following section of the paper.

IV. THE BAD AND THE GOOD

A. THE BAD – THE PITFALLS OF VOLUNTEER TOURISM

Despite the altruistic aspirations and intentions that volunteer tourism and alternative study abroad may possess, these practices are not necessarily beneficial to the places in which they occur, and can often have negative effects. As many development projects have shown, well-intentioned interventions do not necessarily achieve the desired results. This fact, along with the connection between alternative tourism and development aid, has caught the attention of scholars in recent years. The negative impacts of volunteer tourism present themselves in a variety of different ways and can affect both tourists and local residents of the places in which these experiences occur.

In regards to volunteer tourism, Palacios discusses the simple yet powerful effect of creating realistic expectations for both volunteers and “the voluntoured.” Unrealistic expectations can leave both sides feeling unsatisfied, bitter, and skeptical of volunteer tourism as a beneficial endeavor. Palacios discusses volunteer tourism specifically in the university context, noting that programs run by universities tend to be “more likely to provide accountability, reflection, and learning outcomes” (862), although this is not always the case. These programs, for the most part, have historically been framed by a development aid discourse, which can cause unrealistic expectations on both sides of the interaction between volunteers and residents. The use of the word “volunteer” alone, which connotes the idea of “help” or “gratitude,” can have “specific repercussions in terms of social relations; it is a notion of identity, and as such, it strongly determines how the ‘Other’ perceives and relates with a foreigner” (Palacios 867). Possessing the label of “volunteer” puts one in a position of power, thus perpetuating the notion of Western superiority and leading to assumptions on the part of receiving cultures as to the skill level

of the volunteers who come to “help” them. It is assumed that volunteers are somehow more skilled or possess expertise in the areas in which they are providing help to a local community, when oftentimes they have little to no training in these areas. Volunteer programs often include a teaching component where the volunteer is given free-reign over a whole classroom of eager students, even entrusted to come up with an appropriate lesson plan. This can leave volunteers frustrated with the amount of expectations foisted upon them by the “subjects” of their altruism. The local residents learning English, or receiving medical attention, or learning sustainable farming techniques, often assume that their volunteer teachers or partners in a specific project are experts in these subject areas. This leads to unrealistic expectations that the volunteer knows best or will be able to solve all the problems that local residents face; when this does not happen, which is often the case, local residents become bitter and perhaps even spiteful of these volunteer projects and the presence of such volunteers in their community. Palacios, who participated in a short-term volunteer project with an organization in Vietnam, cites a passage from his own personal journal he kept during the trip, in which one of the Western university students, Megan, “ ‘was so stressed out because the kitchen trainers were expecting feedback the next day from her with regard to their plans and curriculums and...she was so worried because, she had read about curriculums and education in general, she had no knowledge or experience in that particular field’ ” (869). Just as recipients of volunteers’ aid can be left with a bitter taste by unfulfilled expectations, so too can volunteers themselves come away unsatisfied by the extent to which they were truly able to help or have a positive impact on the communities in which they worked. Many volunteers come in expecting their help to have a lasting impact, but leave questioning whether anything they did really helped the community at all, perhaps even suspecting that they negatively affected the community in

which they worked.

Guttentag engages this suspicion, listing all the ways that volunteer tourism can have a negative impact. The first potential negative impact of volunteer tourism is the neglect or disregard of locals' desires (540). Volunteer tourism, due to the fact that participants are paying "customers," is expected to provide what it promises: an opportunity for participants to volunteer. Sometimes certain sites are so popular that the providers of the experience might actually end up having to create new programs or alter existing programs in order to keep volunteers occupied, which locals may not want or need. Guttentag sees this problem especially with the "commercial" or for-profit sector of the volunteer tourism industry; these providers find that in order to maintain their program, they must tailor to the wants and needs of volunteers, meaning that the wants and needs of locals may fall to the wayside (541). Guttentag suggests, following other scholars, that NGOs may be better equipped to avoid this trap because their continued operation does not lie solely in obtaining new "customers," although this is surely not true in all cases (542). The non-profit conservation organization Earthwatch Institute, for example, has received criticism for not having any mention on community involvement on its website, which is actually quite common for most conservation associations (Guttentag 542).

