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# Asset-based community development practices in international service-learning: a content analysis of short-term programs in Nicaragua

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ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES IN  
INTERNATIONAL SERVICE-LEARNING:  
A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF SHORT-TERM PROGRAMS IN NICARAGUA

A Thesis Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Designation  
University Honors with Distinction

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University of Northern Iowa  
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This Study by: Kara Christine Poppe

Entitled: Asset-Based Community Development Practices in International Service-Learning:

A Content Analysis of Short-term Programs in Nicaragua

has been approved as meeting the thesis or project requirement for the Designation

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## Introduction

“One week and you are going to change the world!” This is the popular message that current short-term service-learning programs send while recruiting participants. A service-learning program is:

a credit-bearing, educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course, course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic participation. (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995, p. 112)

Participating in an international service-learning program has become a common experience for higher education students. Whether it is with a religious affiliate, service organization, or regular course work, thousands are participating in short-term service-learning programs through educational institutions in less-developed countries, such as Ghana, Haiti, and India. Some of the experiences these programs may provide for participants are interacting with other cultures, learning about poverty, and practicing another language. Most frequently, these programs involve a service project in a local community and tourist activities while in country. This collectively is also known as voluntourism, where participants’ purposes are serving others and making meaningful contributions to society while experiencing a new location.

Students have different motivations and goals for participating in an international service learning program, but there is a common link – the desire to make a difference. How is this difference made? Is it sustainable? What happens after the service-learning participants leave? Many service-learning programs have been criticized for focusing more on the self-development of the participants than on the impact they leave in the community (Cruz & Giles, 2000; Reardon, 1998). Common projects that service-learning students work on are the building of a

school, the donation of medical supplies, or the running of a food pantry, all of which are dependent on outside resources of knowledge, money, and materials to maintain long-term results. Many researchers report that needs-based service projects and donations create and reinforce a cycle of dependency on foreign resources (Kimball, 2004). Oftentimes, the structure of service projects focus on the benefits for the students rather than the community (Boyle-Baise, McClain, & Montgomery, 2010). However, an alternative model of asset-based community development projects, defined in this paper as projects where local community members, not foreigners, are driving initiatives to better themselves and their community, have the ability to stop the cycle of dependency, thus promoting self-sustaining projects (Mathie & Cunningham, 2005).

While there is significant research showing that asset-based community development projects are more effective at creating sustainable change in less-developed countries, there continues to be many international service-learning programs that focus on making their difference through needs-based projects. The needs-based model in international service-learning programs is not providing communities with long-term benefits. However, international service-learning programs should not be completely discouraged or stopped as they remain a transformative teaching tool and they allow for the spreading of other cultures, ideas, and languages (Green, Comer, Elliot, & Neubrandner, 2011). Yet, they should be restructured in a manner that promotes asset-based community development projects over needs-based or student-focused service projects. This research is significant because there are few studies showing the connection between international service-learning programs and asset-based community development projects. With the extraordinary volume of international service-learning participants each year, these programs being shifted to promote asset-based community

development projects have the potential to promote global understanding and create sustainable change in thousands of communities worldwide.

The purpose of the study is to explore how students on short-term international service-learning programs in Nicaragua interact with local communities by analyzing the structure of the programs as evidenced by course syllabi and website content. After extensive online research of international service-learning programs offered in Nicaragua, seven programs became the focus of the study. The four research questions included: 1) In what ways do the international service-learning programs support key components of service-learning, such as academic connections and reflection? 2) In what ways do the international service-learning program structure the time in the host country for service and tourism? 3) In what ways do the international service-learning programs show evidence of partnerships and reciprocity with the local communities? 4) In what ways do the international service-learning programs promote an asset-based community development approach, where local community members are driving initiatives to better themselves and their community? Through this study, it was expected that programs will have varying levels of interaction with local communities. By looking further at the four research questions, methods of increasing meaningful interaction with local communities will surface. Based on these findings, recommendations for future program leaders and students of international service-learning programs will be given to adopt in the planning and implementing of future service projects with local communities in less-developed countries.

## **Literature Review**

### **History of International Development**

International service-learning programs have risen out of Western involvement in international development. Practices of international development have been continually changing. The mass destruction of World War II led to the creation of the World Bank and the

International Monetary Fund, two major international organizations working to alleviate worldwide poverty (World Bank History, 2014; IMF History, 2014). Around this time, the United States also became involved with modern international development through the creation of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). International development assistance by the United States was spearheaded in 1947-1949 by the Marshall Plan, which provided financial and technical assistance in Europe to help rebuild the infrastructure and economy after World War II (USAID History, 2014). International development practices began to further flourish after President Kennedy signed the Foreign Assistance Act into law in 1961, which created the USAID. By the 1970s, the USAID began to focus on basic human needs, including food and nutrition, population planning, health, education, and human resources development. The 1980s brought a shift to using market-based principles for economic growth and employment opportunities in other countries. This was also when international development assistance through nonprofit and private organizations became popular (USAID History, 2014). At this time, it was common that paternalistic, top-down approaches of international aid, which did not involve the input of local community members, were widely accepted as effective (Brocklesby & Fisher, 2003). Recently, international development's agenda has become focused on poverty reduction and that anyone can help through the donation of time, money, or resources.

Controversy exists as to the effectiveness of these aid measures in poverty alleviation. An eighteen-year analysis of development aid revealed that there was not sufficient support to show that development aid led to high growth in developing countries (Ovaska, 2003). Global poverty reduction especially came to international attention when the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals were established in 2000 to work to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower women, reduce

child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability, and create a global partnership for development (Millennium Development Goals and Beyond 2015, 2014). While major organizations, such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and USAID, primarily support international development work with financial and technical means, higher education institutions have increased their role in international development by sending thousands of students on international service-learning programs to address social issues, such as those outlined by the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals.

### **International Service-Learning Programs**

In terms of this paper, international service-learning programs are characterized by one of the following: “faculty/staff-led co-curricular “mission” and service trips, academic courses with international immersion that include service experiences, study abroad programs with service components, or international programs with formal service-learning curricula” (Crabtree, 2008, p. 18). These programs have become increasingly popular as they are a way to develop hard and soft skills and increase employability (Lyons & Wearing, 2008). They have been praised for their success in increasing the cultural competency of students (Amerson, 2010). International service-learning participants generally work on projects with or for community members on topics that address the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals, making them contributors to international development. They are often marketed with labels, such as “making a difference,” “doing something worthwhile,” or “contributing to the future of others” (Simpson, 2004). The language of these suggest that participants are going to work with disadvantaged communities and change lives. Projects have an emphasis on end products, which may include “teaching the child,” “conserving the forest,” or “building a well” (Simpson, 2004). Well-intentioned organizations have and continue to be doing development work from this end product, student-



focused, needs-based approach, where needs are identified, further analyzed, and then solutions to the needs are implemented (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). Simpson (2004) argued that these programs reinforce the need for external sources of help in communities. This has been repeatedly identified as acting like a Band-Aid and being ineffective at creating positive, sustainable change.

International service-learning programs have undergone criticism that in many programs, the community is offering the student a service rather than vice versa (Grusky, 2000). Daniela Papi's TEDxOxbridge talk, "What's wrong with volunteer travel?," encouraged a shift from service-learning to learning service. Instead of traveling to a place with the intention of teaching the local community, Papi promoted the focus to be on learning from the local community with the notion that it is necessary to learn before one can help. Papi argued that the shift from sympathy volunteering to empathy learning will give the students the tools to change the world in the future. Short-term service that leaves participants with a sense of accomplishment allows students to leave without a realistic view of development (What's wrong with volunteer travel?: Daniela Papi at TEDxOxbridge, 2012). To mitigate this, international service-learning trips need to incorporate more study, critical analysis, and reflection of the experiences that participants have in less-developed communities (Grusky, 2000). If this does not happen, these trips are simply tourism and may not be addressing awareness of the socioeconomic disparities that exist today. Without the careful reflection of actions, international service-learning programs, which have a reputation for making a positive difference, have the potential to leave negative impacts in the communities where students work.

### **Negative Impacts of International Service-Learning Programs**

While international service-learning programs have clearly demonstrated positive impacts on students, it is crucial to consider the negative impacts of these programs on the local

communities. Schroeder et al. (2009) brought awareness to the potentially negative impacts of short-term study abroad trips on communities. These may include stresses on the community from participants' high water, electrical, and waste consumption, appearance of elitism, seasonal economic boosts, or usage of alcohol and drugs. When service-learning participants leave gifts for their host families or new friends in the community, this may cause jealousy or rumors amongst community members. Another phenomenon that may occur is that community members may appear act overly nice to please visitors and encourage them to spend money, give gifts, or return to the community (Schroeder, Wood, Galiardi, & Koehn, 2009). Additionally, it is important to consider that repeated short-term visits to an area may increase a community's reliance on affluent foreigners to help solve local problems. Other possible negative effects of international service-learning participants in local communities are:

Local children become enamored with the foreign students and the material possessions they take for granted; students and other visitors leave piles of used clothing and other "gifts" after project/trip completion; community members fight about project ownership as development activities exacerbate internal political and interpersonal divisions; members of neighboring communities wonder why no one has come to help them; projects reinforce for communities that development requires external benefactors; national governments rely on NGOs to respond to the needs in their country; and many students return to pursue courses of study and careers with little apparent divergence from the path of/toward privilege. (Crabtree, 2008)

Oftentimes, many of these potentially long-term negative impacts on local communities are not considered by students and program leaders. However, there are methods to lessen these impacts.

