

Latinos and the Goshen College Study-Service Term

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Maple Scholars Final Paper

October 9, 2018

Introduction

Goshen College prides itself on its unique study abroad program, Study Service Term (SST), which ranks number four on “The 50 Best Study Abroad Programs in America” (as judged by BestCollegeReviews.org). When compared with other nationally-ranked study abroad programs, the distinction between Goshen College and other programs becomes readily clear. While many of these other prestigious programs send their students to live in groups at a castle in Europe or in the dormitories of a major international university, Goshen College’s SST program places students in a developing country to live with host families for three months of intensive study and service. Goshen College highlights this difference on their SST website, stating: “We emphasize service to a local community — and total cultural immersion. On SST, you’re less likely to stay in a hotel or a residence hall. In all countries, students live with local families and experience day-to-day life in the most personal way possible.” Furthermore, the program serves as a way to internationalize the campus itself by providing professors with international experience to then bring back to the classroom. Because SST or an alternative set of courses on campus is required for all students as part of the General Education package, the cost to go abroad is the same as any other semester on campus for those paying room and board, unlike at other universities. While these major distinctions between SST and other study abroad programs have been featured prominently in Goshen College’s marketing campaign, the program needs to be re-evaluated to serve an increasingly diverse student body.

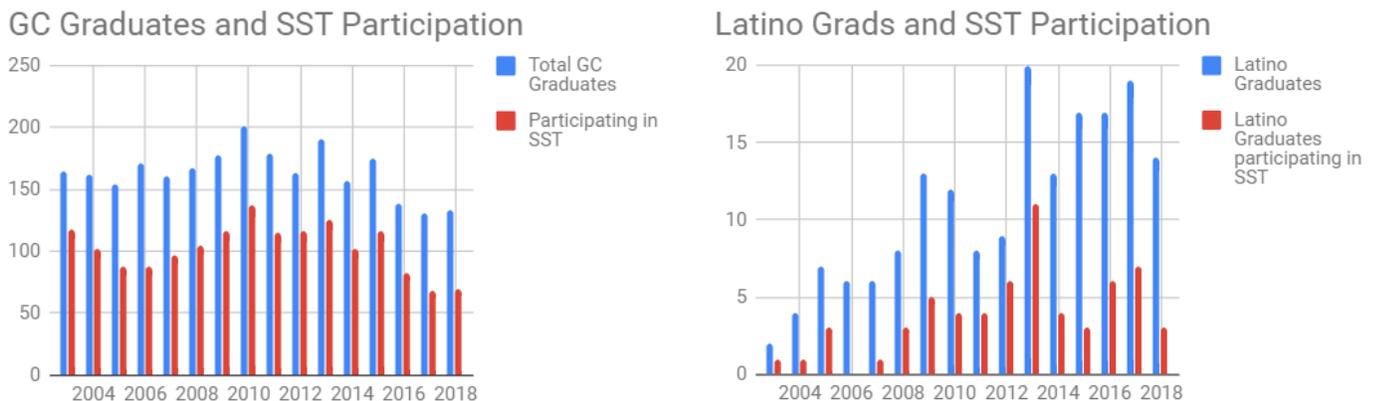
According to the Institute of International Education (IIE), fewer than 10% of US undergraduates participate in study abroad, only ¼ of which are minority students. 2016 Open Doors data shows that for the 2014-2015 school year, 72.9% of study abroad students were white, 5.6% were African American, 8.1% Asian, and 8.8% Hispanic. While the numbers of

minority students studying abroad have increased over the past decade (from 17% of total study abroad students in 2005 to 27% in 2015), these numbers do not run parallel with national college enrollment statistics. These numbers show that for the school year 2014-2015, 58% of enrolled students nationally were white, 17% Hispanic, 15% African American, and 7% Asian.

International education organizations have argued that insufficient funding and a lack of information about the benefits of study abroad play major roles in limiting minority student from participating in study abroad, as well as familial concerns and obligations, pressures to move through college quickly and start a career, and a lack of minority faculty leading study abroad programs (Salisbury, Paulsen, & Pascarella, 125).

