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Chapter 1: Introduction

from

El Otro Lado:

Considering the Impact of Education Abroad
on Host Families in Cuenca, Ecuador

a master's thesis by Søren M Peterson

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

This thesis is an issue-driven study that reviews the scholarly analysis of host-guest interactions in the education abroad literature, which has shown a largely one-sided view of the impact on students.¹ Noting empirical research on tourism and acculturation that has demonstrated that cross-cultural encounters lead to impacts on both guests and hosts, I suggest that the education abroad literature needs to consider the host perspective as well. I then present the perspective of families in Ecuador who host foreign students to learn what they perceive to be the impact of hosting.

In November 2005, the US Senate declared 2006 the “Year of Study Abroad” (Murphy 2006). This declaration reflects the growing importance

¹ For now, we can consider *education abroad* and *study abroad* to be essentially synonymous. Later in this chapter, I will provide a more nuanced understanding as I discuss the evolution of terms that have been used for the phenomenon.

of education abroad, in terms of the roles of US institutions of higher education and federal legislation, and is part of a widespread effort to increase the participation of US students in programs throughout the world. Although institutions such as Indiana University have offered short-term education abroad programs since 1879 (Hulstrand 2006b:48; Office of Overseas Study 2006), rapid growth in programs for undergraduate students did not occur until after World War I; even greater growth occurred following World War II and the start of the Cold War (Association of American Colleges 1960:1; Carter 1973:13; Hoffa 2002:57; Walton 2005). Walton notes that “before World War I, Americans who studied abroad were usually graduate students seeking scholarly or professional training in Europe that was not available in the United States” (2005:259).

Following World War I, Raymond W. Kirkbride, a French professor at the University of Delaware and a war veteran, proposed a year-long program in France for undergraduates (Walton 2005:259-260). Kirkbride initiated the Delaware Foreign Study Plan² with a group of eight students who sailed to France in July 1923 (Walton 2005:255). The program was designed so that students began their studies in the summer with intensive French language classes at a provincial university, after which they went to

² Sweet Briar College took over the Delaware Foreign Study Plan in 1948 (Walton 2005:278). Since that time, the program has been known as the Sweet Briar Junior Year in France (Sweet Briar College 2006).

Paris for the academic year (Walton 2005:262).³ During their time in France, students lived with host families. The Delaware Foreign Study Plan served as a model for later programs such as the Smith College Junior Year in France, which started in 1925 (Walton 2005:262-263).

After each World War, new education abroad programs were created out of “the hope that prospects for world peace and understanding ... would be increased if, during their formative years, young people were given opportunities to live and learn in each other's countries” (Hoffa 2002:57). In this respect, and especially following World War II, education abroad became “a major strategy in international education and world diplomacy” (Grünzweig and Rinehart 2002:5). Much of the growth in the late 1950s and 1960s was spurred or supported by federal legislation passed in response to the Soviet launch of *Sputnik* (Hines 2001:6; Wiley 2001:13). Such legislation included the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958 and the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, more commonly known as the Fulbright-Hays Act (Hines 2001:6-7).⁴

The NDEA, whose objective was “to insure trained manpower of sufficient quality and quantity to meet the national defense needs of the

3 Students generally studied at the University of Paris (Sorbonne), which began offering special classes for foreigners in 1919 (Walton 2005).

4 In addition, the International Education Act (IEA) was passed in 1966 but never funded; nevertheless, it influenced the creation and expansion of programs in the 1970s (Hines 2001:8).

United States” (Hines 2001:6), was perhaps the most important piece of Cold War era legislation. The NDEA included a section, Title VI (“Language Development”), that created programs such as language and area studies centers (Hines 2001:6).⁵ Many of these centers, including the nationally-recognized Center for the Study of Canada at the State University of New York (SUNY) at Plattsburgh,⁶ became involved in developing education abroad programs, especially ones with a language focus. Indeed, Lambert (2001:41) notes that foreign language study became the de facto purpose for the creation of many education abroad programs.

