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OUTCOMES OF A SHORT-TERM MISSION TRIP

Introduction/Background

A short-term mission experience (STME) has been described as a form of volunteer service, characterized by a limited term of service from days to weeks, as well as carefully constructed objectives that may be attainable during that shortened time-period.^{1,2} The objectives are varied as according to the mission of the sponsoring organization. For example, sponsoring organizations may be churches, universities, hospitals, and other nonprofit institutions. And the objectives are as varied as the sponsors from specialized surgical repairs to water well constructions. The experiences also vary with the degree that the hosts are involved.

A STME may be one means of facilitating the development of core values. Core values are fundamental beliefs and attitudes, used by individuals or organizations to dictate behaviors, which are indirect measures of the individual's core values.⁴ Friesen found that a short-term mission experience may lead to positive changes in participants' beliefs, attitudes and behaviors immediately post the mission experience.² These core values are necessary for the development of the health care professional and therefore, the duty of the faculty to promote these values with their

students.

However, significant change of beliefs and values through a STME has not been clearly defined. Sykes conducted a systematic review concerning the outcomes of STME. Unfortunately, he found that 95% of the published studies lacked data collection and/or significant evidence of outcomes.³ Thus, the purpose of this study was to determine whether there is a change in three core values (ie, altruism, care/concern for others, and social responsibility) of graduate students, involving the health and wellness needs of a Navajo community, after a week-long mission experience. In addition, the information gained may provide insight with the development of future STME for graduate students.

Mission Team



Methods

Participants: All six graduate students, who participated in a short-term mission experience during the summer of 2018, were invited to be a part of this study. Two faculty supervised the students with a health and wellness camp for a Navajo community, located in New Mexico. The specific objectives were to: (1) provide



education and supportive resources, as appropriate for the participating Navajo community members, and (2) promote social responsibility and altruism of the graduate students.

Instruments: Two tools were developed for collecting data before and after the short-term mission experience. The pre-test battery consisted of demographic questions, questions from the *International Volunteer Impacts Survey*,⁵ and selected questions from *Core Values Self-Assessment*.⁴ The post-test battery consisted of open-ended questions, questions from the *International Volunteer Impacts Survey*, and selected questions from *Core Values Self-Assessment*.

The *International Volunteer Impacts Survey*⁵ is a self-assessment that measures motivation, intercultural relations, open mindedness, global identity, international understanding, civic activism, community engagement, and social skills. This tool has a 7-point scoring system with 1 equal to strongly disagree and 7 equal to strongly agree.

The *Core Values Self-Assessment*⁴ is a self-assessment that measures seven core values including accountability, altruism, compassion/caring, excellence, integrity, professional duty, and social responsibility. Only three were selected for this study: altruism, compassion/caring, and social responsibility. This tool has a scale of 1 to 5 for the core value, with 1 equal to *never exhibits the behavior* (ie, core value), 2 equals

rarely exhibits the behavior, 3 equals *occasionally exhibits the behavior*, 4 equals *frequently exhibits the behavior*, and 5 equals *always exhibits the behavior*.

Procedure: After receiving written consent, participants were given a battery of pre-tests and post-tests that had the same assigned number. The pre-testing session occurred prior to the short-term mission experience and the post-testing occurred after the experience.

The mission experience on a reservation for a Navajo community consisted of Health and Wellness camp for approximately 60 individuals across the lifespan from pre-school age to older adults. The camp provided an opportunity for students and faculty to offer oral health, nutrition, and self-esteem educational sessions; physical activities; theme-related crafts; a nutritious snack; and culturally sensitive psychosocial interactions. Each day had a theme such as *Share a Smile, On the Go, Inch by Inch*, and *Free to be Me*.

Analysis: Demographic data was analyzed with descriptive statistics. Data analysis of the *International Volunteer Impacts Survey* and *Core Values Self-Assessment* used frequencies and percentages, as appropriate. T test, repeated measures was used to determine differences between the survey results; alpha was set at .05. All qualitative answers were reviewed and analyzed, coded, and then formulated into themes using Microsoft Office products.



Results

Out of the six graduate students, two were male and five were female. The average age was 30.7 years \pm 5.64 years and the range was from 22 to 38 years. Six were Physical Therapy (PT) students and one was an Occupational Therapy (OT) student. All students had not had a missionary experience and only one student had a previous pro bono community experience; one evening, dodgeball game to raise money for a school in Haiti. See Table 1 for specific data concerning demographics.