At Goshen College, a similar imbalance can be found in the SST program. While the college has attracted more Latino students in recent years, the proportion of those who participated in SST does not match that of overall graduating students per class. The charts below further illustrate this current imbalance:

Figure 1. SST Participation: All Graduates vs. Latino Graduates



The difference in scale of the Y-axis should be noted between these two charts, further emphasizing the disproportionately low amount of Latino students that participate in SST. In the figures above, we can see that while Latino participation in SST has slowly increased over time, it is not at a rate matching their graduation from Goshen College. While 70-50% of total graduates participate in SST, far less of the total Latino graduates participate, varying between 20-40% for most years. Ideally, SST units should be a direct representation of the racial makeup on campus; however, when looking at these units, far less Latino students are present. While the exact numbers regarding Latino representation and participation vary from year to year depending on the number of Latinos enrolled and the number of total students going abroad, the fact remains that Goshen College faces an under-representation problem in its SST units.

“There are a whole lot of factors at play,” said Tom Meyers, Director of International Education, in a recent article published in the *Record*, Goshen College’s campus newspaper. “A big one is the increase in the number of commuter students” (McKay-Epp, 2018). Commuter students must pay for room and board when attending SST, an additional cost that may simply be too much for some families. Meyers also mentioned the small number of undocumented students for whom going on SST is impossible. When examining the numbers in the figures above, one can see that total participation in SST has declined over recent years, meaning more students are taking the SST-alternative classes to fulfill their International Education requirement. As such, the alternative program must be given more attention to provide students with experiences that serve as a valuable part of their GC education.

Studies in the past examined the experience of minority students on study abroad, arguing that “despite substantial efforts across postsecondary education to increase minority participation in study abroad, the homogeneity of study abroad programs remains largely unchanged”

(Salisbury, Paulsen, & Pascarella, 2010). The authors argue that “insufficient funding available and a lack of information about the benefits of study abroad have constrained minority student involvement,” along with other factors such as family concerns and obligations. Another study showed similar findings, stating that the most commonly cited factors for lack of minority student involvement are finances and lack of family support, with expense ultimately serving as the most common barrier (Stallman, Woodruff, Kasravi, & Comp, 2010). Multiple research studies show that study abroad is “personally, academically, and professionally beneficial to students” (Perkins, 2017). Furthermore, a correlation can be seen between minority students who study abroad and higher graduation rates (Sutton & Rubin, 2010).

If this is the case, Goshen College must take further efforts to make SST more accessible and valuable to all underrepresented students and fill the imbalance between Latino enrollment and their participation in SST. Neglecting to hear the voices of both Latinos who did and did not attend SST will leave Goshen College without viable solutions to this problem.

This study, as part of the Maple Scholars Program, a Goshen College summer research project placing students alongside professors, examined the experience of GC Latino students on SST. The purpose of this project was to hear their stories and understand ways that Goshen College can improve both the accessibility and value of SST and SST-alternate programs to better facilitate positive learning experiences for our Latino students. When SST was first created, it was done so as a way to provide new global perspectives for a predominantly white Mennonite student body. Although the demographics of the college have changed, this mindset of catering to white Mennonite students remains pervasive and therefore needs to be altered. This study shows that SST provides a valuable experience for Latinos; however, it must be made more accessible and pay attention to the specific needs and address the particular experience of

Latinos before, during, and after SST. In addition, changes must be made to the SST-alternative program to meet the needs of those who, for a number of reasons, cannot go abroad.

Research Methodology

The primary focus of this study was to hear directly from past and present Latino students at Goshen College about their experience with SST. The following questions served as a framework for the research project, from which more specific interview questions were constructed:

1. How can Goshen College make SST more accessible to Latino students?
2. What is the experience of SST for Latinos?
3. What is the overall value of SST (or alternative classes) for Latino students?
4. What changes need to be made to further improve the program?

This study examined a range of perspectives, both from Latinos who went on SST and from those who did not, in order to understand the broader experience at Goshen College. We obtained a list of all Latino students in the last 15 years and whether they went on SST or not from the office of Justin Heinzkehr, Director of Institutional Research and Assessment. After corresponding with these students, a final count of 24 Latinos were interviewed; 12 current students and 12 alumni, 10 males and 14 females, 14 commuters and 10 on-campus students. Of the 24 total, 15 of them went on SST. These interviews, conducted by senior students Jose Ortiz and Landon Weldy, with one taking notes and the other asking questions, were recorded and later transcribed for analysis. Using the program Dedoose, codes were assigned to keywords and

ideas to evaluate how often they came up and what factors linked them together. Through this process, we identified common themes in each of the major categories that make up our findings.

Research Findings

This study shows that SST provides a valuable experience for Latinos, yet that ultimately, changes need to be made to both the SST and SST-alternative programs to address the particular experience of Latinos. The research gathered from interviews with Latino students can be divided into four sections, each of which can be further divided to reveal specific themes and variations: Accessibility, Experience (during SST or in alternative classes), Values gained from experiences, and recommended Policy changes.