The Junior Year Abroad model, exemplified by the University of Delaware/Sweet Briar College and Smith College programs, predominated education abroad during the first half of the twentieth century (Bowman 1987:13). However, by the 1950s, the Eurocentric Junior Year Abroad model was no longer typical; newer programs were based in a wider variety of locations and had shorter durations (Association of American Colleges 1960:5; Bowman 1987:13). Although the term “study abroad” was

5 In 1980, the US Congress amended the Higher Education Act of 1965 to incorporate Title VI of the National Defense Education Act (Wiley 2001:15).

6 I was the Assistant Study Abroad Coordinator at SUNY Plattsburgh from 2000-2001 (and Interim Study Abroad Coordinator from January to September 2001). At the time, the study abroad office was housed in the Center for the Study of Canada and overseen by the Director of Canadian Studies and International Programs. SUNY Plattsburgh offers summer French immersion programs at three sites in the province of Quebec (Montreal, Quebec City, and Chicoutimi), and Spanish language courses can be taken in Mexico through the university's exchange program at the Universidad de Monterrey or in a sustainable development program in Oaxaca.

coined in the late 1950s, it did not replace “junior year abroad” (JYA) in common usage until the 1980s (Bowman 1987:13). More recently, the term “education abroad” has gained acceptance as a result of the growing popularity of experiential (i.e., non-study) programs such as internships, volunteering, and service-learning.⁷

As I suggested above, most of the earliest education abroad programs took place in Europe; programs in Latin America and other parts of the developing world appeared much later. One of the leading pioneers of education abroad in Latin America was Indiana University. It created a summer program for education majors in Mexico in 1939, and a summer program for Spanish majors followed in 1952 (Office of Overseas Study 2006). In addition, Indiana was the first US university to venture into the southern hemisphere when it opened an academic year program in Lima, Peru, in 1959 (Office of Overseas Study 2006; Bowman 1987:16). Bowman (1987) notes that other programs opened in Latin America in the 1960s, including ones in Argentina (Colgate University), Colombia (University of California), Costa Rica (one by University of Kansas and another by the Associated Colleges of the Midwest), and Mexico (California State College and University System).

⁷ For example, NAFSA (a worldwide international education association) replaced its “Section on US Students Abroad” (SECUSSA) with a new “Knowledge Community for Education Abroad” during its restructuring in 2005. The term “study abroad” is still widely used; however, in this thesis, I have elected to use the newer, more inclusive term “education abroad.”

Although US institutions started numerous programs in Latin America in the 1960s and early 1970s, by 1987 only 29 of those programs were still operating (Bowman 1987:53). The closure of many programs was due to economic crises and military dictatorships that plagued many Latin American countries (especially those in South America) in the 1970s.⁸ Moreover, these difficulties delayed the opening of programs in some parts of Latin America. For example, Stephenson (1999:7) notes that Stanford University took the first group of US students to Santiago, Chile, only in 1990. The following year, Bill Culver from SUNY Plattsburgh inaugurated the first program to integrate US students into regular classes with Chilean students (Stephenson 1999:8).⁹

In 1962, Argentina was the only Latin American country to appear in the list of leading education abroad destinations for students worldwide (Carter 1973:48); 40 years later, four Latin American nations—Mexico, Costa Rica, Cuba, and Chile—are among the 20 countries receiving the most US students (IIE 2005a). As a region, Latin America is second only to Europe.¹⁰ Although the percentage of US students studying in Latin

8 Furthermore, many programs, such as the Augustana College Summer Spanish Program, left Peru (or shut down) in the late 1980s due to the activities of Sendero Luminoso (“Shining Path”), a Maoist insurgency.

9 The Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE) started its own program in Santiago shortly afterwards (Stephenson 1999:8).

10 For academic year 2003-04, 60.9% of US students reported by the *Open Doors* survey studied in Europe; Latin America was a distant second with 15.2% (IIE 2005b).