### **Managing Negative Impacts within Local Communities**

As program leaders and students in international service-learning programs in a less-developed country's community, it is necessary to consider the potential risks and outcomes of actions. As a form of tourism, international service-learning programs, have unpreventable impacts and consequences, but many can be managed to minimize the negatives and emphasize the positives (Archer, Cooper, & Ruhanen, 2005). Institutional commitment, knowledgeable program leaders, student and community preparation, establishment of long-term relationships, and institutional review are methods suggested to minimize these negatives (Archer, Cooper, & Ruhanen, 2005). Additionally, looking at how previous methods of international development have harmed communities and how new methods, such as asset-based community development (ABCD), may reinforce positive change can be used to minimize these negatives.

### **New International Development Practices**

This shift toward global poverty reduction has brought new ideas for creating sustainable change in international development. A leading idea is to implement asset-based community development practices. Some researchers provide examples of why previous methods of international development have been ineffective and how alternative methods of community development, such as asset-based community development, where local community members are driving initiatives to better themselves and their community, have become an increasingly popular method for international development.

Traditional development theory focuses on increasing the flow of capital from wealthy countries to poor countries to support development growth (Korten, 1987). Korten argued that the people who are administering the financial capital in poor countries often use this capital to increase their own wealth, status, and quality of life. Through continued streams of external capital, villages learn to wait for outsiders to support them and do not make the most of their own resources. Korten acknowledged that financial capital plays its role, but he recommended

that developing human capital is necessary for a sustainable future. He recognized that this is difficult as it requires that people must have the opportunity and incentive to mobilize the resources to manage serving others and themselves (Korten, 1987). This focus on the people and people's skills is crucial in alleviating poverty.

Tourism in less-developed areas can worsen the effects of poverty rather than alleviate them when the focus is on philanthropy, the giving of money or resources. Ashley (2005) argued that the tourism sector needs to shift from philanthropic approaches to ones that benefit the community through changing business practices. The primary advantage of philanthropic development is that it can alleviate immediate needs in a community. However, common disadvantages of philanthropy include projects that fail or cannot be sustained and the creation of dependency on external funding in a community. On the other hand, shifting from the promotion of philanthropy to the support of local business practice in a community can have long-term positive impacts through product development, income generation, and market appeal. Ashley (2005) identifies that the primary disadvantages of this approach are that impacts are slow to show and it requires high input of time and leadership. By moving the focus to local income generation, it is alleviating this need for continual external support.

Brocklesby and Fisher (2003) argued that development that is focused on people's assets, rather than on their needs, can paint a more inclusive picture what poor communities have to offer. When plagued with words or actions that suggest people from poor communities are less-abled than others, it creates a sense of elitism and negates that people are people everywhere. Brocklesby and Fisher (2003) advise focusing on asset-based community development, which is built upon the premise that people have five capital assets: "social capital (social networks and relationships of trust), natural capital (natural resource stocks), financial capital (savings, income, credit), physical capital (transport, shelter, water, energy, communications), and human

capital (skills, knowledge, and labor)” (p.187). A focus on these assets allows for people to see other people as people and use this as the central point to initiate and sustain change in communities.

Together, Korten (1987), Ashley (2003), and Brocklesby & Fisher (2003), highlight that providing external financial and physical resources to a community in a less-developed country is not going to promote that community’s self-sufficiency. While slow and without immediate results, focusing on the people of the local communities, what assets they have to offer and how that can be used to bring in local income generation, has the ability to create long-term change. The key to combining this with international service-learning programs is spending time with local community members and reflecting upon the experience.

### **Suggestions for Promoting Interactions with Local Communities**

Research suggests that students participating in international service-learning who have more interactions with communities have a higher impact on both the participants and the local community (Crabtree, 1998). Through observations with community-based organizations in El Salvador and Kenya, “communities well developed in terms of their self-sustaining organization and problem-solving capacities provide more powerful learning contexts for students while also producing more positive outcomes for community members and organizers” (Crabtree 2008, p. 24). While this is likely to be beneficial for both parties, international service-learning programs must consider the power dynamics associated with the United States and other wealthy nations. Fiske (1993) cautioned:

Cross-cultural [interaction] which is initiated and directed by the more powerful of the two cultures (for power difference is always part of the cultural differences) always runs the risk of reducing the weaker to the canvas upon which the stronger represents itself and its power. (p. 149)

Advocating for change should be local community driven and controlled, and the inclusion of the local community must be integrated into conversations and decisions (Wearing, 2009). For international service-learning programs and the local community to be able to do this, understanding of each other's culture and response in situations is critical (Wearing, 2009). Direct interaction between local communities and their foreign visitors is what stimulates long-term, socially and environmentally positive impacts (Wearing, 2001). To foster a focus on the relationships, not the end products of service, Root (2008) suggested a shift of questions with international service-learning participants from "What will we do?" to "Who will we be with?" and "Who will we be encountering?" (p. 317). Service-learning trips should be focused on "seeing, hearing, and sharing existence with others" (Root, 2008, p. 318), rather than doing something. Root (2008) advised preparing international service-learning students through reading literature written on or by the indigenous people, watching a documentary on a similar village, leading discussions on financial, political, and social situations in the community, and reflecting on personal cultural values and stereotypes. Through activities like these, which foster the focus on the local community members and the fundamentals of asset-based community development, international service-learning programs can produce "global awareness among all participants, providing opportunities to develop mutual understanding, and creating shared aspirations for social justice and the skills to produce it" (Crabtree, 2008, p. 29). A new chapter in international development and international service-learning programs where students and local communities are mutually benefitting from this cross-cultural interaction is possible.

### **Methodology**

This study consists of a content analysis of the websites and course syllabi of seven university-sponsored, service-learning programs in Nicaragua to answer the research questions:

1) In what ways do the international service-learning programs support key components of

service-learning, such as academic connections and reflection? 2) In what ways do the international service-learning program structure the time in the host country for service and tourism? 3) In what ways do the international service-learning programs show evidence of partnerships and reciprocity with the local communities? 4) In what ways do the international service-learning programs promote an asset-based community development approach, where local community members are driving initiatives to better themselves and their community?

The programs were selected from the first seventy results of a Google.com search of “Nicaragua Service-Learning Program” on February 6, 2015. Of the seventy results, seven were selected for further study because they met the following criteria: the program was sponsored by or affiliated with a college or university in the United States of America, offered course credit with the syllabus available online, involved a service-learning project, traveled to Nicaragua for less than three months, and operated in 2014 or 2015. The constant comparative method was used to identify emerging thematic categories from the content of the websites and course syllabi (Glesne, 2006). In this analysis, emerging themes included ways that programs applied specific elements of service-learning, including academic connections and reflections, structured time for service and tourism, demonstrated evidence of partnerships and reciprocity, and operated from an asset-based community development approach. A framework to better analyze these elements was developed and can be found in the results’ section. Only content from freely available website descriptions and syllabi were analyzed. For each program, if available, the following information was collected for the analysis: university description, course title, credit hours, length of course, course contact hours, time in Nicaragua, participation requirements, cost of program, course topics, course objectives and goals, partnerships with other organizations, living accommodations, tourist activities, community participation, assignments, service project design, language requirements, reflection opportunities, and other unique information.

### Program Overviews

The following seven program overviews are provided to introduce the basic framework and design of each program. Each description reflects the available information and was assigned a letter, A-G. Table 1 provides an overview of each program’s basic characteristics and the subsequent paragraphs provide more detail on the program structure.