The second possible negative impact of volunteer tourism is "a actual hindering of work progress and the completion of unsatisfactory work" (Guttentag 543). Many experiences in volunteer tourism give participants the opportunity to gain practical experience in different career areas that would require more experience back in their respective home countries. Volunteers are often given the opportunity to teach or do medical work with little to no training. According to a 2009 report on the state of the

volunteer travel industry, only 2 percent of the 28 companies surveyed for the report are skills-based (*State of the Volunteer Travel Industry 6*), proving that in general, whatever the kind of work involved, training tends to be very scarce. In teaching programs, for example, a volunteer with absolutely no teaching experience or knowledge of the local language may be assigned an entire classroom of children to teach English to. Volunteers with little experience who help to construct a new house may be handed a hammer and told to start working with little oversight by a project supervisor regarding the quality of their work. Unsatisfactory work can also result from bad attitudes, especially from participants who view their experience primarily as a vacation or who are more motivated by the self-centered reasons mentioned in Chen's study. These volunteers may have less dedication to a project and less concern for whether a project is completed correctly and to the highest possible quality, resulting in either slow or unsatisfactory progress, which locals, were they allowed to participate in construction themselves, may be able to complete better.

Another possible negative impact of volunteer tourism discussed by Guttentag is a decreased local labor demand and the development or promotion of dependency upon the aid provided by volunteers (544). Many volunteer tourism projects, for example, have volunteers engaging in unskilled labor. This means that locals would be able to perform these skills as well, but they are not chosen to do so because volunteers from abroad do not need to be paid for their work; in fact, these volunteers are actually paying to work (Guttentag 544). Dependency can also develop as a result of volunteer tourism, because as Wearing deftly notes, " 'volunteers can reiterate the ethos of the 'expert,' thus promoting deference in the local community to outside knowledge, therefore contributing to the curtailment of self sufficiency' " (qtd. in Guttentag 544). When a steady stream of

volunteers labor and donations continually flow into a community, the impulse to improve one's economic or social conditions through hard work and conscious effort toward self-improvement can be diminished.

The fourth possible negative impact of volunteer tourism, corroborating Palacios's discussion, is the damaging conceptualizations of the "other" that volunteers may construct in regards to the people living in the communities they encounter (Guttentag 545).

Programs in volunteer tourism are often framed by a development aid discourse, painting the volunteers as the generous saviors who are helping to relieve the plight of the people living in the impoverished communities they travel to. Thus, a division between the volunteers and the locals is immediately established and imbued with uneven power relations; the volunteers are generously helping to relieve the locals' struggles, a narrative which the locals may have come to passively accept without much second thought. Locals are not encouraged to—and thus not cognizant of—the many ways that they can teach something valuable to their "saviors" from the West in a reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationship. In this situation, both sides end up constructing polarizing and unrealistic conceptions of the "other." Locals view volunteers and the skills they possess with deference, believing that the volunteers somehow have more authority and knowledge as to how locals can better their lives. Volunteers are trained to believe that their presence in the community is highly valuable and desired. Of course this is not always the case, but it is often reinforced by (sometimes staged) expressions of gratitude on the part of the locals for their help, or the locals' interest in the volunteers' opinions due to their conceptions of volunteers as experts. The use of Orientalist rhetoric in promotional materials for volunteer tourism has much to do with this problem; it propagates certain stereotypes of the developing world, such as its simplicity, impoverishment, authenticity, exoticism, or

tranquility, which leads to a situation in which “volunteers ‘are emphasizing difference and establishing a dichotomy of ‘them and us’ as opposed to ‘finding commonality between the developed and the developing world’ “ (qtd. in Guttentag 545). A related issue that stems from the spread of these stereotypes is the rationalization of poverty (Guttentag 545). Western travelers see this “simple” life of the people in the communities where they work, free from the “weight” of excessive attachment to material possessions, and idealize this situation in their minds. They cite the happiness, hospitality and often deeper spirituality demonstrated by the members of the host communities in order to rationalize poor material conditions that they find in these places, and may form a romanticized view of poverty that does not register the full weight of the problems that poor people in developing countries face.

