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Purpose over Performance: Student Perceptions of International Student Service Projects
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Anthropology Honors Thesis
Professor William Fisher

Introduction:

Are we, as students at an American college, more equipped to disseminate resources in a foreign place than the locals? This question sparked debate at one of the most memorable meetings of my extracurricular international student service project. Cathy, my counterpart, insisted that, rather than only send resources for our local partners to utilize, it was imperative that we also travel to the place to facilitate resource distribution. This was not because of any anticipated breeches in trust for our contacts to do this job fairly, but from a perceived importance of our positionality as foreign members who attract attention.

As students from an American university, she said, we attract attention in a foreign area, from both people inside and outside of the communities with which we work. This attention is used to bring the communities we work with more recognition in the international system and consequently better access to resources they need. But where were these resources to come from? Cathy was suggesting we, as American students working on a community development project in our spare time, were markers of communities that should receive resources because of our arbitrary engagement with them. I disagreed. These places were not devoid of resources solely because they had not yet been given attention; there weren't enough resources to go around.

Discussions like these questioned our roles in international student-run service projects, and reflected academic debates over development in general (i.e. what is the impact of westerner's "service" in non-western areas?). At the end of our meeting, we had come to no conclusion. What did we really know for sure? We would be traveling there in less than a month.

At the time of this conversation, I was the leader of an international student service project (ISSP), a group on campus dedicated to partnering with a foreign community to help

address social justice issues, and had begun questioning my own role and the role of these groups on William and Mary's campus and throughout the globe. My perception of my own involvement and the impact of my well-meaning action began to decay as I learned more about global systems, international development, and specific social and political situations in the area. I found myself skeptical of the efficacy of our group, but still working hard to implement trips and interviews. As my opinion began to diverge, my group members and other successful trips demonstrated to me that we could be effective; we were just a "work in progress."

I was not alone in my doubts, however. I noticed similar concerns raised by other ISSP (International Student Service Projects) group members. These were assuaged by the idea of our mutual purpose of good work and the necessity of that work being done in a pronounced ethical manner. We had all read articles about irresponsible student or NGO (non-governmental organization) intervention, but by nature of our ethical methods, that was not what *we* were doing. All ISSPs have methods to properly engage with a community, either self- or professor-taught, and I believed those methods were the best guarantee of our success. My particular group was focused on problems of environmental degradation in Bangladesh. My involvement with it, and the interviews described here transpired prior to my research with students on campus.

When I was in country with the project in 2012, walking around the village with my Bangladeshi counterpart, we adhered to my group's chosen methodology. Every tenth house, we interviewed the household members in our three-way method of conversation: English to Bangla, Bangla to Bangla, Bangla to English. We completed these interviews to learn about their livelihoods in general and hoped to use this information within our methods to understand community-identified problems and develop solutions in regards to the environmental disasters so frequently plaguing rural Bangladesh. While interviewing, we received not only a wide scope

of attention, but also gifts of food (while we were asking them about their low agricultural productivity), not to mention the gift of time it took to answer our rather lengthy initial survey. I believed that, because we adhered to these community-based methods, *we* were the ones helping *them* and thus I was a good person.

Many groups like mine thrive on William and Mary's campus. There were 20 in fall 2014, representing about 5% of the clubs and organizations on campus. These groups travel to international communities big and small, and attempt to address social justice issues from public health to education. Despite their diversity, these ISSPs all have similar frameworks and purposes, evoking public praise for their good works. Students involved in these trips are undergraduates; meaning involvement has a four-year time limit. Many of the goals and purposes of these groups align poorly with this time frame and limit their effectiveness as catalysts for development.

In this paper I examine what I have observed to be student perceptions of ISSPs and the realities behind their existence. In order to understand these perceptions, I conducted interviews with student leaders and members of these organizations, examined the advertising presence of ISSPs, and developed an autoethnography of my own involvement. Systematic data collection and analysis enabled me to identify what I believe are significant patterns involving participation within ISSPs and the group interaction and organization, including the effort to sustain initiatives in the face of constant membership turnover.