Program	University	Course Title(s)	Credits	Time in Nicaragua	Language Component
A	Central Washington University	International Sustainable Development in Nicaragua	3	15 days; optional extensions	N/A; optional 9-day Spanish immersion
B	Old Dominion University	Nicaraguan Communities and Tourism	3	8 days	N/A; possible English-Spanish language exchange activity
C	The Chicago School of Professional Psychology	The Power of One – Nicaragua	3	9 days	Spanish skills welcomed
D	Tompkins Cortland Community College	Nicaragua: Anthropology and Health, Cultural Survey of Student Abroad in Nicaragua; International Health	6	14 days	Spanish speaking skills recommended; <u>Beginning Spanish for Healthcare Professionals</u> required
E	Portland State University	Global Aging; Service-Learning in Nicaragua	6	14 days	Spanish skills encouraged; at least one English and Spanish speaking student for every non-Spanish speaking student is strongly encouraged
F	University of Northern Colorado	Field Studies in Nicaragua: The Geography of Farms, Fish, and Food	3	9 days	N/A
G	Northwestern University	Doing Development: The Theory and Practice of Community Engagement; Development in the Global Context: Participation, Power, and Social Change	6	8 weeks	1 year of college-level Spanish required; language training in pre-departure orientation

*Program A* - Central Washington University (CWU), a medium-sized, publically assisted university, offers a three credit hour optional course, “International Sustainable Development in Nicaragua” in collaboration with the organization, Growth International Volunteer Excursions (GIVE Volunteers). It is open to students from any university. GIVE Volunteers operates the in-country program, which lasts fifteen days and runs eleven times between May and August. The course is delivered fifty percent online by CWU and fifty percent in-person in Nicaragua by



GIVE Volunteers staff. There is an average of thirty to thirty five students in each program session. In addition to Nicaragua, GIVE Volunteers also offers the same course for students in its Tanzania and Thailand programs. Students contribute to one of two service-learning projects: teaching English, health, and literacy or working on an eco-friendly construction site. GIVE Volunteers partners with local organizations and the United Nations. Students live together in a home for volunteers. The cost of the main program without the course is \$1995 plus airfare. The optional course is an additional \$1200 fee. Participants have the option to add a nine-day Spanish immersion experience before the main program for \$1095 and a twelve-day scuba reef conservation experience for \$1495 to the end of their trip.

*Program B* - Old Dominion University (ODU), a large, public research university, offers a three-credit course, “Nicaraguan Communities and Tourism.” The three-credit hour course runs in the spring semester with an in-country component of eight days in March. It is open to only ODU students. Students must pass a swim test. The course meets in person for eight weeks before and three weeks after travel to Nicaragua. While in-country, there are structured discussions, lectures, and writing assignments. Students participate in four service-learning activities while in-country, each for about half a day and at a different location. The service-learning activities are teaching English or leading structured activities with local children. Old Dominion partners with three local Nicaraguan organizations, Aprender Fundacion, Comunidad Connect, and Project Woo. Students spend four nights with a host family and four nights in a hotel. The cost is \$2850.

*Program C* – The Chicago School of Professional Psychology is a small, private graduate university. They offer a three-credit hour graduate course, “The Power of One - Nicaragua.” This program travels to Nicaragua for eight days in August (The Power of One: Service in Nicaragua, n.d.). The course is meets online for six weeks prior to travel. Students participate in one of three

service activities while in Nicaragua: “contribute to a psychosocial intervention with children in extreme poverty, engage in LemonAid Fund’s global forgiveness gratitude and appreciation research project, or work in capacity building of an INGO (international non-governmental organization)” (The Power of One: Service in Nicaragua, n.d.). Program C collaborates with the LemonAid Fund, Americas Association for the Care of Children, and local public schools. Nights at the beginning and end of the program are in a hotel, and the others are with a homestay. The cost of the program is \$1620 plus airfare.

*Program D* – Tompkins Cortland Community College (TCCC), a small, public, two-year college, runs “Nicaragua: Anthropology and Health,” a fourteen day in-country program in Nicaragua in January. The program meets in the fall semester to prepare for the trip. The program is six credits, three credits for “Cultural Survey of Study Abroad in Nicaragua” and three credits for “International Health.” The program is open to TCCC students only. Permission of the instructor and an interview are required for admission to the program. Prerequisites for participation are demonstration of college-level skills in mathematics, English, and reading and a college-level anthropology course. Students must be in good health, meet with a doctor before departure, be able to walk long distances, and be able to carry personal belongings. Spanish language speaking skills are recommended. The program fee is \$1800 plus airfare and tuition.

*Program E* – Portland State University (PSU), a large, public research university, offers a fourteen day in-country program in Nicaragua in June. It is open to junior or senior undergraduate and graduate students at Portland State University. Requirements for participation are 2.75 GPA for undergraduates or 3.0 GPA for graduates, transcripts, a statement of purpose, two references, and an interview. Spanish language skills are recommended. The program maintains a 1:1 ratio of Spanish and English speakers. The program is six credit hours. For undergraduate students, it is one six-credit hour course, “Capstone – Global Aging and Health:

Enhancing Communities in Nicaragua.” Graduate students take two, three-credit hour courses, “Global Aging” and “Service-Learning in Nicaragua: Enhancing Communities in Nicaragua.”

The course meets for five hours per week in the spring semester prior to travel to Nicaragua in June. Portland State University partners with the Jessie F. Richardson Foundation (JFRF) to facilitate the program. Students are expected to serve as representatives of the U.S., Oregon, Portland, PSU, and JFRF while participating in the program. The students stay in hotels. The cost of the program is \$3750.

*Program F* – University of Northern Colorado (UNC), a medium-sized, public university, operates the program, “Field Studies in Nicaragua: The Geography of Farms, Fish, and Food.” The course is three-credit hours and open to junior or senior undergraduate and graduate students from UNC. Students must be studying geography, environmental studies, history, international studies, social studies, or related sciences, and possess critical reading, analysis, and writing skills. The course meets for five weeks prior to a nine day program in Nicaragua in March. There are 120 course contact hours, thirty hours online and ninety hours in person. Students complete one and a half days of service. In Nicaragua, students stay in a hotel. The maximum number of participants is fifteen. The cost of this program is unavailable.

*Program G* – Northwestern University, a large, private research university, offers the Global Engagement Studies Institute (GESI). GESI is a nine and a half week summer study abroad program that is open to Northwestern University students and students across the country. With GESI, students may do their in-country component in Bolivia, Dominican Republic, India, Kenya, Nicaragua, South Africa, or Uganda. To participate in the Nicaragua program, GESI requires an individual to be an undergraduate or recent graduate with a 2.5 or higher GPA, have a minimum of one-year of college-level Spanish, be open-minded, flexible, and humble; submit an online application with two essays, resume, transcript, and the application form; and interview

with a staff member. The program participants for all countries are together for pre-departure training in Chicago for seven days prior to in-country travel and for three days afterward for a final summit. The program is six credits, three-credit hours for “Doing Development: The Theory and Practice of Community Engagement” and three-credits for “Development in the Global Context: Participation, Power, and Social Change.” The course is taught only in person. The service component is planning, implementing, and evaluating a small-scale community development project. Participants stay in a hostel while in Chicago and with a host family while in Nicaragua. The organization, Foundation for Sustainable Development, facilitates the in-country component of the program. The cost is \$7840 plus airfare.

### **Results**

The website content and syllabi were searched for main ideas and quotations that explain or directly support the service-learning approach, service versus tourism structure, partnerships and reciprocity, and an asset-based community development approach. Collectively, these results are one indicator of the types and depth of students’ interaction with local communities. The included tables display the highlights of the content analysis.

### **Service-Learning Approach**

The service-learning approach is described as the methods that the program leader uses to deliver academic content and facilitate reflection in connection to a service project. For each program, the style is varied, but all of them include required readings, written assignments, and oral and/or written reflections. Table 3 provides an overview of the academic elements, service component, and reflection opportunities of each program with more in-depth descriptions following.

Program	University	Academic Elements	Service Component	Reflection Opportunities
A	Central Washington University	Pre-departure assignments (self-assessment, principles of sustainable development description, and Nicaragua cultural research), double-entry journal, 16 reflection writings, participation (on-site activities and 14 discussions), final project	English language after-school program with a focus on English, health, and literacy or plastic bottle construction project	Daily oral and written reflection - “How does your experience thus far inform your understanding of the facts and issues you researched prior to departure?” - “How are you experiencing the transition from your cultural comfort zone to your new setting?”
B	Old Dominion University	Weekly readings and responses, trip journal, current event assignment, presentation (post-trip), participation, exam (pre-trip), instructor evaluation	Four half-days of service with youth arranged by local organizations	Professor-led reflection sessions, written journals - “To reflect on students’ positions as volunteers and tourists in Nicaragua.” - “We will reflect on our experience before we return.”
C	The Chicago School of Professional Psychology	Global Perspectives Inventory pre- and post-tests, discussions, project preparation paper, reflections, service project, video, participation, final presentation	Participate in 1 of 3 service projects: Forgiveness, Gratitude, and Appreciation (FGA) Workshop; data collection and analysis on FGA; or leadership and capacity building of an international nongovernmental organization	Daily oral reflection - “Through reflection, students can expand their knowledge beyond concrete facts, reach a new understanding of social problems, interpret real-life situations, propose practical and meaningful solutions to societal problems, and take informed action.”
D	Tompkins Cortland Community College	Written research assignment, reflective essay, or visual presentation; participation; reflective journal entries; group sessions; daily discussion; language preparation; presentations on and off campus	Students develop a small health project, like a basic first aid course or community workshop for parents of children with disabilities.	Reflective journal entries - “Reflective journaling is employed as a method of self-awareness and active transformation.”
E	Portland State University	Initial questionnaire, project plan, Portland-based training and reflection, pre-travel evaluation, spring-term participation, field participation, final program evaluation and reflection, final project report and presentation	Students develop a project plan related to aging and practice the activities on campus before traveling to Nicaragua.	Regular written and oral reflection opportunities - “Each day, teams will work together on various project activities and reflect on lessons learned.”
F	University of Northern Colorado	Participation and attendance; participation and performance in photo research activity; field journal; written project	One and a half service days working with a diabetes prevention program and on a farm.	Daily journal entries; one scheduled group discussion - “What is the role of indigenous people in food networks today?”
G	Northwestern University	9 group papers (project proposal, external work plan, 7 internal work plan and group progress reports, final summit summary); participation	Students develop and execute a project in Nicaragua in a small team with local Nicaraguans.	Reflective weekly papers and group reflection summit after the trip - “...they will participate in a series of cognitive assessments...to draw out relevant lessons about their projects, themselves, and development work more generally.”