Several of the negative impacts discussed thus far can really be applied to all alternative tourism in general, not just volunteer tourism. Despite the fact that alternative tourism has good intentions and at least a degree of consciousness of the damaging effects of mass tourism, the interaction between tourist and local is inherently not one of equality. The tourist is paying to see and interact with a place and its people, and even in the case where tourists are desired and reciprocity between tourists and locals is achieved, the relationship is not natural. It may be equal *quantitatively*, in terms of power or influence, but not *qualitatively*; the tourist is away from home, outside of his comfort zone, and has essentially paid to meet the local, who may have an entirely different conception of himself and his home than the tourist has. The local may be able to upset the notion of himself and his home projected upon him by the tourist, or he may not.

Having thoroughly addressed the all ways that volunteer tourism can be detrimental to the goal of development, it is important to emphasize that volunteer tourism is not all

bad, and that there are programs out there that have been able to positively affect development in the places in which they work. Two examples of such programs are the Human Needs and Global Resources (HNGR) program run by Wheaton College, a Christian college in Illinois; and the university partnership with Dominica established by Professor Thomas Klak, who began the program with Miami University (Ohio) and then brought it to the University of New England upon becoming a professor there.

B. THE GOOD – TWO EXEMPLARY PROGRAMS

Paul Robinson's HNGR program and Thomas Klak's study abroad program in Dominica serve as great complements to each other in a discussion about effective volunteer tourism programs because, although founded upon similar understandings of development, the two programs are also different in several ways. The existence of these differences shows that there is some flexibility in what a successful program can look like. The first major difference between the two programs is length; while the HNGR program is six months long, the Dominica program is short, lasting 12 days (Robinson, "Interview"; Klak and Mullaney 2). While the HNGR program places individual students in various countries across the world, the Dominica program is a group program that travels to the same place every year. The last significant difference between the two programs is that one is faith-based and the other is not. As a Christian school, Wheaton incorporates faith and Christian practice into the HNGR program curriculum, and many of the organizations it partners with around the world are faith-based ("HNGR Program Overview"). The Dominica program, on the other hand, is not faith-based and does not incorporate faith into its curriculum. Nevertheless, there are also many similarities between the two programs, which will come through in the following discussion.

1. THE HUMAN NEEDS AND GLOBAL RESOURCES (HNGR) PROGRAM

The Human Needs and Global Resources program was founded at Wheaton College in 1976 as a “global study-service” program, aimed at teaching students about the problems of world hunger, and hoping to teach them how to address these problems (“History of HNGR”). As described previously in the third section of the paper, the HNGR program is founded around the idea of “holistic development,” which recognizes that human need arises in every realm—from the psychological to the spiritual to the social—not just the economic. This commitment to holistic development demonstrates a deep understanding of the complexity of pursuing development work in the Global South, which is evident in how the program is structured and carried out. Various aspects of the program help act as safeguards against the various possible pitfalls of volunteer tourism outlined in the first half of this section.

The first safeguard is the application process, which is one of the most rigorous application processes out there. Only open to Wheaton students, prospective participants essentially “track into” the program by the time they are sophomores in order to fulfill all the requirements for the actual experience, which they take part in for the fall semester of their senior year (Robinson, “Interview”). Required preparatory courses for the program include “Third World Issues,” an introductory course typically taken during freshman year; an anthropology course called “Biculturalism”; two additional courses related to issues of development and working in the “Third World”; a course called “Field Research Methods and Intercultural Orientation” to help prepare students for conducting independent field research while abroad; and, if the destination of choice speaks a language that Wheaton teaches, at least an intermediate level proficiency in this language by the date of departure

("Preparatory Coursework"). This means that there is a minimum requirement of 18 hours of coursework before embarking in the program, with possibly additional hours due to the language requirement. Students are also screened with psychological assessments to ensure that they are mentally prepared to go abroad by themselves and live in an environment incredibly different from what they are used to for six months (Robinson, "Interview"). Such a rigorous application and preparation process ensures that students go into the experience with proper knowledge of issues related to development and cultural exchange, and most likely ensures a pool of students that possesses the proper motivations for participating in the program.