Accessibility

Throughout the course of the study, five main barriers that keep Latinos from accessing SST became prevalent: cost, scheduling conflicts, family obligations, lack of communication, and immigrant status. Examining these additional factors can allow the college to both work at attracting more Latino students to the SST program as well as serving the needs of those who simply cannot participate on SST.

Scheduling conflicts. For many students, a barrier to entry involves trying to fit a semester of SST into their busy academic schedule. One such example are athletes, who find it hard to take time off due to a mixture of their sports season, the need for off-season training, and classes.¹ Additional examples include majors such as nursing or biochemistry, which operate on a strict time schedule that allows for little flexibility during the traditional school year.² These both lead into the next problem that comes with scheduling-- the element of increased cost.

¹ Participant 17

² Participants 2, 3, 10, 15, 19

For both athletes and those whose class schedules do not allow for Fall or Spring SST units, the logical alternative would be participating in Summer SST. However, since most scholarships last only 8 semesters, students must either take off a semester (which may not be possible due to required classes) or pay the additional cost of an extra semester without the aid of merit-based scholarships. One participant commented on the numerous jobs he had to work as payment for Summer SST, only to have spent money on an experience he found comparable to Mexico, which he visited frequently with family.³ If international education remains a requirement at the college, all majors should find areas to allow students to participate in SST during the traditional school year.

Cost. The barrier of cost came up frequently during the interview process (14/24 saw cost as a factor, or 58%), both as a direct consequence of scheduling (as noted above), or oftentimes in relation to the additional cost of paying room and board that commuter students must pay. As of the 2017-18 school year, room and board cost \$10,650 (\$5,325 per semester). In this same year, 40% of total undergraduates commuted; of these, 39% were Latino. Furthermore, 68% of all Latino students at Goshen College were commuters. For students living at home, this extra cost of room and board either becomes too much for them or is not adequately explained when advertising SST. Some commuter students see this extra cost as a “discount” for students who live on campus, failing to realize that students on campus already pay this cost.⁴ For many Latinos, cost tends to outweigh the perceived benefits of going on SST. A commuter student who went on SST mentioned cost numerous times, saying that ultimately there is a sense of false hope from other commuter students who want to do SST but give up because of lost hope or a lack of

³ Participant 3

⁴ Participant 10

trust in the college.⁵ She felt that the college keeps pushing SST on students but in the end takes little direct action to help students with the high cost. However, one student who set her mind to go on SST knew that with the help of her family, she could get past the cost and make it work. She worked three part-time jobs, and her mother sold tamales and enchiladas to raise enough money for her to go.⁶

Family obligations. Various forms of obligation to family serves as an additional barrier to participating on SST. For some, this may take the direct form of having children of their own to look after.⁷ These parents simply cannot leave their children for three months. Other forms of familial responsibility that came up in the interview process are more Latino-specific, including such obligations as taking family members to and from work/school, looking after siblings while parents are gone, or working a job (during the school year or summer) to help out with family expenses.⁸ As such, leaving for three months, even with the aid of scholarships or grants to pay for the cost of SST, means giving up money that could have been earned during that period. For some, this opportunity cost does not seem worth it, even they feel a desire to go on SST. When describing what it would have taken for him to have gone on SST, one student told us, "I guess it would have taken a sense of, that my family was going to be okay. Throughout this past year, I was working a job on campus just to help out with whatever I can. So I just needed a sense of security that it wasn't going to be costing my family money."⁹ Another student stated that the biggest factors for commuters are cost (as noted previously), lack of support from family, and the fear of leaving responsibilities at home.¹⁰ While these obligations may be increased for

⁵ Participant 10

⁶ Participant 12

⁷ Participants 18, 20, 22

⁸ Participants 1, 2, 5, 12, 21

⁹ Participant 5

¹⁰ Participant 12

commuter students who live at home, many Latinos who live on campus are still heavily involved in the lives of their family members.

Communication. Another breakdown point in the decision-making process relates to how effectively the college explains the various aspects of SST to students, particularly the cost, experience, and overall value of participating. Whether or not SST is required for international students is often unclear.¹¹ While some students noted the role advisors played on their decision, most noted a lack of influence from professors on their decision to go on SST or not.

Once again, commuters become a factor here. Much of the value and experience of SST is shared by students on campus, through activities such as chapel or simply through friendly interaction. Many students feel that this exposure to other student's stories prepares them for their own experiences.¹² Commuter students miss out on much of this experience. For those who participate on SST, this can lead to experiences on SST being radically different than expected (as will be further examined later).