*Program A* (Central Washington University): For students who elect to take the course, it specifically focuses on the following learning sequence: “contextual border crossing, dissonance, personalizing, processing, reflection, and integration” (UNIV 304 Nicaragua Syllabus, n.d.). Before departure, students focus on self-assessment, principles of international sustainable development, identification of issues affecting host communities. Required readings include a book and online sustainable development reports. In Nicaragua, students participate in a sustainable construction project or an English language after-school program that promotes English, health, and literacy. While in-country, there are sixteen modules, each with a dialogue circle and a reflective writing. Modules are focused on topics, such as culture and context, education and human rights, advocacy and aid in a complex system. A sample of questions discussed in dialogue circles include, “Based on your research and experience, how is the national and local governmental structure affecting the local people you have come to know?, What are the differences between charity and development and assistance and dependency?, and What do you see as the greatest challenge facing these communities in relation to the socio-cultural issues you identified” (UNIV 304 Nicaragua Syllabus, n.d.). Examples of reflective writing topics are “Identify one ‘victory’ large or small that you participated in or observed,” “How does your academic experience connect to your experience on the ground?” and “What do you have and what do you need?” (UNIV 304 Nicaragua Syllabus, n.d.). Two reflective discussions are scheduled while in-country. Upon return from Nicaragua, extracts from twelve of the sixteen reflective journal writings and a final project in the form of a paper, video, or PowerPoint are required.

*Program B* (Old Dominion University): Selected course objectives include: understand the complex political and economic relationship between Nicaragua and the United States that influences travel and tourism between the two countries; understand the different types of

tourism and how they impact communities in Nicaragua; critique the processes of tourism and community development in Nicaragua; and reflect on students' positions as volunteers and tourists in Nicaragua (ODU Program: Community & Tourism in Nicaragua, n.d.). Some of the pre-departure course topics are US relations with Nicaragua, international development in Nicaragua, volunteer tourism and eco-tourism, and Nicaraguan culture and traditions.

Assignments for this course include six response papers to required readings, journal entries that connect to course content, a current event paper, participation, an exam, and a reflective presentation. There are seven scheduled discussions. Students participate in four half-day service activities with children in the local communities. Sentences, such as "We will reflect on our experience before we return." and "Following dinner, students and the professor will have reflection/academic time" are present in the syllabus (ODU Program: Community & Tourism in Nicaragua, n.d.). The reflective presentation is delivered after returning to the United States and is to include what the student learned, thought about the experience, and references to academic content (ODU Program: Community & Tourism in Nicaragua, n.d.). Students have the opportunity to complete the faculty evaluation form at the end of the course to evaluate the instructor's effectiveness.

*Program C* (The Chicago School of Professional Psychology): Selected course topics include global leadership skills and culture and customs. The course is delivered online before and after the in-country travel and in-person while in Nicaragua. There are two required textbooks and four required journal or manual readings. Assignments include the pre-departure forms, six discussions posts, a project preparation paper, a reflection paper, a service project, a video project, a final presentation, and contributions to the team and professional content. Students are to answer questions, like "Please consider the impact the culture has in Nicaragua and its effect on people in coping with issues of conflict. Are there any human rights issues and

how does the culture address them?” and “What are the government policies currently shaping the issue/organization/system you will be working with while in Nicaragua?” in their online discussion posts. The service projects are designed before departure by the students through the project preparation paper assignment, which is to outline what the team will be doing, who needs to be talked to, what the team needs to know to accomplish the work, and what the team will be doing (The Power of One - Nicaragua: IS610 - Nicaragua, n.d.). Emergency procedures are discussed on the first day in Nicaragua. There are several references to reflection activities. These are “Students will be challenged to reflect upon their individual beliefs, personal biases, and judgments related to psychology practices” and “To reflect in service learning means to think critically about and analyze emotional responses to service activities in the context of the course content and the learning objectives of a particular course or curriculum” (The Power of One - Nicaragua: IS610 - Nicaragua, n.d.). Students are to participate in daily reflection discussions and keep a journal. After travel to Nicaragua, the program offers “students the space to reflect but also the opportunity to meet with fellow students to discuss ways in which service to a similar local population could be realized” (The Power of One - Nicaragua: IS610 - Nicaragua, n.d.).

*Program D* (Tompkins Cortland Community College): Pre-departure sessions include readings, lectures, movies, discussions, mini-assignments, and language practice (Culture Survey for Study Abroad, n.d.). There are two required books and a Spanish dictionary for healthcare professionals. Several other books on healthcare and Nicaragua are recommended. Additional resources on anthropology, field notes, travel, and Nicaraguan culture are listed in the syllabus. In Nicaragua, students observe, interview, and take field notes, and academic activities include listening to guest speakers, visiting museums, and working with local communities. The following are descriptions of the service-learning project:



- “Through primary observations and face to face interviews students will be able to integrate their didactic learning with the information they are presented “on the ground.” Students will visit the regional medical center, maternity house, families with ongoing health issues, and other relevant settings” (International Health, n.d.).
- “Students will identify a knowledge deficit in the region and develop a program based on this need. They will assist in creating health education modules for educational purposes to be presented to a variety of audiences” (International Health, n.d.).
- “On-site, students will work as a group to identify and complete a small health project, e.g., outpatient primary care health clinics, basic first aid course, diabetes education, community working for parents of children with disabilities...In country lectures from local health care practitioners may occur. Observation of maternity house care and hospital procedures will occur” (International Health, n.d.).

Students keep reflective journals and are invited to share these reflections in daily group discussions. In the syllabus, it states that “‘reflective journaling’ is employed as a method of self-awareness and active transformation” (International Health, n.d.). A written report or reflective essay and a presentation are required upon return to the United States.

*Program E* (Portland State University): In the ten sessions before traveling to Nicaragua, students watch films, listen to lectures, discuss projects, and participate in a mandatory Education Abroad orientation. Selected course topics are gerontology, community development, cross-cultural communication, public health, and community service. The syllabus addresses potential safety and health issues in Nicaragua, such as extreme heat and uneven walkways. The professor includes that “the classroom learning builds on student knowledge and skill sets in order to prepare teams of students to successfully complete projects in the field while traveling in Nicaragua” (PSU Faculty-Led Nicaragua: Capstone: Global Aging and Health: Enhancing

Communities in Nicaragua, n.d.). Grades are based on participation in the United States and in Nicaragua, pre- and post-travel evaluations, a project plan, training, reflection, a current event presentation, a country profile paper, a research paper, and a final report and presentation. There are seven required readings and a textbook. In the semester prior to travel, “students will develop a project plan, practice the activities that will be carried out in Nicaragua, and reflect on their experiences in preparation for implementing projects in Nicaragua” (PSU Faculty-Led Nicaragua: Capstone: Global Aging and Health: Enhancing Communities in Nicaragua, n.d.). The first days in Nicaragua are used as acclimatization time. Then, the students and faculty work at the service project sites, which include schools, medical facilities, and community organizations. Time is given for daily reflection on lessons learned. Students give presentations to community partners at the end of the time in Nicaragua. After returning to the United States, the program meets to reflect on their experience.

*Program F* (University of Northern Colorado): Before departure to Nicaragua, students are required to write a research paper on a topic related to Nicaragua. Sample topics for this paper include the community health movement, fair trade coffee in Nicaragua, or the farm stay as an agro-tourism model. There are required readings from ten journal articles and books. The main course topics are gaining an appreciation for the dynamic people and places of Nicaragua and learning about the geography of food, farms, and fisheries. In Nicaragua, the structure of this program includes a class lecture or discussion and a field activity each day. This program focuses on investigating questions, such as “What is the role of indigenous peoples in food networks today?” and “How does agricultural tourism and associated farm stays contribute to the state’s sustainable development objectives?” (Office of Extended Studies: Tentative Syllabus, 2014). While in Nicaragua, the professor gives lectures on agricultural tourism, fisheries, drug cartels, national parks, and food security. One group discussion is scheduled halfway through travel in

Nicaragua. A student's grade is determined on four areas: participation and attendance in all activities, participation and performance in a photo research activity, a field journal, and a written project. The service-learning component is short and occurs at the end of the trip.