While abroad, students intern at one of HNGR's partner organizations and live in a homestay in the local community (Robinson, "Interview"). This experience of being alone and fully-immersed in the community without anyone from "home" to accompany them not only encourages students to truly engage their host community, but also helps guard against the unhealthy conceptualizations of the "other" that are more likely to arise in a group situation; in such a situation, the comfort of having someone who "understands" one's own culture may discourage even trying to understand some aspect of another culture that may initially be intimidating, off-putting, or strange to the student. Another part of a student's curriculum while abroad is an independent study project that incorporates his or her academic background—whether it be in anthropology, education, Christian ministry, psychology, etc.—as well as the needs of the host organization, to construct a project that will be of benefit to the host organization (Robinson, "Interview"). As Robinson asserts, this piece of the experience is really the most important contribution that students can make to their respective host organizations: "What students can actually provide, in terms of service, really is writing and synthesis skills. That's about it. You

know, we can't build latrines and school rooms; they can do that better themselves," asserting that oftentimes these organizations don't have the capacity or resources to engage in self-evaluation or assessment activities that could be used to improve the organization's impact ("Interview"). Robinson cites the American educational system's emphasis on *formation*, rather than *information*, as incredibly helpful in equipping students to perform this work, which is really "the one thing that the student can give back—the ability to take a piece of work that the organization is doing—to evaluate it, to assess it, to make new proposals, to do on-the-ground field research that might involve community assessments, that might involve all of the kinds of things that are needed by organizations involved in community transformation" ("Interview"). Students are really there to be immersed in a community and in the context of their respective host organizations, and to observe how these communities achieve transformation in their own unique contexts, which the student will then be able to "translate...into their own sort of situations" (Robinson, "Interview"). It all comes back to "walking alongside" and "accompanying" rather than serving or directing, as many development-oriented programs refer to their work.

Robinson's language is consistent with how the program presents itself on its website, which is understandable considering Robinson directed the program for fifteen years. As the "Program Overview" reads, "a six-month service-learning internship in the Majority World is at the heart of the HNGR experience" ("HNGR Program Overview"). Here, the use of the term "Majority World" embodies the goal of reciprocal transformation that the program tries to achieve. This is as opposed to using the term "Third World,"—the unfortunate counterpart to the rich, Western "First World"—which implies an uneven interaction in which the host destinations will be transformed by the supposedly superior

knowledge of the West. "Majority World" flattens these very elitist notions in another way in that it points to the minority status of citizens of the "First World," whose standard of life is actually enjoyed by a small minority of the world's population. Echoing Robinson's discussion of holistic development and so-called "whole-living," the website also reads that the HNGR program is an experience "in which students participate in transformational initiatives that enable people to live whole, secure, and productive lives" ("HNGR Program Purpose and Mission"). This further demonstrates the unity and thoroughness of the HNGR program's vision, as is also clear in an examination of the program's post-internship requirements.

Before their return to Wheaton for their final semester, students attend a retreat at Wheaton's campus in northern Wisconsin, where they discuss their individual experiences (Robinson, "Interview"). Through this comparative exercise, they begin to process the similarities and differences between their experiences, thus obtaining a wider view of how both global and local forces affect the various phenomena they each individually observed while abroad. A capstone seminar taken during the semester following the students' return further encourages this process of critical reflection, helping them to work through all that they saw and experienced and to overcome the feeling of despair that many return with, so as to eventually come to a conclusion as to what the experience will mean for the rest of their lives (Robinson, "Interview"). The final piece of the post-internship experience is participation in a chapel presentation, in which the students present on their experience in front of the entire Wheaton community (Robinson, "Interview"). This helps students synthesize their experience by forcing them to boil down all that they've learned individually and collectively into a single joint presentation. As Robinson describes,

You know the first thing we want them to do is to assume that

their hosts are sitting in the audience. What do you want people to know that you've learned from them—in their homes, in their lives, in their work, in their values, and all that? And that really...translates it from 'This is my experience' to 'This is what I've been given and all the insights that I have,' so it's a whole different level. They're responsible to a whole different level ("Interview").