Furthermore, this lack of communication is even more present between the college and parents of Latino students, a subject that will be expanded upon in the Policy section. At a recent dinner for Latino parents, they were asked to share their opinions regarding SST. Many did not know what it was. Those who had heard of it gave incorrect information about it, believing it was the type of "grand tour" many other colleges have as their study abroad program, more akin to a long vacation than an intensive, immersive program of study. Even after parents become accustomed to the notion of SST, the lack of family or friends who have gone on SST plays a big role. This social capital that many at Goshen take for granted helps prepare students for what they will encounter on SST. Hearing stories from one's cousin or parent or sibling over the years

¹¹ Participant 7

¹² Participants 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16

serves to effectively convey the value of study abroad, and why this experience can be so beneficial. As much as SST dominates the marketing platform of Goshen College, it is clear that what SST *really* is needs to be better communicated to Latino students and their families.

Immigrant status. Regardless of other areas of accessibility to participate in SST, the reality is that some people cannot leave the country no matter what changes are made. If this is the case, and international education remains as a core requirement at GC, what can the college do domestically to cater to the needs of undocumented students?

Experience during SST

For many Latino students, their experiences during SST are different from those of non-Latinos. Both for good and for bad, considering these specific perspectives can allow for better overall experiences.

Group dynamic. Mentioned commonly when discussing the group dynamic during SST was the lack of Latino (or even minority) representation.¹³ Because majority students typically knew each other from living in the dorms, this created a lack of connection between them and Latino students present. Students noted that because of this, the groups divided itself into sub-groups (or cliques, as some called it). One participant saw three groups in her unit: the "brown people," the Mennonites, and the in-between group.¹⁴ Oftentimes Latino students found themselves interacting more with each other "because [they] could relate more to what was going on" in terms of seeing these barriers that Mennonite students may be unable to perceive.¹⁵ This separation amongst group members becomes even more pronounced with commuter students,

¹³ Participants 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16

¹⁴ Participant 11

¹⁵ Participants 1, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11

who typically don't know on-campus students unless they happen to share a class or some other connection.¹⁶

The most common area of disconnect within the group was the presence of the “Menno wall” (the division between Mennonite students and other students unfamiliar with their traditions).¹⁷ This division followed students across the globe and was noted across SST units regardless of location or year. Not only did this cause the formation of cliques within the group, but also the feeling of exclusion by Latino students, who felt left out by Mennonite traditions such as hymn singing and prayer. Participant 8 highlighted this theme, saying, “They did the kumbaya thing Wednesday morning and sang hymns and prayed a lot. They were very insistent on singing hymns.” During the *Despedida*, the goodbye ceremony in Peru, a group of primarily Mennonite students wanted to sing hymns (without the books) to their host families, forcing the few Latinos in the group to stand awkwardly in the back. In regards to the Menno wall, one student, the only Latina in her group, said, “I didn't have someone to talk it out with, and so when you're the only one there, you don't want to point it out and be the angry minority.”¹⁸ These traditions neglected to find methods of self-care or expression that included all those present.

Self-identity. During the course of the study, we found that SST challenged Latino students to wrestle with the concept of self-identity. Students, simply by being exposed to new cultures and ways of thinking, are forced to question where they fit into the world. This is an issue for all students; however, Latino students encounter questions of identity in different ways than majority students. For instance, students who viewed themselves as Mexican (rather than Mexican-American) were still considered American or white by host families and others in the

¹⁶ Participants 10, 13, 24

¹⁷ Participants 1, 3, 8, 9, 10, 11

¹⁸ Participant 13

SST location.¹⁹ Students struggled to explain the differences between their culture and mainstream American culture. Other students faced racism due to the way they looked: host families had expected them to look like the "traditional" blonde-haired-blue-eyed American and expressed disappointment upon seeing these students that didn't fit their preconceptions.²⁰ For many, especially those who previously did not feel as strong a connection to a Latino identity, this experience created a desire to know more about their own culture or further embrace parts of their Latino heritage.²¹ "I had this deeper appreciation for who I was...I stopped straightening my hair. I wanted to show it off, to embody what it means to be Latina."²²

Those with a stronger connection to a Latino identity experienced connections to life in their host countries that majority students did not. In particular, for students who went to Latin America, host families often appreciated that they knew Spanish (however for those who weren't as strong speakers there was an expectation that they should be fluent).²³ Students felt a better connection with their host parents beyond that of their peers who were struggling to communicate.²⁴ One student mentioned how she was familiar with living humbly because of her visits to Mexico with her family, ultimately serving as a reminder of her Latino culture.²⁵