*Program G* (Northwestern University): Program G is broken into three sessions: pre-departure training, the in-country program, and a return summit. A sample of course topics include, problem-solving, community conflict resolution, global development history, privilege, and power. Students meet for one full week of training in Chicago traveling to their placement country. During the training week, students participate in get-to-know you activities, language classes, instruction time for the six credits, a safety and security session, reflection sessions, and guest speakers. Several books, articles, and case studies are used throughout the course. There are two graded components of this course – participation and written assignments. Students are required to submit nine papers as a team, which consist of a project proposal, external work plans, internal work plans, group progress reports, and a final summit summary. The syllabus states, “This course is built on consistent written reflection, both individually and collectively in groups. The assignments are designed to help you and your group critically process the class material and shape the course of your project work in the field” (Logistics, n.d.). Project proposals are submitted after being in country for two weeks. Progress reports that contain challenges, accomplishments, areas for improvement, and plans for next week are submitted weekly. The program ends with a three-day reflection summit in Chicago. In the final summit summary, students “evaluate performance and impact of their work and ...draw out relevant lessons about their projects, themselves, and development work more generally” (Logistics, n.d.). In addition, exercises are completed on identifying opportunities and challenges and personal strengths and weaknesses. Students are asked to evaluate the program by sharing what

they found most and least interesting and useful and what they would improve if they were in charge of the program.

### Service versus Tourism Structure

The type and frequency of service and tourist activities are noted for analysis of how time is structured while in Nicaragua. Table 3 describes how many days that service or tourism activities were present and examples of what those activities were. A half-day of tourism counts as one day. Some days had both service and tourism activities present and are recorded in both columns.

Program	University	Service Days	Tourism Days	Example Tourism Activities	Example of Other Activities
A	Central Washington University	9	12	Surfing, kayaking, fishing, releasing sea turtles, volcano boarding, exploring Leon, snorkeling, going to the discotheque	N/A
B	Old Dominion University	4	4	Surfing, visiting a volcano	Participating in an English/Spanish language exchange, fishing/cooking/baking with host families
C	The Chicago School of Professional Psychology	8	0	N/A	Picnicking and hiking with host families
D	Tompkins Cortland Community College	N/A	N/A	Visiting historic sites in Managua, shopping in markets	Assessing children in an orphanage, observing clinical care
E	Portland State University	8	3	Shopping, participating in an optional tour, hiking	Visiting schools, community organizations, and medical facilities
F	University of Northern Colorado	2	1	Visiting a volcano	Touring an ecological preserve, a technical agricultural high school, a coffee processing plant, and a hydroelectric facility
G	Northwestern University	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

*Program A* (Central Washington University): Students participate in a service-learning project on nine days and in a tourist activity on twelve days of the fifteen days in Nicaragua. Students spend nine half-days working on the education or construction service projects. After the service project, students have the afternoon to enjoy tourist activities. Two full days and one night are reserved for tourist activities. Tourist activities available during the program include playing soccer with the locals, surfing, kayaking, fishing, relaxing, seeing sea turtles, fishing,

volcano boarding, exploring Leon, snorkeling, going on a boat ride, and dancing at the discotheque. Optional excursions include a nine-day Spanish immersion experience and a twelve-day reef conservation trip.

*Program B* (Old Dominion University): While in Nicaragua for nine days, four days have a service component and four days have a tourist component. The students participate in four different half-day service experiences with children and adolescents. Tourist activities are surfing and a volcano tour. Program B also spends three half-days doing cultural activities with community members, like cooking, language exchange, or dancing.

*Program C* (The Chicago School of Professional Psychology): There are no tourist activities scheduled on Program C's itinerary. A component of the service project is incorporated on all eight days (preparation, implementation, or presentation of results). Cultural activities with the host families, like hiking and picnicking, occur on two days of the program.

*Program D* (Tompkins Cortland Community College): The program description and syllabus do not include a detailed itinerary to determine the time spent on service projects and tourist activities. This program allows students to participate in clinics, observe clinical care in a hospital setting, assess children in an orphanage, practice Spanish and Miskito languages, and develop a small health project. Tourist activities include traveling by boat to remote villages, visiting historic sites in Managua, and shopping in the market in Masaya.

*Program E* (Portland State University): Students participate in a service activity on nine days and a tourist activity on three days of the fourteen days in Nicaragua. The service project is related to aging and health. Tourist activities include shopping, a tour of Managua, and an optional tour.

*Program F* (University of Northern Colorado): Students participate in a service activity on two days and in a tourist activity on one day. They are in Nicaragua for nine days. The service

component is one and a half days and occurs on the last two days of the trip prior to return to the United States. The first service day is spent visiting a health clinic to discuss a diabetes prevention program. The second service experience is a morning spent volunteering on a rural farm. Daily activities are linked to coursework. Some of these activities are touring the chocolate factory to discuss distribution channels and visiting a farm for a lecture by peasant farmers. The last half day is when the students participate in the volcano tour, which is labeled as tourism.

*Program G* (Northwestern University): This program does not provide a daily itinerary online. Most of the description is on course content or project development. There is no mention of tourist activities on the website or in the syllabus.

### **Partnerships and Reciprocity**

Partnerships that demonstrate working with, which promote collaboration and equality, are encouraged over working for, which suggests benefaction and superiority (Boyle-Baise, McClain, & Montgomery, 2010). Working with partnerships support continuous involvement, resource sharing, and sustainability. Examples of reciprocity, when a relationship is mutually beneficial for the parties involved, are also documented. Table 4 highlights the partnerships and reciprocity evident in the online content.

Program	University	Partnerships	Reciprocity Evidence
A	Central Washington University	GIVE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “As a GIVE volunteer, you will work with rural communities to implement valuable infrastructure that supports health, education, and the further development of human and social capital. Community support and involvement will be key in all development endeavors. Sharing culture, accomplishments, and forming bonds while working side-by-side with the locals is a critical part of the building process.”</li> <li>- “Together the students, instructor, guides, and local community members co-generate learning.”</li> <li>- Students play soccer with the locals.</li> </ul>
B	Old Dominion University	<u>Aprender Fundacion</u> , <u>Comunidad Connect</u> , Project Woo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “This will include meaningful engagement, immersion and discussion with members of the host culture about culture, tourism, and community development.”</li> <li>- “Following our breakfast we’ll divide into fishing/cooking/baking with different community members. This gives us a chance to look more deeply at the impacts of homestays and community based tourism.”</li> <li>- “After a delicious dinner, we’ll take the opportunity to talk to both local and foreign surf providers about tourism and the different impacts it has had on their community as well as their aspirations and plans for future development.”</li> <li>- “We’ll have a chance to share music, legends, and culture.”</li> </ul>
C	The Chicago School of Professional Psychology	Americas Association for the Care of Children, <u>LemonAid</u> Fund, and local public schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Meet the community women and exchange cultural understandings.”</li> <li>- “Visit and talk with women at tobacco barns.”</li> <li>- “Hike to waterfall and picnic with homestay families.”</li> </ul>
D	Tompkins Cortland Community College	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “On-site cultural immersion including guest speakers, visiting museums, and working with local communities.”</li> <li>- “On site, students work as a group to identify and complete a small health project.”</li> </ul>
E	Portland State University	Jessie F. Richardson Foundation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “At the beginning of the trip students will have dedicated time to orient themselves and with identified community partners.”</li> <li>- “For more than ten years, PUS students, faculty, and community partners have been working to improve the well-being and quality of life for older adults located in several project sites throughout Nicaragua.”</li> <li>- “Students will participate in public health and community development projects with older adults, local leaders, and other community stakeholders.”</li> </ul>
F	University of Northern Colorado	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “...museum: stop here <u>enroute</u> to <u>finca</u>/farm for lecture with <u>campesinos</u>.”</li> </ul>
G	Northwestern University	Foundation for Sustainable Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “All interns spend the first two weeks living with homestay families, studying Spanish intensively, participating in development and social entrepreneurship education discussions, project content and technical training, safety and security orientation sessions and visiting communities, and development and relief organizations in nearby towns and cities. This “ramp up” segment is essential to ensure that interns can work as effectively as possible with our development professionals and constituents in the field.”</li> <li>- “Enjoy your last few days together as a group to share your projects with local counterparts and the rest of the intern team. Work with our team to create long-term plans for how they will implement your projects and incorporate recommendations.”</li> </ul>

*Program A* (Central Washington University): In the course description, it states, “Through cultural immersion and experiential learning in an international setting, students will engage in activities designed to broaden their perspectives on sustainable development while providing opportunities for personal growth” (UNIV 304 Nicaragua Syllabus, n.d.). This is evidence of a working for relationship. The syllabus states, “Your willingness to participate, work as a member of a team, and be respectful of one another and all those we encounter is essential to a positive learning experience.” and “It is essential that we remain adaptive to changing circumstances and be patient with ourselves and those around us” (UNIV 304 Nicaragua Syllabus, n.d.). These statements support a working with relationship. Program A is partnered with local non-governmental organizations, rural communities, and the United Nations. For the service projects, the website provides other examples of partnerships and reciprocity, such as:

- “As a GIVE volunteer, you will work with rural communities to implement valuable infrastructure that supports health, education, and the further development of human and social capital. Community support and involvement will be key in all development endeavors. Sharing culture, accomplishments, and forming bonds while working side-by-side with the locals is a critical part of the building process.”
- “GIVE is partnering with the residents of Little Corn Island, Nicaragua, and the United Nations to clear out an invasive species of weeds from a 24-hectare swamp that serves as the hub of biodiversity on the island, then replace it with mangroves and other suitable foliage” (GIVE Nicaragua Excursion, n.d.).