Background on International Service Learning at William and Mary

The oldest ISSP on William and Mary's campus in continued existence began in 1999, over 15 years ago. This ISSP is still running based on an evolving purpose and mission, now

focusing on positive change for youth in its region. Similar projects begun in the early 2000s have a solidified methodological ideology, and are often still working toward their original long-term goal. Newer projects are focused on establishing a clear purpose, as well as the operational problems of securing original logistics for travel and stay in country.

During the span of 17 years, the number of ISSP groups at the College of William and Mary has grown to 20. The records on how many ISSPs have started and either lost student interest or completed their purpose, thereby disbanding, are unclear. The question of completed purpose is difficult when considering that some of the ISSPs have endured over 15 years on campus, and is contrasted by the idea that students initiate ISSP groups each year. On campus there is a clear focus on the initiation of groups, and the sustainability of those groups' purposes, but less focus on the achievement of a given purpose.

During the course of this research, at least one additional ISSP began, recruited members, and planned travel. The 5% of student clubs and organizations ISSPs represent is rapidly growing in ratio. This presence is growing year by year through accolades, student desire and school acknowledgement.

To be considered an extracurricular group on campus an ISSP must submit a constitution and an application for recognition to the Office of Student Leadership and Development. This enables the use of on-campus space for events and meetings and allows on-campus advertising. This is imperative due to the high number of groups and student pool of interest. An ISSP may not get the membership it wants if the school does not recognize the group.

The push for school acknowledgement, and the given requirements, leads an ISSP to ascribe to an official text that may not directly align to their purpose. In my own ISSP involvement, my co-leaders and I wrote in our constitution that we did *not* travel abroad as a

group, and that individuals traveled separately from the recognized school group of their own volition. We all traveled together and we were travelling as a group. Likewise, we told our community partners that we were a group at William and Mary, not individuals traveling separately to help. This is a very apparent way in which an ISSP configured its organization and script of interaction to fulfill the recognition of the school, but it is evident in more subtle ways as well. An important outcome of the school recognition requirements is that ISSPs are accustomed to a discrepancy or divergence from what is scripted about their purpose, involvement, and formulation, and what is realized in action.

Furthermore, the cultural idea of school recognition and the benefit it offers means that, while it may not be explicitly stated as a requirement by the school for acknowledgement and existence, students expect an extracurricular they might join to have officers and set positions/avenues for involvement. The movement through the leadership hierarchy of an extracurricular is important to students as an outward acknowledgement of achievement that can be used in other aspects of that student's life as proof of certain characteristics or skills.

The ISSPs on William and Mary's campus are organized in recognizable patterns. This is formally true in reference to school recognition and student expectation of an extracurricular group. This is informally recognized in specific student expectation of ISSPs (leadership skills, moral association, research skills, etc.) and the competitive relationships ISSPs have with each other in regards to student recruitment and funding, evident on William and Mary's campus because ISSPs are so prevalent and well known. I believe ISSPs are important to study not only because of prevalence, but also because of the way these patterns combine to facilitate the association between ISSPs and ethical international engagement and/or personal morality fulfillment in the minds of students. ISSPs seemingly monopolize this role. Further, the literature

on service learning, community engagement, and international development, as well as sensationalized media stories regarding trips like ISSPs, informs the students about what is important in the formation of a service-oriented internationally engaged group. This formation is regularly patterned, and ISSPs new and old are decisively organized in an intentional manner.

Theories Informing ISSP Patterns

Service Learning and Community Engagement

Students are generally not exposed to literature on service learning and community engagement until they become involved in an ISSP. Prior to exposure, this literature is implicit in the media portrayals of development, as well as the popularity and good opinion of ISSPs on William and Mary's campus. Once introduced to the literature within an ISSP framework, students more explicitly apply themes from the critical academic literature they have read. However, it is important to note that, within a student run ISSP, the students and/or professor advisors are the decisive factor in the literature and critiques a general student member is exposed to; students read what leaders in ISSPs tell them to.