What Wheaton does is essentially instill in students throughout the program—from the start of the application process to their return to Illinois and beyond—that the opportunity they have to participate in the HNGR program is an incredible gift. This relates back to Palacios's discussion of creating realistic expectations for both volunteers and members of the host communities. In the HNGR program, the students' main purpose for going abroad is not to impart knowledge or to *give* anything in particular, but rather to observe, understand, learn and accompany; as Robinson asserts, however, this understanding often does end up being a benefit for the host organizations via assessments and research reports that help them construct a better understanding of themselves.

With all of these traits in mind, my argument is that the HNGR program is an exemplary program for promoting development. To clarify, the impacts are varied; they are both direct and indirect, and affect a variety of places and actors. As stated in the second section of the paper, the goal of this project was initially to quantify the impact of various alternative tourism programs upon development in the places that these programs operate, but that this endeavor proved difficult to carry out. Thus, the impacts addressed in the discussion to follow will not only be the direct impacts of these programs upon the host destinations, but will include various impacts that may either directly or indirectly promote sustainable development, in both students' host countries, as well as the countries that they return home to.

As Robinson writes in the on the program's website, "participating in HNGR is to set

out on a life-long journey. It is to set out on a journey of discovery about the deep paradoxes of our world” (“A Note from the Former HNGR Director”). Indeed, as data provided to me both by Robinson and current HNGR staff, the program seems to have life-long impacts on its participants. According to the most recent survey of alumni of the 2012 program, 17% of them are currently working in international development/transformation abroad. (Wilson) In addition, 46% of all alumni are doing community development/service/ministry work in the United States (Wilson). As Robinson also estimated,

within....90-95% [of alumni] are very intentional about how they use their resources, what organizations they donate to—they do very careful research on all of that. They are on the whole...continuing to have a financial or other kind of commitment to service-based organizations. So even if it’s not direct involvement, there’s a lot of indirect—lifestyle, vocational, values—kind of shifts that happen as a result of this (“Interview”).

Thus, there are a number of significant outcomes from the HNGR program. In terms of direct impact upon the host communities, there is first the student’s contribution to his or her host organization, most importantly through organizational or community evaluations and proposals, which help enhance these organizations’ effectiveness at achieving their own individual “indigenous” versions of transformation (Robinson, “Interview”). The other direct impact is the number of alumni who now work abroad in international development/transformation. Indirect impacts include the choices that alumni make in regards to resource-use and donating money; one’s choices and effects of these choices do not occur in a vacuum. When we chose to conserve water, we may be helping to reduce conflict over water shortages in developing countries, where this has become a huge problem in recent years. When we conduct research before donating to a specific charity,

we can avoid supporting charities that—like many volunteer tourism organizations—actually exacerbate the problems they are trying to solve, despite good intentions. Although not relevant to developing nations, it is also an incredibly positive outcome that so many alumni have ended up working in community development/service/ministry work back in the United States; perhaps they are instilling the next generation of HNGR participants with the values that they adopted as a result their own participation in the HNGR program.

2. THOMAS KLAK'S STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM IN DOMINICA

Like the HNGR program, there is a unity of vision in Thomas Klak's study abroad program that he has been running to the Caribbean island nation of Dominica since 2005 (Nelson and Klak 2). Klak began the program with student groups from Miami University, where he taught previously, and now takes groups from the University of New England, where he now teaches. Like the HNGR program, the Dominica program is based on a very broad conception of development that is not solely based on economic indicators. It also stresses the importance of incorporating various actors in a commitment toward sustainable development, and on maintaining and growing upon these relationships over time. Nelson and Klak differentiate between "service-learning," which they view as a too one-sided interaction that "may encourage students to view those they serve as victims rather than community partners" (7), and "civic engagement," which connotes more of a sense of mutual exchange. Civic engagement, which is more based upon collaboration on several levels rather than the individual level, is way to connect goals in both sustainable development and social justice (Nelson and Klak 7). As opposed to the "too top-down and one-sided" approach of service-learning,

Civic engagement is purposefully and actively centered on collaborating with our community partners and on reciprocal relationships with them. This means we work to define goals and projects through long-term interactions with a range of community-leaders, including those not conventionally viewed as leaders, such as members of local organizations working behind the scenes to improve the quality of life in communities (Nelson and Klak 7).