America has not changed significantly in the last decade, the actual number of students nearly tripled, from just over 10,000 in 1993-1994 to nearly 27,000 in 2003-2004 (IIE 2005b).

During the same period, overall enrollment in education abroad programs increased at a slightly slower pace, from 76,302 in 1993-1994 (IIE 2006b) to an all-time high of 191,321 in 2003-2004 (NAFSA 2006:8). While the growth of the past decade is impressive, in late 2005 the Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Fellowship Program ("Lincoln Commission")¹¹ challenged the education abroad field to increase enrollment to one million students annually by the 2016-2017 academic year (Durbin 2006:6). This goal represents more than a five-fold increase over current figures and signifies that the field of education abroad will need to grow even more rapidly in the next decade to meet the challenge. Moreover, the Lincoln Commission made clear its desire for further democratization of education abroad. In addition to this dramatic increase in overall participation, it called for the demographics of participants to be more in line with those of the overall undergraduate population and for more students to study in non-traditional locations such as South America, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa (Durbin 2006:6).

¹¹ Congress established the Lincoln Commission in 2004 to significantly expand the opportunities for US students to study abroad, especially in non-traditional countries (Durbin 2006:4). The Abraham Lincoln Fellowship Program, although not yet funded, is the latest in a series of recent federal initiatives for undergraduate education abroad that also include the David L. Boren Undergraduate Scholarship Program (1991) and the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship (2000).

As Durbin notes, the United States “is continuously threatened by a serious lack of international competence in an age of growing globalization. Our world ignorance is now seen as a national liability” (2006:4). Such a concern is not new. Many US institutions have created education abroad programs, often with the support of the federal government, with the goal of cultivating mutual understanding between countries. Indeed, the interaction between education abroad participants and members of host communities presents an exciting opportunity to study the dynamics of cross-cultural contact, yet the education abroad literature has focused almost solely on students. Bochner et al. (1979), Carlson and Widaman (1988), and others have studied whether students develop an understanding of other cultures as a result of participating in education abroad and other intercultural programs. Adler (1975), Nash (1976), and others focused on students' personal growth. More recently, the Institute for the International Education of Students (IES) studied the long-term impact of education abroad on its alumni in such areas as language, intercultural understanding, and personal development (Dwyer 2004).

My review of the literature, facilitated by database searches (primarily Academic Search Premier) and bibliographies (e.g., Comp 2003; Learning Abroad Center 2004), uncovered only a handful of studies that address impacts, particularly sociocultural ones, on receiving

communities.¹² Stephenson (1999) appears to be the first to have studied impacts on host families. Her research in Santiago, Chile, also examined the sociocultural impact on education abroad students and Chilean university professors. Owen (1999) addressed the effects of international students on host families in Vancouver, British Columbia, and Sumka (2000 and 2001) analyzed the sociocultural impact of a summer program on host families in Quito, Ecuador.

Research on education abroad encompasses multiple academic fields, including anthropology, education, psychology, and sociology (Weaver 1989:1), and each of these disciplines logically examines the subject from a slightly different perspective. Nevertheless, as I noted above, scholars of education abroad—even anthropologists—generally have considered only one side of the cross-cultural encounter, focusing on the impacts on *students*.

The focus on students seems a deliberate one. Bochner et al. remarked that

there is usually an implicit assumption, shared by everyone involved ... that the primary function of host nationals is to teach, advise, and supervise the transformation of the sojourner. From this perspective, there is little need to study the growth and development of host nationals exposed to

¹² Skye Stephenson (1999) and Julie Levy (September 2004, personal communication), education abroad professionals at the School for International Training, and Shoshanna Sumka (2000), a graduate of the applied anthropology program at the University of Maryland, came to similar conclusions in their reviews of the literature.

foreign students, since none is assumed or expected.
[1979:31]