This literature within community service learning generally focuses on methodological design and outcomes for students (Claus and Ogden 1999, Kenney et al. 2002, Kiely 2005, Strait 2009, Wei-Wen et al. 2012). Students and faculty alike find community engagement a more successful, lasting way to learn, and identify with land grant universities' original mission to give back to communities at large (Kenney et al. 2002). The university programs of today clearly acknowledge the commitment to student learning as top priority. One director of a youth program said that its focus was not on service, but "development of leadership skills and the pursuit of action leading to community improvement," (Claus 1999: 2). This is reflected in ISSP

organization, because ISSPs do not require skills necessary for research and community improvement prior to entry; these are taught within the meetings and mission of the group itself. This represents a high valuation of student skill development based on the time needed to teach and hone these skills.

Student skill development represents one part of the literature on student outcomes. These outcomes include, “international competence, language skills, appreciation of cultural differences, tolerance for ambiguity, and experiential understanding of complex global problems,” (Wei-Wen et al. 2012: 233). These outcomes are considered a result of the program design from which the students engage in a service capacity, and largely focus on performance as a result of program design (Litke 2002). This program is evaluated in the realm of knowledge formation (Kane 2012), civic involvement (Moely et al. 2002), and critical thinking skills (Kiely 2005) for students involved.

Methodological considerations are likewise emphasized, distinguishing between traditional and critical service learning categorizations (Mitchell 2008, Hautzinger 2008), as well as defining “community-based” (Viswanathan 2004) and giving advice on proper implementation of this form of method (Willis et al. 2003). Mitchell distinguishes traditional service learning, consisting of reflexive learning, from critical service learning that “...aims to dismantle structures of injustice” (2008: 50). Hautzinger also makes this distinction, associating traditional service learning with direct participation and critical service with more observance and “community-based learning” (2008). These distinctions are important for ISSP groups as they relate to outsider perception (i.e. recruitment and funding) and in-country action.

Community-based models are perceived to be more involved and ethical by students, and can

therefore validate an already-involved student about their interaction with a community, or an interested student more likely to join an ISSP because of its perceived community focus.

Community-based learning and service takes many forms in both title and organization. Community-based participatory research (CBPR), one form cited by ISSP groups, emphasizes collaborative research with a defined community to produce beneficial social change (Viswanathan 2004). Community-based research and learning methodologies are associated with student learning in the literature (Willis et al. 2003, Kane 2012). Other ISSPs use ideas of community-based learning, even if it is not recognized as such by name. This may be a result of the ISSP competition and interaction of William and Mary's campus, and the pressure to formulate ISSPs in a certain way, as well as the influence of experiential methodological reforming for ISSPs after interacting with a community. Community-based methods have distinct emphasis on partnership, equality and research (Viswanathan 2004). These three concepts show up frequently in student interviews. Students consider fulfilling the pillars of this method as the best way to evaluate their ethical engagement with a community. Community engagement methods, then, are a way for ISSPs to evade evaluation that may lead to critique. If an ISSP's mission fulfills all of the requirements of a community-based method, then a student will consider it successful.

While there are a few studies on student perceptions of involvement in programs like ISSPs, none focus on the way student-led trips and the way students perceive their own self-determined actions (Kane 2012, Reed-Bouely et al. 2012, Brody & Wright 2004, Willis et al. 2003). A group of undergraduate students wrote of their perceptions of involvement in community-based research, focusing on their endorsement of this type of research, the benefits for students, and advice for future student practitioners (Willis et al. 2004). This research focused

on the benefits of community-based research to undergraduates, rather than the project's impact on the "community". Brody & Wright (2004) write about the motivation of students to join service learning programs, and the perceived fulfillment of psychological self-expansion needs that come from involvement. Reed-Bouely et al. (2012) focus on student perceptions in regards to balancing involvement in a service learning program and student employment, which is so prevalent for current college students. Kane (2012) focuses on student perceptions of ownership in knowledge formations, citing how students who participate in community-based programs believe that communities can "co-create" knowledge. Despite the academic popularity of community-based participatory research, students' perceptions of their own experiences with this approach receives relatively little attention. In the case of student-led projects, such research is necessary because, unlike faculty who are immersed in the literature and who work in a framework that holds them ethically and pedagogically accountable, student groups are largely ad-hoc and personality driven. I am researching student perceptions of their own student-led programs, and the regularity in both program organization and student perception of it on William and Mary's campus.