In addition, Latino students (especially those in Latin American countries) found it easier to blend in and walk about the city without being bothered.²⁶ This feeling of blending in was only compounded for Latina women in the group, who may be more comfortable navigating through social systems with more clearly divided gender roles. A Latina participant noted the

¹⁹ Participants 3, 10, 15

²⁰ Participants 4, 9, 11, 24

²¹ Participants 1, 2, 8, 12, 13, 15, 16, 24

²² Participant 15

²³ Participant 2

²⁴ Participants 10, 12, 24

²⁵ Participant 24

²⁶ Participants 8, 12, 13, 16

effect her skin color played in helping her adapt: “White girls got singled out by men and men would harass them or cat-call them or ask them for directions and that never really happened to me.”²⁷ Another student noticed how other girls in the group were unhappy with the expectation that they help out in the kitchen, but said that she felt at ease adapting to the situation because of her own culture.²⁸ Yet Latina students who stood out in the country due to their skin color experienced types of harassment they may not have felt in other locations. “I had hard times being a ‘white’ female in Africa,” a student who went to Senegal told us. “I got marriage proposals.”²⁹

SST expectations. Although some students were aware that their experience would likely be different than that of their friends, others felt lied to when they received an experience radically different from what they were expecting. Some were not expecting the amount of schoolwork that students were made to do, especially reading multiple chapters a night, which took away from valuable time spent with families.³⁰ One student mentioned thinking they would be studying at a university with other students, only to discover the reality of SST upon arrival.³¹ Others discussed how they weren't aware of how hard it would be; that they only heard the good parts of SST from friends and peers.³² Service families placements were sometimes disappointing. “I wasn't expecting a five-star hotel,” one student told us, “but at least a mosquito net.”³³ For someone who had luxuries like Wi-Fi, warm water, or their own bedroom, they felt like they were not having the “SST experience,” and shared disappointment that their transition

²⁷ Participant 8

²⁸ Participant 12

²⁹ Participant 15

³⁰ Participants 8, 12

³¹ Participant 12

³² Participants 2, 3, 10, 15

³³ Participant 3

was not as hard as it had been for others.³⁴ This experience of false expectations during SST has a direct connection to the systems of social capital discussed previously. Long-time exposure to a variety of stories about SST (the good and the bad, the proper mindset for service, etc.) provides students with better preparation as to how their own experience will be. Although some Latinos mentioned making the decision to go in without expectations, it appears that steps can be made to better describe the mindset necessary to succeed.

Values gained from SST

As stated in the thesis, this study contends that Latino students find value in going on SST, despite some already living a “cross-cultural experience.” These values can be broken down into three areas: challenging one’s identity, global connectedness, and decisions related to career path.

Challenging identity. This first category of value relates to personal growth Latino students experienced during and after SST. Traveling to a new culture allowed them to ask “who am I?” in a context beyond what they were familiar with. A common theme here was a newfound independence from family.³⁵ For many, this independence meant a deeper appreciation of their own adaptability, as overcoming each new experience built self-confidence. One participant felt that this experience allowed her to create her own identity apart from her family with individual values and self-worth.³⁶ Another student noted how SST allowed him to be more confident in who he was without regard for other people’s opinions.³⁷ The value of independence was especially prevalent for commuter students (this being their first time away from home), yet

³⁴ Participant 8

³⁵ Participants 9, 11, 16

³⁶ Participant 11

³⁷ Participant 9

some noted how this made the transition harder for their family members to let go.³⁸ As previously mentioned, many students felt a deeper Latino self-identity and appreciation for their own culture, often times resulting in a desire to understand more about their history. One student mentioned how after SST, she felt that she could better understand how her parents grew up and the reasoning behind their actions.³⁹

Global connectedness. An additional value for Latino students who went on SST was creating a sense of global connectedness. Living in another country gave them the chance to build language skills or see how other cultures organized their systems of politics, healthcare, and education.⁴⁰ One student noticed how professions with lesser value in the United States, such as farmers or teachers, were given great respect in this new culture.⁴¹

Many students noted how these experiences allowed them to open worldviews beyond typical assumptions or portrayals of a culture.⁴² For example, a student said that now when people talk ignorantly about this group of people, she can bring up her own experiences and tell them that they are incorrect.⁴³ Participants highlighted the benefit of understanding both what makes people similar across the globe, as well as what differences make people unique.⁴⁴ Furthermore, those interviewed saw the benefit of challenging why they do what they do or believe what they believe in their own families. For example, seeing how people interacted with each other in Peru made one participant value spending time with people more upon returning.⁴⁵