In contrast to this assumption, anthropological studies of tourism and acculturation suggest that cross-cultural contact between locals and visitors is not a one-way street. Acculturation theory, which has been used in both tourism and non-tourism settings, suggests that cross-cultural contact results in each group adopting at least some cultural traits from the other, resulting in an approximation of each culture toward the other (Nuñez 1989:266). This would suggest that education abroad programs are likely to have some kind of sociocultural impact on hosts. It is troubling that in the quarter-century since Bochner et al., only a few studies have attempted to learn about the impacts of education abroad on receiving communities (see Stephenson 1999; Owen 1999; Sumka 2000 and 2001; Levy 2002). This is lamentable for, as Stephenson (1999) and Sumka (2001) have noted, as a result of cross-cultural contact with students, hosts may develop a greater appreciation of their own culture and a better understanding of their guests' culture. Clearly, there is much to learn from studying hosts.

Drawing upon anthropological studies of tourism and acculturation, this thesis examines the literature's implicit assumption noted by Bochner et al. (1979) that education abroad programs do not have an impact on hosts. It does this by heeding Stronza's (2001:272) call for researchers to

involve groups on both sides of the encounter. To that end, I have integrated data from a variety of people, including current host families, former host families, language students, and key personnel of education abroad programs and language schools in Cuenca, Ecuador (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: Location of Cuenca, Ecuador

As the field of education abroad seeks to democratize—by sending one million students abroad by 2016-2017, especially to non-traditional locations, and by recruiting more of them from previously underrepresented groups—we must consider how this growth might impact the communities that host our programs. By focusing on host families, this thesis will make a contribution to the emerging body of knowledge about the sociocultural impact of education abroad programs on host cultures, as well as to anthropological studies of host-guest relationships. My primary concern is to understand the sociocultural effects of cross-cultural contact on the carriers of the host culture, specifically, host families in Cuenca, Ecuador, to examine whether those effects do, in fact, occur in both directions. To that end, this study asks questions about what occurs in the encounter between host families and foreign students, what host families think about these encounters, and

whether host families perceive that hosting has resulted in sociocultural changes.

Thesis Overview

This thesis begins by demonstrating the one-sided nature of the scholarly analysis of host-guest interactions in the education abroad literature. In contrast to the literature's focus on students, I then show how scholars have studied host impacts in the context of tourism. Based on this evidence, I contend that the field of education abroad must consider how, and to what extent, programs impact receiving communities. In doing so, this thesis gives voice to host families, whose stories generally have not been heard previously, in an attempt to examine host-guest relationships from their perspective. My ethnographic analysis forms the bulk of this thesis, which is divided into two sections that provide background materials and a case study of host families in Cuenca, Ecuador. The final chapter provides a summary of the findings and conclusions of this study and offers suggestions for further research.

More specifically, Chapter 2 presents the theoretical and methodological concerns of this thesis, which draw largely upon the scholarly work of anthropologists and other social scientists who have

investigated the sociocultural and economic impacts of tourism on local communities. In the chapter, I outline previous scholarly research on education abroad, the anthropology of tourism, and acculturation. I contend that, as Sumka (1999) proposed, education abroad is a form of *academic tourism*.¹³ In considering methodological issues, I briefly discuss theoretical approaches that give voice to those whose stories previously have not been heard. Finally, I discuss the nature of my fieldwork in Ecuador and the methods I used for my data collection.

Chapter 3 presents the background materials required to contextualize the ethnographic discussion and analysis that follow in later sections of the thesis. I begin with a brief ethnographic sketch of Cuenca, Ecuador, and then discuss education abroad programs, language schools, and homestays in Cuenca. This material sets the stage for the discussion of my ethnographic fieldwork.

Chapter 4 discusses the ethnographic fieldwork I conducted in Cuenca in 2005 (June-August and November-December). The chapter is based on both primary data and secondary materials I collected in Cuenca, including interviews with host families, students, and key personnel of education abroad programs and language schools, as well as tourism brochures, demographic data, and scholarly articles.

¹³ Sumka (1999) uses the term “responsible tourism.”

The thesis concludes with Chapter 5, in which I summarize the findings of my research, discuss the contributions and limitations of my study, and suggest topics for further research.