I have identified a general focus on the United States within the service learning and community engagement literature, and have also noted the emphasis on students rather than communities when outcomes and methodologies are described. The international focus of ISSPs, then, represents a uniqueness that is used in marketing and fundraising strategies, as well as used by students as justification for a lack of evaluation frameworks for these models specifically (Stacey Interview, 2015). Students within ISSPs tout the more uncommon nature of their international community action, while simultaneously incorporating the ubiquitous student-centered focus found in the literature. Whether discussing models or outcomes, ISSP groups and

the literature assumes the student is the best measuring stick for success in either realm. This means that, when students consider the design and evaluation of a program, the precedent to favor student skills, student-designed methods, and student outcomes is upheld. The way students perceive their position and self-evaluation within ISSPs reflect this student-centered bias.

Methods

In order to understand how students are thinking about the goals of ISSPs and why groups seem to have unconfirmed efficacy internationally, but recognized success on William and Mary's campus, I interviewed students involved in the projects. To get a full and nuanced understanding of how ISSPs work on campus and how students perceive their position within them, I conducted semi-structured interviews with both leaders and general members in ISSPs, as well as with school administrators and a professor advisor. Additionally, I have examined the public media presence of ISSPs through websites and email advertisements. I have observed both general business meetings of groups and interest meetings for potential new members. It was my original intention survey the general membership of most ISSPs. Due to time and response constraints, however, I did not receive enough variety and number of responses for this to be a viable method to add to my research. The last component of my methods is my own involvement in an on-campus ISSP. It was during this involvement that my original research questions surfaced. In an autoethnographic method, I feel I can use my personal experience as a participant-observer to add depth to my research as both an insider and outsider. The Human Subjects Committee through the Institutional Review Board process at William and Mary approves of these methods.

Within the semi-structured interviews with students, I asked them questions centering on themes regarding:

- Motivation and avenue for joining the ISSP
- Benefit to the community the ISSP works with
- Benefit to the students involved in the ISSP
- Complications of community-student interaction
- Consideration of ISSPs as valuable for all students
- Ideas about global, active, or culturally American citizenship and identity

Additionally, at the end of the interview, I gave the students the opportunity to tell me if they thought there was a salient topic or idea that I needed to know about ISSPs from their experience. Due to the conversational nature of semi-structured interviews, the questions asked of each student were not all the same. However, I was able to interview fourteen students representing 8 ISSP groups in an effort to understand these themes. Two interviews were conducted as triads, one with two students, and the rest were individual. All these interviews have been transcribed and analyzed to inform my work. Grounded theory fuels the analysis of the interview texts, from which I derived the themes presented in the process described later in this work. Techniques used included word counts, pile sorting, and looking for keywords in context (Bernard 2011: 429-435).

The analytical process began with the identification of quotes or sections of student speech I thought were important. My identification of these quotes rested on my own personal familiarity with ISSPs because of my involvement, as well as the aim to identify themes by which this student speech may be understood. Bernard (2011: 430) cites Corbin and Strauss (2008:65) in his description of “in vivo” coding, by which themes are named by actual phrases

voiced by subjects. In the course of the theme generation for the process explained later on, I elected not to use exclusively in vivo coding due to the nature of language within ISSPs in general, and the variation of many words used to indicate the same purpose, as well as the various meanings any one word might indicate. Thus, the student words themselves had to be interpreted within a framework of supplementary units (websites, administrative interviews, advisor interviews, my involvement) and other students' descriptions of their groups.