³⁸ Participants 13, 24

³⁹ Participant 24

⁴⁰ Participants 1, 3, 4, 8, 10, 12, 13

⁴¹ Participant 4

⁴² Participants 4, 8, 13, 15

⁴³ Participant 13

⁴⁴ Participants 4, 7, 15

⁴⁵ Participant 12

Not all Latino students experienced the same value of global connectedness from SST. One participant felt guilt coming back to luxuries in the United States when those he lived with for three months didn't have that option.⁴⁶ In addition, he felt that Latinos do not need to experience humility or poverty if they are already experiencing this or living between two cultures in the United States. Yet other students mentioned how this new global perspective allowed them to understand that the ability to travel puts them as Latinos in a privileged position already.⁴⁷

Career-related decisions. A third major value from SST has been its influence on career-related decisions. In particular, the experiences on the service portion of SST allows students first-hand experience, oftentimes in an area of work similar to their planned career path. These experiences allowed students to better understand what they want to do in life, creating either a feeling of confirmation in their choice of study or pushing them to change majors after SST.⁴⁸ Although service experiences tend to accomplish little direct change for those living in the host country, Latino students upon return have felt an increased desire to help those in their own community. One student said, "I felt bad because I don't know what to do to help people, so coming back I think about how can I help people's needs?"⁴⁹

Direct career opportunities often come as a result of going on SST. Multiple students and alumni have had employers become very interested in them after hearing about the skills developed during SST.⁵⁰ It appears that alumni are more able to examine the values SST has had on their decision-making, due to their time to process these experiences and see how they have

⁴⁶ Participant 3

⁴⁷ Participants 14, 24

⁴⁸ Participants 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 24

⁴⁹ Participant 12

⁵⁰ Participants 1, 8, 9, 11, 12, 15, 16

shaped their lives. Many of these alumni have direct correlations between SST and their current career, choosing jobs that focus on intercultural relations, peacemaking, or teaching.⁵¹

Values gained from SST-alternatives

For Latino students who did not participate in SST (for a variety of reasons previously mentioned), the alternative courses presented a mixed bag in terms of value. Here, there is some overlap with the values gained from SST, as students highlighted the benefit of learning about global cultures.⁵² For instance, a class called “History and Culture of Latinos in the United States” had a large impact on one student because she was previously unaware of most of Latin American history or the involvement of the United States in their social problems or violence.⁵³ Understanding other people's history outside of the dominance of European culture helped her to look at things differently, to shift her way of thinking and try to find the root of the problem. Another Latino noted how those in one of his classes who didn't have personal experiences with poverty had an eye-opening experience, yet their experiences in Nicaragua (as part of the baseball team trip) helped them to connect in other ways.⁵⁴ He found that class to be one of his favorite experiences at Goshen College because few other colleges value global perspectives to the same extent.

Although most alternative classes do not incorporate elements of service into the curriculum, one professor chose to do so for an SST-alternative capstone course. Students found that this portion of the class forced them to think differently about the world and question their assumptions (as opposed to the classroom element).⁵⁵ A Latino student who was previously ambivalent to service or volunteer work found a new desire to keep doing service for others after

⁵¹ Participants 13, 15, 24

⁵² Participant 23

⁵³ Participant 18

⁵⁴ Participant 17

⁵⁵ Participants 17, 20, 21

graduating.⁵⁶ Other alternatives have previously included service as well. In the past, GC offered a domestic SST that engaged in Latino culture in the area, visiting host families once a week and taking field trips. Although the program ultimately ended after just two groups due to lack of student enrollment, a former participant was ultimately glad that alternative classes were a requirement, as she would not have done them otherwise.⁵⁷ On one of the field trips, their group worked at a mobile health clinic that went to farms and treated migrant workers, an experience that was beneficial for her to see things that media normally overlooks. For her, it was nice to step out of one's own culture even if that means into another Latino culture; just because they're the same grouping doesn't mean they're completely the same.

Lack of value. Despite the value some Latinos have found in the alternative courses, many students feel ambivalent about them at best, hostile at worst. For some, the lack of value was due to a feeling of being watered down, lacking real depth in subject matter.⁵⁸ Furthermore, alternatives lack the immersion and service aspects of SST. One student noted how in these alternative courses, you leave the same way came in.⁵⁹ Students are not being challenged. This lack of options and value caused one student interviewed to seek out his own program. He did not want to take alternative classes, yet all the summer SST options were in a South American country (which he felt he could do better without the college), and so he put together his own independent proposal to do service in Bolivia.⁶⁰ He felt that this trip provided a more unique path than the introductory levels achieved in SST or alternative classes.