*Program B* (Old Dominion University): Program B collaborates with three local organizations, Aprender Fundacion, Comunidad Connect, and Project Woo. One of the course objectives is “to reflect on students’ positions as volunteers and tourists in Nicaragua” (ODU



Program: Community & Tourism in Nicaragua, n.d.), which suggests that students are working to understand their role in the partnerships. In the service projects, there is evidence for working with partnerships:

- "We will join Norman, their music teacher and lacrosse coach for an afternoon of structured activities that we determine with the children."
- "We'll have a picnic lunch in a nearby community, Carrizal, where we'll help teach a community English class designed to create lifelong learners who feel comfortable with themselves and others...This is one of Comunidad Connect's programs. Following the class, we've invited young adults in the community to come play soccer and volleyball with us" (ODU Program: Community & Tourism in Nicaragua, n.d.).

In addition to working alongside locals for their service projects, Program B also collaborated with the local community for recreation and educational enrichment opportunities.

- "We'll return...later in the afternoon for some academic time followed by dinner as a group, and a bonfire with the community. We'll have a chance to share music, legends, and culture before our final night's sleep..."
- "Following our breakfast we'll divide into fishing/cooking/baking with different community members. This gives us a chance to look more deeply at the impacts of homestays and community based tourism."
- "After dinner, we'll be having dessert, coffee, and conversation with locals and longtime residents who have participated in San Juan's surf tourism. These experts will include both locals, Nicaraguans from other parts of the country, and foreigners. This is one way to gain insight into the changes, positive and negative, brought by

tourism and lessons learned” (ODU Program: Community & Tourism in Nicaragua, n.d.)

*Program C* (The Chicago School of Professional Psychology): Program C does not list any official partnerships with local organizations. However, Program C reveals high levels of involvement with community members. This is displayed through, “Students will learn through observation, dialogue with local community members, international aid agencies and government officials and engaging in a variety of community service initiatives” (The Power of One - Nicaragua: IS610 - Nicaragua, n.d.). In the syllabus, the professor indicates that “much of the preparation time in country will be done with locals to help transference of skills so that our work is sustainable after we leave. We will have time to have substantial immersions of students into the host culture” (The Power of One - Nicaragua: IS610 - Nicaragua, n.d.). Activities in Program C’s itinerary include “visit...to meet the community women and exchange cultural understandings,” “orientation meeting with cultural mediators and ...leaders...to identify skills and content for our work together,” “visit and talk with women at tobacco barns,” “they [community members] will have time to ask questions and contribute psychosocial aspects to better the projects if appropriate,” and hiking with host families (The Power of One - Nicaragua: IS610 - Nicaragua, n.d.).

*Program D* (Tompkins Cortland Community College): This program writes little on the community portion of the program, but in its description, it states that the program “is intended for any student interested in a full cultural immersion experience with a high level of interaction with local people” (Culture Survey for Study Abroad, n.d.). Later in the syllabus, it states that “...students will work with local communities on needs that the community identifies...observation sites may include local villages, health care settings, local NGO’s, universities, or local homes” (Culture Survey for Study Abroad, n.d.).

*Program E* (Portland State University): This program has a long partnership with the Jessie F. Richardson Foundation. There are many examples of partnerships and reciprocity with the local community in the program description and syllabus:

- “For more than ten years, PSU students, faculty, and community partners have been working to improve the well-being and quality of life for older adults...throughout Nicaragua” (Health and Aging in Nicaragua, n.d.).
- “The course is based on a service-learning model which attempts to foster deliberate and mutually beneficial learning among older adults and community partners in Nicaragua and PSU students” (Health and Aging in Nicaragua, n.d.).
- “At the beginning of the trip students will have dedicated time to orient themselves to the country and to build bonds among themselves and with identified community partners” (PSU Faculty-Led Nicaragua: Capstone: Global Aging and Health: Enhancing Communities in Nicaragua, n.d.).

*Program F* (University of Northern Colorado): This program does not have any listed partnerships or direct evidence of reciprocity. However, the main objective of the course is to “encourage an appreciation of the dynamic people and places of Nicaragua through intensive classroom and field study...” (Office of Extended Studies: Tentative Syllabus, 2014). Students are encouraged to learn as much as possible about Nicaragua prior to departure.

*Program G* (Northwestern University): Foundation for Sustainable Development is Program G’s partner. “By preparing for, doing, and evaluating community development projects, students will become more competent collaborative change agents in their communities and institutions” is the purpose of the pre-departure training (Logistics, n.d.). Program G emphasizes partnership with the communities through explaining, “During your fieldwork, you will apply these principles to design and implement a small-scale community development project with a

team of peers and local community partners” (Logistics, n.d.). In the final summit in the United States, program leaders ask questions, such as, “Who participates?,” “Who is left out or excluded?,” and “To what degree did your organization’s activities build the capacity of community actors and organizations to advance development goals?”

### **Promotion of an Asset-Based Community Development Approach**

Finally, content was searched for evidence of an asset-based community development approach, where the local community members are integral in the process. This was developed based on the idea that, “if communities are perceived as capacity-rich, then students identify assets, in terms of people and organizations, and build upon them. Community people become partners to, not clients for, service projects” (Boyle-Baise, McClain, & Montgomery, 2010, Chapter 4, p. 3). Some highlights of evidence for and against an asset-based community development approach are present in Table 5. While all programs supported an asset-based community development, four programs (A, B, C, and D) revealed content that contradicted this approach.

Table 5 – Asset-Based Community Development Approach			
Program	University	Supporting Asset-Based Community Development Approach	Contradicting Asset-Based Community Development Approach
A	Central Washington University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “How have you experienced the people, places, and programs you’ve seen?”</li> <li>- “Based on your research and experience, how is the national and local governmental infrastructure affecting the local people you have come to know?”</li> <li>- “Self-assessment survey to frame the preconceptions of the upcoming experience in light of each student’s own cultural context.”</li> </ul>	- “The design is generated to elevate the students’ personal experience while enriching it academically.”
B	Old Dominion University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “To understand the different types of tourism and how they impact communities in Nicaragua.”</li> <li>- “We will join Norman, their music teacher and lacrosse coach for an afternoon of structured activities that we determine with the children.”</li> <li>- “We’ll have a picnic lunch in a nearby community where we’ll help teach a community English class designed to create lifelong learners who feel comfortable with themselves and others... This is one of <u>Comunidad Connect’s</u> programs. Following the class, we’ve invited young adults in the community to come play soccer and volleyball with us.”</li> </ul>	The students spend each day doing different activities, which decreases the opportunity to build trust with community members.
C	The Chicago School of Professional Psychology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Students will learn through observation, dialogue with local community members, international aid agencies and government officials...”</li> <li>- “Students will demonstrate a basic understanding of Nicaragua culture, people, and traditions.”</li> <li>- “Students will have developed a culturally relevant adapted Forgiveness, Gratitude, and Appreciation Manual for the Nicaragua culture.”</li> </ul>	- “This is a hands-on experience... where beyond an amazing study abroad transformative experience and making a difference you just may end up with a publication and a training to add to your CV.”
D	Tompkins Cortland Community College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Examine the given historical context and the impact of Western culture on developing nations.”</li> <li>- “Students may learn of a community-identified need and assist in problem solving. Students may work side-by-side with locals on a given community project.”</li> <li>- “Using focused areas of interest, students will be placed in a variety of settings to gain a more complete understanding of the culture from the indigenous peoples’ perspectives.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Through participation in actual healthcare clinics, students will be exposed to the disparities and the functioning of a third world healthcare system.”</li> <li>- “Students will identify a knowledge deficit in the region and develop a program based on this need.”</li> </ul>

E	Portland State University	<p>- “The course is based on a service-learning model which attempts to foster deliberate and mutually beneficial learning among older adults and community partners in Nicaragua and PSU students.”</p> <p>- “The program operates in a sustainability framework that stresses the importance of engaging Nicaraguans in a way that will benefit members of today’s and tomorrow’s communities with the long-term goal of building community capacity.”</p>	N/A
F	University of Northern Colorado	<p>- “The goal of the course is for students to gain an appreciation for the dynamic people and places of Nicaragua through intensive classroom and field study.”</p> <p>- “How does agricultural tourism and associated farm stays contribute to the state’s sustainable development objectives?”</p>	N/A
G	Northwestern University	<p>- “Based on ABCD and participatory development models, students will build their skills and strategies for doing short term, small scale development projects with local NGOs and community members.”</p> <p>- “Second, while working on international development case studies, the student groups will learn how to move from diversity to divergence, from divergence to convergence, from convergence to action, and from action to learning. How they make these moves will determine their ability to work together, interact with their host organizations, and engage their community partners in multi-cultural contexts.”</p>	N/A

*Program A* (Central Washington University): This program explained that not just the program leaders teach through the statement, “Together the students, instructor, guides, and local community members co-generate learning” (UNIV 304 Nicaragua Syllabus, n.d.). The syllabus emphasizes a principle of quality over quantity. Although much of the website content is on the tourism components, GIVE’s website has a statement about their commitment to asset-based community development.