This deep commitment to reciprocity and mutuality is evident in the program's structure.

During their short stay, students get to experience a short homestay in which they live and work alongside a family, accompanying them in their daily activities (Nelson and Klak 120).

The transiency of this stay may seem a prime opportunity for the commodification of culture—for this family to become a spectacle for the student who may not fully engage due to his or her fleeting stay—or the rationalization of poverty; two days is not enough to fully process or realize fully the struggles that poor families go through. Although not foolproof, Klak has attempted to combat this by requiring weeks of preparation on these types of issues prior to the group's departure, as well as reflection and discussion activities during the trip. Before departing for Dominica, students are assigned readings and written reflections, engage in discussions about these readings, talk to Dominican environmentalists and community leaders over Skype, and work to develop individual research projects, which are part of the program's curriculum (Nelson and Klak 113).

Nelson and Klak's interviews with homestay hosts, who are financially compensated for hosting students, yielded no negative feedback apart from the complaint that the homestays were not long enough. As one respondent said, "My only wish is that we had more time together. I can see things that Americans don't know about gardening. There is a lot more we can learn from each other" (Nelson and Klak 120). Here the theme of reciprocity that runs throughout the program is evident; local families believe that they

have something important they can teach to the foreign students, and rightly so.

There is not a sense of “awe” in regards to the students’ “superior Western knowledge” that can often arise in programs of this nature.

One of the core tenants of the Dominica program is the idea of repeated and long-term interaction. Klak has worked to build up a network of contacts and community partnerships over time and to engage them each time he returns. This commitment toward building true relationships has enhanced the program’s scope and impact, and also rubbed off on students, who have taken it to heart. Experiencing Dominica has prompted academic interest in several students, who have returned to do independent research; since 2005, eight Masters and Honors Thesis research projects have sprung from this partnership (Klak and Mullaney 2). Like Robinson’s students in the HNGR program, these students have lent important writing and synthesis skills to write-up assessments of issues in Dominica; these could be of great use to the communities they interact with and the country as a whole. For example, one student performed a water-quality analysis at ecotourism sites that receive heavy traffic from cruise-ship vacationers, while another evaluated and mapped the potential for landslides, which are a significant problem on the island (Klak and Mullaney 2). Another exemplary impact is the homestay program created by a Miami University graduate student as part of his Masters Thesis; the rationale behind the project is that it allows villagers to “more directly reap benefits from ecotourists” (Klak and Mullaney 12). There are various other positive results of this commitment toward relationship-building, including “an ongoing matching funds campaign” with schools in the Grand Fond Village of eastern Dominica that further promotes reciprocity and mutuality, among various others (Klak and Mullaney 12).

There is also a monetary aspect to the Dominica program’s impact. In addition to

the homestays, students stay at ecolodges during the experience; this not only contributes to the country's economy, but also promotes the cause of sustainable development through support for these establishments (Nelson and Klak 119). In addition, it "extends experiential learning to meal time and night time" because students are able to interact with locals involved with the management of these places throughout their stay and learn about their "strategies and challenges" (Nelson and Klak 119). This inclusion of purposeful engagement and inquiry into the operations of ecolodges helps, once again, to guard against this psychological divide that arises between students, who are "tourists" consuming the culture of Dominica, and locals. The relationship is more accurately described as an interaction between "visitors," and hosts.

The reflection activities built into the program are also incredibly important in giving students an accurate portrait of developing countries, poverty, the challenges of development, and how their own actions have both local and global consequences. As Klak and Mullaney maintain,

Students' experiences deepen when required to journal, process, articulate, react to (not always positively), and discuss each day's intense activities. Rigorous reflection allows them to connect their experiences to academic theories of citizenship and sustainability, strengthening both the intellectual and capacity-building aspects of the trip (14).