Even if the subject matter was engaging, some Latino students interviewed felt that a lack of options forced people into classes who didn't want to be there, which created a negative

⁵⁶ Participant 17

⁵⁷ Participant 20

⁵⁸ Participants 5, 21, 22

⁵⁹ Participant 5

⁶⁰ Participant 19

environment for those interested in the subject.⁶¹ Such classes only serve as a way to fill up their schedule rather than become a worthwhile part of their education. For some, this was due to its requirement aspect: why should Latino students have to take alternative classes if they are already living a cross-cultural?⁶² Another student said, “I don’t remember the exact classes but they were all useless and a complete waste of time and money...I was not allowed to use my tuition money toward Spanish classes which would have actually helped my career.”⁶³ When one can see that SST has direct impacts on students' choice of study or career path, can alternative courses provide the same for students? Despite the value some students gain from the courses, how much are they being challenged to broaden their way of thinking?

Policy changes:

Based on the findings of this study, the following are suggestions for how the college can better meet the needs of Latino students as they relate to SST.

Cost. Cost remains one of the primary barriers to SST for Latino students. In particular, this relates to the extra cost of room and board for commuters, as well as the added cost of taking SST during the summer for those whose schedules allow little flexibility. While a number of students suggested the cost of SST be lowered, there is unfortunately little the college can do to ease this financial burden. Simply put, the college barely breaks even with expenses for SST, and furthermore cannot afford to find money elsewhere that could be used to subsidize the cost. While there is an endowment that can be used in future to help reduce costs for the college, it currently does not have enough money to make a real impact.

There are things, however, that can be done related to cost. As previously stated, some students were unaware of the extra cost of Summer SST or believed those who lived on campus

⁶¹ Participant 5

⁶² Participants 3, 5

⁶³ Participant 22

got a discount. By effectively explaining the costs of going on SST, students can begin to work with the financial aid office to see what steps they can take to make this process work for them. Another potential area of improvement is to have a donation campaign that focuses on keeping SST running or reducing costs for the college, students, or even create a scholarship for commuter/Latino students.

Building relationships with students. An additional area of improvement is finding ways to maintain relationships with Latino students throughout their college career. Some Latinos who were interviewed felt as if the college only cared about getting them to come to Goshen, and gave little attention to them after arriving on campus.⁶⁴ Not only would building relationships with Latino students work to keep retention up, but also connect with students in a way that can explain the benefits of SST and see how to fit it into one's schedule early on. One alumni identified how students often wait until it's too late to decide about SST.⁶⁵ If the college can identify students early on who feel shaky about attending SST due to the experience or finances, they can more proactively encourage them to do SST.

Family communication. Not only does the college need to build better relationships with Latino students, but SST also needs to be better explained to Latino families. For white Mennonite students who have a handful of friends and relatives that went on SST, they have often been preparing to go for years. They know why they want to go, they know what to expect. However, Goshen College can no longer assume that its student body is all from the same background--doing so will only perpetuate this disparity within the SST unit.

One of the biggest issues here is providing Latino parents with a better understanding of what SST is, especially when considering the large cost and fears of being apart from family for

⁶⁴ Participant 10

⁶⁵ Participant 19

an extended period. Oftentimes, the parent is the deciding factor. Yet many Latino parents do not know what SST is, or why they should send their child on it. Furthermore, some parents who take time out of their schedules to attend meetings about it are invariably met with another barrier--the meetings are in English. Latino students who were interviewed frequently brought up the need to communicate information about SST to families in Spanish.⁶⁶

The college should engage in workshops or meetings specifically for Latino families (in Spanish), where Latino students who formerly attended SST can explain not only what SST is, but the values they got out of their experiences. Such meetings can serve not only to start thinking about the possibility of their child going on SST but to find resources for parents who may need others to talk about to ease concerns while their son or daughter is abroad.

Pre-SST Orientation. As can be seen during the Experience portion of this study, how prepared students feel for SST remains a mixed bag. While students may never feel fully prepared to travel abroad (dealing with culture shock remains an important part of the SST experience), steps can be taken to better ensure that the needs of students are being met throughout the experience.