- GIVE is dedicated to empowering our host communities by identifying and building assets that foster the development of physical, human, and social capital. This is done in accordance with the Asset-Based Community Development Model (ABCD), which is a

leading sustainable development practice. We work directly with community leaders and credible NGOs to find out what the host community's strengths and opportunities are, and then work alongside them to build off of these strengths using sustainable development principles. This capacity building approach ensures community participation and encourages community driven prosperity with our assistance, and has led us to be warmly received in all of our host communities (GIVE Nicaragua Excursion, n.d.).

*Program B* (Old Dominion University): One of Program B's course objectives is "To understand the different types of tourism and how they impact communities in Nicaragua" (ODU Program: Community & Tourism in Nicaragua, n.d.). Throughout the website content, there were many attempts to participate in reciprocal activities and hear the community's perspectives. However, when doing service, each of the activities only lasted for half of a day, which does not allow sufficient time to develop relationships. These are one-time service events, which do not long-term change as much as continuous service events do.

*Program C* (Chicago School of Professional Psychology): In this program, students work on creating culturally-appropriate materials, which reflects consideration of the community. Time in this program is dedicated to building relationships with host families. However, the website content continually highlighted the resume benefits of participating in this program.

*Program E* (Portland State University): This program has been running for many years and has evolved. The website content highlights that "The program operates within a sustainability framework that stresses the importance of engaging Nicaraguans in a way that will benefit members of today's and tomorrow's communities with the long-term goal of building community capacity" (Health and Aging in Nicaragua, n.d.). The students design and practice

their projects while in the United States, which although well-developed are not fully completed with the communities in mind.

*Program F* (University of Northern Colorado): Students are encouraged to learn about the people in Nicaragua as Program F's syllabus states, "Course will encourage an appreciation for the dynamic people and places of Nicaragua through intensive classroom and field study..." (Office of Extended Studies: Tentative Syllabus, 2014). The itinerary includes many tours of local places and supports an experiential learning model. The program does not go into further depth about how students will gain an appreciation for the people and places of Nicaragua.

*Program G* (Northwestern University): In the pre-departure training, Program G's students have a unit on asset-based community development. Students are to use this training in the field: "Based on ABCD and participatory development models, students will build their skills and strategies for doing short term, small scale development projects with local NGOs and community members" (Logistics, n.d.). During the project and at the end of the program, group members are asked to evaluate their work and offer methods for future improvement.

By looking at the tables and quotations for the service-learning approach, service versus tourism breakdown, partnerships and reciprocity, and the asset-based community development approach, it is evident that these seven programs interact with the communities to different extents. For example, Program A has strong messages about commitment to asset-based community development and community partnerships, but a main focus of the website content is on the tourism activities that the students will participate in while in Nicaragua. Program C and G had the greatest focus on the service work. In both of these programs, there was little to no focus on tourism activities. Program B focuses on integrating the community members in their activity through sports and meals. This evidence supports that there are varying levels of



programs using the asset-based community development approach in interacting with communities.

### **Discussion**

Through analyzing the information on the service-learning approach, service versus tourism structure, partnerships and reciprocity, and promotion of an asset-based community development approach, indications of community involvement levels were found and interpreted.

#### **Service-Learning Approach**

Service-learning is often criticized for having many different definitions. In this study, the approach of combining classroom learning and preparation and service were further analyzed. Before traveling to Nicaragua, most programs focused on learning academic content related to the course topics. For Program B, most assignments needed a connection back to the required readings or lectures. Overall, the syllabi revealed that students were encouraged to develop connections between their classroom learning and experiences in Nicaragua. Most programs had oral or written assignments that involved further research into course topics-related issues in Nicaragua. There was focus on the issues facing Nicaragua, but little to no attention given to learning about the people of Nicaragua before going to Nicaragua except for in Program F. Program F demonstrated this through bringing native Nicaraguans or those who have spent extensive time in Nicaragua as guest speakers at pre-departure training. Few programs had time allotted in the syllabus for health and safety discussions or an outlet for instructor evaluation. Some programs had language requirements, most encouraged some Spanish language skills, but few focused on language development before or during the program. Program E required there to be a one to one ratio of English and Spanish speaking to English speaking students. In the pre-departure training of Program G, there were daily Spanish classes. For Program D, a course topic specific English-Spanish dictionary was required. All programs, but Program G, had program

leaders or students design their service project prior to travel to Nicaragua. Program G is longer than the other programs, which allows in-country project development with community members to be more feasible. Reflection is a critical component of service-learning, and all programs dedicated time for reflection before, during, and/or after travel to Nicaragua. Common methods for this reflection were in journal entries, papers, and discussions. Overwhelmingly, the focus of the programs, and specifically the service-learning component, were on the student and what they would be benefitting from it. These findings are significant because they indicate that the programs' service-learning approach have common elements, such as academic content and reflection, but differ in other areas, such as language preparation and service project development.

### **Service versus Tourism Structure**

Of the seven programs, four (C, D, E, and G) had service as the primary activity while in Nicaragua. Programs A and B divided their time between service and tourist activities. Program F's focus in Nicaragua was primarily on experiential learning experiences connected to the course topic rather than service or tourism. Most service projects were directly related to the course topic. For example, Program C prepared, implemented, and presented results on a forgiveness workshop, and Program D developed a small health project. Program C and G did not mention tourism activities in their website content. This indicates that service projects are connected to the classroom learning and that tourism was not the dominant component in the programs' itineraries.

### **Partnerships and Reciprocity**

Some programs displayed stronger evidence of partnerships and reciprocity than others. In particular, Programs A, B, C, E, F and G demonstrated this particularly well. First, Program A mentioned that "sharing culture, accomplishments, and forming bonds while working side-by-

side with the locals is a critical part of the building process” (GIVE Nicaragua Excursion, n.d.). This supports Korten’s argument that human capital is an important part of the development process (1987). Next, Program B regularly works with existing organizations for service projects and incorporates students into the locals’ daily activities, such as playing soccer or making meals. Program C structured time for meeting with locals to identify skills and allowing them to ask questions. Program E indicated in the program description that faculty and students had been working with community partners in Nicaragua for ten years. This program also allowed students time to be in Nicaragua before beginning work with community partners. The main course objective of Program F is to gain an appreciation for the dynamic people of Nicaragua, which suggests that the program is running not to make changes, but to encourage understanding. Program G was the only program to openly state that it would have a discussion on who is and is not participating in the projects and how well the students worked with the community members to build capacity. Partnerships and reciprocity are key to asset-based community development as they are an indicator of the extent of working with the local communities. While the programs interacted with the local communities in different ways, the evidence suggests that developing partnerships are key components in these programs studied.

### **Promotion of an Asset-Based Community Development Approach**

Most programs show evidence that the students receive insight from local community members while in Nicaragua through community meetings, observations, or local lecturers. Programs A, B, C, and D, showed evidence of an asset-based community development approach in some locations and not others. One example of this is in Program A’s course description, it states, “Through cultural immersion and experiential learning in an international setting, students will engage in activities designed to broaden their perspectives on sustainable development while providing opportunities for personal growth” (UNIV 304 Nicaragua Syllabus, n.d.). This

suggests that the focus of the program is on the students' development, not the local community's. However, in one location on the program's website, it says, "We work directly with community leaders and credible NGOs to find out what the host community's strengths and opportunities are, and then work alongside them to build off of these strengths using sustainable development principles" (GIVE Nicaragua Excursion, n.d.). In the first quotation, the growth is solely on the student, which contradicts the asset-based community development approach, but the second one strongly supports the asset-based model. This example displays a theme throughout the programs. When programs contradicted the asset-based community development approach, it was most often because the focus was on what the student was benefitting from the experience. The programs displayed varying levels of commitment to the asset-based community development approach. Some of these examples were more surface-level, like "The goal of the course is for students to gain an appreciation for the dynamic people and places of Nicaragua through intensive classroom and field study" (ODU Program: Community & Tourism in Nicaragua, n.d.) and "Students may learn of a community-identified need and assist in problem solving. Students may work side-by-side with locals on a given community project" (Culture Survey for Study Abroad, n.d.), where the website content did not go on to further explain how they were going to accomplish this. Several of the programs only spent one day or less working at each specific site. This does not promote the continuity and relationship building that is stressed by the asset-based community development approach. Additionally, words like, third world and needy, implies that communities are less capable. Focusing on assets, not needs, is the foundation of the asset-based community development approach.