Klak and Nelson's interviews with alumni of the program have shown that the program has been effective at inspiring critical reflection from students on these subjects. As one student said,

through this [study abroad] experience, I have learned that although I have an enormous amount of energy I want to utilize to help peoples in need, the best thing I can do is to join efforts that are already in existence, community-based efforts, of the people for the people. Trying to help from the outside, I am learning, is just another form of elitism. Although this

lesson came with difficulty, I am glad to have learned it – especially from so gracious a people (116).

Although this is only one reflection from one student, it demonstrates that short-term trips can have significant impacts. The commitment, however, is not short-term; this seems to be the key to developing an effective short-term service trip. Klak and community partners in Dominica are engaged with each other throughout the year to plan for the annual trip and any joint initiatives that may take place over a long-distance, such as the matching funds campaign with the schools in the Grand Fond Village. By maintaining these relationships, engagement can be deeper; this benefits not only students' learning, but also the impact on the organizations and communities involved with the program. As one community leader in Dominica stated: "Well if you are learning well and coming back every year, then this is the kind of tourism we want" (Nelson and Klak 122).

V. CONCLUSION

As this paper has shown, alternative tourism, if constructed and managed correctly, can be a beneficial tool for achieving development. Sadly, its recent popularity, particularly fueled by rising engagement in volunteer tourism and alternative study abroad, has led to quite the opposite result for development. For the purposes of this paper, development has been conceived as encompassing various realms, from the economic, to the social, to the psychological, to the spiritual, and so on. The problem with volunteer tourism and alternative study abroad is that many who engage in these experiences are doing it for the wrong reasons, looking to increase their chances in the international job market by obtaining “global citizenship,” to have a truly “authentic” experience, or to gain independence and “learn about themselves.” In this way, the developing world—by and large the typical destination for experiences in alternative tourism—becomes commodified. Travelers go into the experience with actually quite selfish motivations, concerned more with how the experience will benefit them rather than the population of their chosen destination. The proliferation of neoliberal discourse in promotional materials for experiences in alternative tourism is largely to blame for this problem, while the proliferation of Orientalist discourse both maintains and encourages the deepening of the North-South divide. This leads to unrealistic conceptions of the “other” on both sides of the interaction and unrealistic expectations of how the interaction will play out. Western volunteers may go into the experience believing that their short stay will have a profound impact on the communities they engage, and feel disillusioned when this does not happen. This feeling of disillusionment might arise among residents of the host communities as well, who have been conditioned to view Western knowledge as “superior” and are disappointed to find how inexperienced many of these Westerners are, as they are often

not sufficiently screened by alternative tourism providers for motivations or experience. The other possibility is that insufficient encouragement of critical self-reflection will cause travelers to believe that their help and presence *was* truly beneficial and vital, thus only furthering notions of Western superiority and discouraging reflections regarding their own complacency in a highly unfair and unjust global status quo. Other possible results of these experiences include the promotion of dependency among the host communities, which may become accustomed to the presence of free labor and economic inputs from tourists, or the disregard of local's desires, which can occur when there is little collaboration between host communities and program providers in constructing effective volunteer tourism or alternative study abroad programs.

Combating all these possible problems requires careful planning, and engagement between the program provider and the host community based on reciprocity and mutuality. Rather than using a discourse of "development aid" or "service-learning," which connote asymmetrical power relations and directionality, programs should be conceived of as experiences of "accompaniment," in which both sides are able to teach and learn from one another. Development can be achieved in many different ways through various means; we must begin to acknowledge this fact if we truly want to achieve development in the places we engage through volunteer tourism and study abroad. As the HNGR program and the Dominica study abroad program have shown, it is possible to achieve development through alternative tourism; the first step in this process, however, is abandoning this desire to transform others and allowing others to transform us. It is through this process of accepting transformation that we actually have the most chance of transforming the lives of others in a truly beneficial way.

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