One student highlighted how long some of the pre-SST orientation meetings are, causing students to feel overwhelmed by information or start to lose focus.⁶⁷ This can cause crucial information to go over students' heads. Although these meetings tell students not to go into SST with any expectations, for instance, these concepts could be better explained to help students understand that their experience will likely be different from those of their friends. Planning more frequent, shorter meetings can not only get this information across better, but find ways for students to get to know each other better beforehand (particularly commuters, who may be

⁶⁶ Participants 11, 12, 15, 16

⁶⁷ Participant 12

nervous about knowing fewer in the group). Creating a 0.5 credit hour course for students to take before leaving for SST, in which they meet for an hour once a week in the weeks leading up to departure may be such a way to find time to prepare for these experiences.

Furthermore, orientation meetings do little to see the specific needs within the group. Meeting with minority students within the group beforehand to talk about their expectations and fears is a good first step. For commuters, this may be their first time leaving home and therefore may not feel as comfortable sharing these concerns within the larger group.⁶⁸ Furthermore, Latino representation from former students during these meetings can help identify the variety of experience possible for future participants, particularly Latinos, who may experience different things than other students during SST.

In addition to helping students identify their goals for SST, there are steps leaders must take to be better prepared to care for their students. Making leaders aware of the problem of the Menno wall and of other specific needs of Latino students will serve to make them feel taken care of during their time abroad. Rather than assuming the needs or backgrounds of students (in terms of self-care, identification, connection with traditions such as hymn singing, etc.), having members of each SST unit fill out forms identifying such needs can more fully represent those present. Furthermore, leaders need to find ways to better prepare host families for the diversity of their host students. Expressing that not all Americans look the same or come from the same background can better ensure the students feel comfortable in their new environments.

Post-SST Processing. After wrestling with issues such as self-identity and global poverty, SST participants are left on their own once they have returned to the US. Steps should be taken for all students upon returning to further deal with these heavy questions. Similar to the orientation process, a 0.5 credit hour course upon returning would provide such a space for

⁶⁸ Participant 13

students. Small groups moderated by a trained faculty member should meet after returning to process their experiences and continue seeking answers to these difficult questions. Instead of requiring the Mahara portfolio, a tedious task that students complete out of obligation, those returning from SST would write a reflection during this course that would more effectively process their experiences and evaluate the program at the same time.

Revamp the alternative program. Although the college has traditionally given little attention to the SST-alternative program out of a desire to encourage more students to go on SST, there are ultimately some students who cannot participate for a variety of reasons. As such, the alternative program must be changed to provide students with experiences that serve as a valuable part of their GC education.

Firstly, the name of the program must be changed. The name “SST-alternative” causes students to think that the classes they will be taking are less-than.⁶⁹ Goshen College uses jargon that has little meaning to those unfamiliar with the programs. Calling the program something like “International Education” or “Global Education” removes this jargon and conveys the ideal outcomes of the classes.

Furthermore, steps should be taken to increase student buy-in by fully expressing what benefits the classes will provide them. Part of this problem is a shortage of options--students are forced into classes they do not want to be in simply because it fits into their schedule. With this problem of scheduling comes another consequence: students are placed into classrooms they are completely unprepared for simply because they are alternatives, a result that is unfair both for those taking it as an alternative and for those in whose discipline the class falls under.

In addition to re-examining the classroom element of the “alternative” program, the college should examine what aspects of the program are the most successful. These boil down to

⁶⁹ Participant 5

two sections: global education, and experience. Successful “alternative” classes provide students with a new perspective on the world by allowing them to learn about the impact of other cultures abroad or within the United States. However, these learnings should incorporate the experiential side as well. For instance, incorporating a service element into the program during the capstone class. Furthermore, students of various background find the three-week trips traditionally done during May Term very beneficial to their college education.⁷⁰ Continuing to focus on these types of trips both internationally and domestically can provide students with opportunities to broaden their perspectives without sacrificing large costs or giving up familial responsibilities. For students who cannot leave the United States due to legal reasons, trips to indigenous, Appalachian, Amish, or even Latino communities would provide cross-cultural trips within the country.

Conclusion

This study shows that SST provides a valuable experience for Latinos; however, it must be made more accessible and pay attention to the specific needs and address the particular experience of Latinos before, during, and after SST. In addition, the SST-alternative program must be re-evaluated to meet the needs of those who, for a number of reasons, cannot go abroad. Further research should be done on this subject, examining ways to help Latinos with the extra barriers of cost, finding room for flexibility in programs of study and athletics, and listening to the needs of specific members within SST units before, during, and after their journeys abroad. Furthermore, a task force is needed to re-examine the alternative program and create a more beneficial experience for students. By doing so, the college can more fully provide a global education for all its students.

⁷⁰ Participants 1, 3, 8

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