Table 1. Demographics of Participants

	Frequency (f ^a)	Percent (%)
Gender		
Female	4	66.7%
Male	2	33.3%
Age (years)		
20-24	1	16.7%
25-29	1	16.7%
30-34	3	50.0%
35-39	1	16.7%
Discipline		
PT	5	83%
OT	1	17%

^an=6

*International Volunteer Impacts Survey*⁵

Using the *International Volunteer Impacts Survey*, the investigator found the average pre-test scores to be high (i.e., ≥ 5), whereby the students agreed or strongly agreed that they were motivated to gain a greater cross-cultural understanding; had experiences with people of different backgrounds; were open mindedness about other cultures; understood importance of global identity; were interested in community engagement, and possessed effective social skills. The two areas that were scored lower (i.e., ≤ 4) included understanding of international issues and involvement with civic activism. See Table 2.

The average post-test scores continued to have high scores (i.e., ≥ 5) with intercultural relations; open-mindedness about other cultures; importance of global identity; community engagement, and effective social skills. Interestingly the motivation to gain a greater cross-cultural understanding was slightly lower than the pre-test score. In addition, the understanding of international issues and involvement with civic activism were slightly higher after the short-term mission experience. However, the investigator found no significant change, using repeated measures t-test statistic, post short-term missionary experience. See Table 2.



Table 2. International Volunteer Impacts Survey⁵

Pre-scores	μ	<i>SD</i>
Motivation	5.11	0.73
Intercultural relations	5.05	1.23
Open mindedness	6.00	2.10
Global identity	5.00	1.33
International understanding	3.75	2.03
Civic activism	1.76	1.52
Community engagement	6.00	2.44
Social skills	6.11	0.72
Post-scores	μ	<i>SD</i>
Motivation	4.81	0.96
Intercultural relations	5.58	1.20
Open mindedness	5.93	0.72
Global identity	5.22	2.26
International understanding	4.67	2.06
Civic activism	3.4	2.27
Community engagement	5.57	1.76
Social skills	6.57	0.98
T test, repeated measures	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Motivation	-1.838447	0.12540
Intercultural relations	1.734104	0.14343
Open mindedness	0.103994	0.92122
Global identity	0.160540	0.87874
International understanding	0.768273	0.47702
Civic activism	1.035868	0.34774
Community engagement	-0.907959	0.40553
Social skills	2.188104	0.08029

^an=6

Core Values Self-Assessment⁴

Using the *Core Values Self-Assessment*, the investigator found the change in the average pre-test scores to a higher score for altruism, compassion, and social responsibility. The post-test scores were higher than 3.85 for those three behaviors. However, the investigator found no significant change, using repeated measures t-test statistic, post short-term missionary experience. See Table 3.



Table 3. Core Values Self-Assessment^A

Pre-scores	μ	<i>SD</i>
Altruism	3.98	0.60
Compassion	4.50	0.39
Social responsibility	3.53	1.07
Post-scores	μ	<i>SD</i>
Altruism	4.36	0.77
Compassion	4.58	0.55
Social responsibility	3.85	1.27
T test, repeated measures	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Altruism	1.496538	0.19477
Compassion	0.666963	0.53433
Social responsibility	1.19452	.028584

Open ended questions

All six students were asked to comment on whether their knowledge and attitudes changed through the short-term missionary experience. All but one student (83.3%) replied that there was a positive change. The same students indicated that they learned about other cultures with four specifying the Navajo community; one mentioning other native Americans; and one identifying community in poverty. In addition, two students learned more about medical issues such as Diabetes Mellitus.

Four of the students (66.7%) reported that their attitudes changed with a greater desire to help others in need, such as this Navajo community. For example, one student stated, “I am even more passionate about social responsibility for those in need by interacting and getting to know this culture.” Another student specified, “I liked educating and living with the natives and letting them educate us about their ways.”

Discussion/Conclusion

The results from two tools and open-ended questions demonstrated that the majority of participants appeared to be more attuned to future short-term missionary experiences or

other pro-bono work. There appeared to be growth in their own knowledge about a different culture, as well as medical issues, in particular Diabetes Mellitus. Selected core values (i.e., altruism, care/concern for others, and social responsibility) also appeared to be developed. Social responsibility was specified in the open-ended questions. Past research also supported this finding of positive changes within its participants.^{1,2,6}

However, significance could not be established mainly due to limited numbers of participating students, as there were only 6 students. Persistence also was not demonstrated because the post-testing was completed on the last day of the STME. Future research with a larger sample size is indicated to further explore the benefits of this form of pro bono service. An inquiry of whether the changes in attitudes and knowledge would continue over time is also recommended.

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