Program G provided robust evidence that it attempted to maintain an asset-based community development approach throughout the program. Students are trained in the fundamentals of an asset-based community development approach before going to Nicaragua,

develop their projects with a team of peers and locals, and are asked to evaluate their ability to work with this approach. Program G displayed that its program design supports the asset-based community development approach with more in-depth examples in the website content. One example of this is "...students will learn how to articulate and align shared core values, common goals, and mutual self-interests, as well as discover and mobilize gifts, assets, and resources. Successfully "doing" these verbs is essential to build and sustain consensual interdependence in their groups, between their groups and host organizations, and with their community partners" (Ciudad Sandino, Nicaragua, n.d.). The findings imply that while all programs show some evidence for using an asset-based community development approach, many programs are able to be restructured to further promote the community's involvement throughout the program with the asset-based community development approach. If the international service-learning programs want to be conducting meaningful service that leaves a lasting impact, then it must be completed with the communities' priorities in mind. Recommendations for how this can be accomplished are included.

### **Limitations**

Since this study only analyzed freely available content about the international service-learning programs from websites and course syllabi, other factors were not taken into consideration. Service-learning programs in Nicaragua of higher, the same, or lesser quality were not included in the study because they did not meet the five criteria. The written content may not be updated or accurately reflect what occurs in the classroom or on-site in Nicaragua. Additional written material may be given to students during class or in Nicaragua. Service, academic, and tourist activities not listed in the written content may occur. In addition, each program may have used a different definition of service-learning. This analysis was unable to measure the short- and

long-term impacts of international service-learning programs on students, program leaders, local communities, and poverty alleviation goals.

### **Recommendations**

Many programs were not included in this study because the course syllabus was not available. It is recommended that students are aware of program goals and expectations before agreeing to participate. By providing a syllabus, either online or in-person, and creating course requirements, this minimizes the likelihood that a student participates in a program that is not well-suited for a student's academic plan or interests.

Based on the literature review and the findings of this study, it is recommended that the focus of international service-learning programs be on cultural exchanges with the local community rather than on attempting to make a difference in the community in a short timeframe (Root, 2008). The following table lists some examples of activities that promote mutually-beneficial interactions and an asset-based community development approach.

Table 6 - Recommended activities for students to participate in with local community members	
Discuss issues in formal and informal settings	Play sports or go hiking
Stay with host families	Share stories and ideas
Prepare meals with community members	Observe daily routines
Learn key phrases of each other's language	Assist with household tasks

In accordance with asset-based community development, create a culture of reciprocity where the students and community members are sharing ideas. In a few days or weeks, taking the time to learn from one another may inspire change for both the students and the community members more so than a small service project. This may be accomplished through a variety of methods. Collaborating with local organizations and maintaining community partnerships are approaches to begin building these cultural exchanges. Through engaging in activities, such as storytelling, sharing meals, or playing sports, both the students and the community members learn. If feasible,

arrange for accommodations with host families and allow time for students to participate in daily activities with the community members, such as cooking a meal, fetching water, or working in the fields (Raymond & Hall, 2008). When doing this, it is important to be respectful of the community members' time. Be conscientious that the activities are not stopping or discouraging community members from normal activities, like taking goods to the market, attending school meetings, or visiting a sick neighbor. Although communication without words is possible, it is respectful for students to learn at minimum the greetings in the local language. This may help to build trust between students and community members. When possible, provide translators so that students and community members are able to communicate with each other more. Short-term programs with a language component may encourage students to study another language in their home country or during another abroad experience (Gorka & Niesenbaum, 2001).

Before engaging in an international service-learning program, it is necessary to consider the answers to the following questions from the perspective of the community, the students, and the program leaders.

Perspective	Questions to consider
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How will we be involved with the students?</li> <li>- Will there be an on-going partnership?</li> <li>- What will happen after the students leave?</li> <li>- Will the students' presence be more beneficial or harmful to our community?</li> </ul>
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How will we be involved with the community?</li> <li>- How would we feel if students from Nicaragua came to our community to do this project?</li> <li>- What will happen in the community after we leave?</li> <li>- Will our presence be beneficial or harmful to the community?</li> </ul>
Program Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Are we preparing our students for travel to a less-developed country (e.g. language, safety, culture shock)?</li> <li>- Are we connecting academic content to in-country experiences?</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Are we focusing on mutual learning for the students and the community?</li> <li>- How is our program's presence viewed by the community?</li> </ul>
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The answers to these questions can help foster discussion and guide an appropriate agenda for the time in another community.

If a program would like to involve a service project, then engage and involve the local community members as much as possible and like many of the programs in this study, pair it with academic content and critical reflection. Without the opportunity to process the experiences and understand its local and global contexts, it is service, not service-learning. While preparing and planning ahead are important, a service project must be built upon the goals and strengths of the community members. It is difficult for students to design a project for a community that they have not met. Their agenda may not be appropriate for the community that their project is to be implemented in. If possible, have an equal or greater number of local community members for every non-local person working on the project. Before starting the service project, allow time for the students to observe and learn from the community members. This allows students to begin discovering answers to questions, such as:

- What assets does the community have available?
- What are some of the community's values?
- What do community members enjoy doing?

Conducting an asset mapping exercise with community members allows both parties to greater understand the resources available to them (Neal, Wilson, DeLaTorre, & Lopez, 2010). This can serve as a launching point for current or future projects. By listening to the community's voice, this allows the projects to be led and molded by the community members. Community organizations may help with the facilitation of this. This often will take more time than if led by the program leader or students, but a service project with the goals and timeline of non-locals is



unlikely to sustain itself without local community ownership. It is also important to avoid projects that have a temporary solution to a long-term problem, such as providing one meal to address hunger issues in the community. Additionally, it is crucial that service projects are designed out of materials that are readily available, both physically and financially, to community members. If a project is dependent on resources from another city or country or are too expensive, then when the materials run low, they are unlikely to be replaced. By taking these recommendations into consideration, future international service-learning programs will better support asset-based community development practices, which is more mutually beneficial for both the students and the community members.

### **Conclusions**

The purpose of the study was to discover how students on short-term service-learning programs in Nicaragua interacted with local communities by examining the programs' structure as evidenced by course syllabi and website content. Through analyzing this content, the results revealed that the service-learning programs in the study have different levels of interactions with local communities and commitments to the asset-based community development approach in Nicaragua. All programs tie the service component to the academic content and reflection. Without these components, it is simply service, not service-learning (Grusky, 2000). However, most of the programs' foci are on service activities rather than tourism, which promotes that students are there to do more than have fun. The focus of one program (F) is on learning about the people and places of Nicaragua rather than on designing and implementing a service project. This program aligns closely with a learning service, rather than service-learning, model (What's wrong with volunteer travel?: Daniela Papi at TEDxOxbridge, 2012). Through this model, the students are gaining in-depth perspectives the country and culture that promotes understanding over change. Evidence of partnerships and community collaborations were found in all

programs, but some programs were structured around more reciprocal activities. Hiking or cooking together are examples of activities from the studied programs that encourage dialogue and cross-cultural understanding between students and community members. The asset-based community development approach discourages the cycle of dependency (Mathie & Cunningham, 2005). Some programs displayed evidenced of working with the community members to drive change from within. These findings are significant because they highlight ways that current and future program leaders, students, and community organizations can shift away from needs-based models with asset-based methods. This information is to be used to reflect upon their own programs and to improve or develop the structure of future programs. Table 8 displays elements of an ideal asset-based community development program.

Table 8 – Elements of an ideal asset-based community development program	
Academic Content	Service versus Tourism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop rigorous academic curriculum that connects to the in-country experiences</li> <li>- Provide regular opportunities for oral and written reflection (individual and group)</li> <li>- Arrange thorough pre-departure training that includes discussion of safety and health, culture shock, and language preparation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Structure activities around mutual learning</li> <li>- Do service activities if it is appropriate</li> <li>- Limit tourism activities</li> <li>- Tie in academic components to tourism activities when possible</li> <li>- Allow community organizations to design short-term service projects</li> </ul>
Partnerships and Reciprocity	Asset-Based Community Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Arrange accommodations with host families</li> <li>- Dedicate time to learning about the host culture before, during, and after travel</li> <li>- Listen to the community organizations and community members</li> <li>- Allow time for sharing each other's culture (food, language, games)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Place the communities' priorities first</li> <li>- Complete an asset-mapping activity</li> <li>- Use words of empowerment, not negativity</li> <li>- Determine if the program's presence is wanted in the community</li> <li>- Maintain equal or greater ratio of local to nonlocal members of project teams</li> </ul>

By using these strategies to give more attention to the impact on the local communities, rather than to only the students, local communities will be better equipped to sustain change after the students leave.

Future research is needed to measure if short-term programs without a service-learning component have a long-term influence students and community members. This could be expanded to see if there is a difference between short-term and long-term programs. In addition, it is necessary to determine if an asset-based community development service project developed with community members sustains change longer than a service project developed by program leaders and students. Finally, it is necessary to evaluate if these projects significantly contribute to achieving the Millennium Development Goals in less-developed countries.

International service-learning programs designed and implemented with, not for, the community members are more likely to successfully address the Millennium Development Goals. It is recommended that program leaders, students, and community members collaborate to reflect on what is the best agenda for all parties involved. If a service project is determined to be appropriate, implement it with asset-based community development practices in mind, such as an equal or greater local to nonlocal ratio and asset mapping. A strong focus on the community members and the program's impact on the local community will create a more mutually beneficial learning experience for all.

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