I began with some general themes I had identified. These themes were those that had informed my questions—motivation, complications, benefit, interaction, value, and identity. Under the theme of benefit, or positive change, I identified many students speaking in a similar manner. One said, "*We are working with education which everyone seems to be passionate about,*" another said, "*...its always a positive. There's very few people that don't think that it's a great thing to, you know, make the education experience for kids as thorough as possible.*" These quotes were coupled with others such as, "*...people like teaching,*" and "*...we brought with us the knowledge of how to run education in a more creative way than they are probably used to. Than they are definitely used to...I think that in itself is harmless.*" As well as students describing responses from others who said, "*'that's great I'm glad you're teaching kids.'*" These quotes center on education, outside perception, positive change, and student interaction with the community. What I noticed here is the combination of these themes evidenced in these quotes indicated both a desire to look good for outsiders, which I have interpreted to mean strategies of marketing an ISSP to new students as a method of appraisal and anti-political interaction with a community. I am interpreting what students say in an effort to understand how they perceive themselves and the work they are doing.

All interviews did not mention education because not all ISSPs focus on education in a foreign context. However, I developed the larger themes of student appraisal and anti-political stance from interviews indicating these larger ideas regarding other sub-themes (social organization, medical relief, infrastructure/public health). This follows the method of pile sorting, by which you take quotes in context and sort them into piles of similarities, naming each pile (Bernard 2011: 431). The process developed below is the result of the main larger piles in which the important student quotes were sorted. The subparts of the process are indicated and are a result of these sub-themes that were not necessarily present in every interview.

To supplement this analysis, I also conducted semi-structured interviews with the head of the Office of Community Engagement Branch Out International Trips (the overarching organization under which several ISSPs exist on campus), the director of the Office of Leadership and Development, who oversees all student groups, and the head of the Reves Center for International Studies, under whom all international travel associated with William and Mary rests, as well as the faculty advisor for one of the ISSPs. These interviews were addressed in the same methods of “in vivo” and deductive coding and pile sorting, but here I focused on how non-students and student emphases differed. I also used these interviews to add to my understanding of the institutional context within which ISSPs operated. These interviews added depth, giving a perspective on how student perceptions of ISSPs were understood by non-students.

Students frequently discuss the presence of ISSPs in a social media realm (Student Interviews February 9, 2015, February 16, 2015). Students will often engage with the ISSP and social media in an individual form, posting for personal reasons rather than on behalf of the group. The media presence I observed for this research, however, was purely from the group itself. The data collected is from official websites and content officially associated with the name

of the ISSP. The decision to do this was in part a logistical one; there is almost no way to keep track of individual ISSP member postings, let alone obtain consent to use it in research. It was also a decision to focus on the message put out by the group. Media presence is primarily facilitated and produced for people outside the ISSP itself, either potential new members or potential donors. ISSPs want to impress both of these types of viewers, and therefore the media they officially advertise (and its accordance or discord with the student interviews) reveals a great deal about the ISSP and its self-perception as a group. Data from this arena is analyzed through similar methods to the interviews. I analyzed language in written text on websites and advertisement for variables that may be coded into themes for understanding (Bernard 2011: 429). This viewpoint means again that media content was used widely as a comparative component that complemented the interviews.

The last portion to inform my conclusions is my own involvement in an ISSP. I was involved in an ISSP beginning my sophomore year, and it was from this involvement that my research questions came into being. Therefore, I am considering my involvement through the lens of autoethnography. Donna Young and Anne Menely (2005: 3) describe autoethnography thusly, "...it requires those who are already embedded in particular cultural and social processes to subject themselves and their most intimate surroundings to the same forms of critical analysis as they would any other." This related to my own experiences with ISSPs because I was a participant who began to objectify my surroundings and ask questions from a cultural relativist standpoint. Autoethnography allows me, as a researcher, to be a participant observer and form questions based on what I do not understand from this participation. I put this under the heading of cultural relativism because, like an established culture, students in ISSPs all seem to know and understand certain customs and ideas about their international and on-campus working that, to

me, did not seem obvious. Similar to a cultural outsider, I developed my questions based on what I did not understand, but seemed obvious to students in ISSPs as a cultural known or custom of their existence. I use my observations in this way again as a supplement to the student interviews and other data.

Defining Types of ISSPs

The details of methodological practices and phases are consistently in flux for ISSPs on campus, but all adhere to a few principles. ISSPs may be defined in terms of four characteristics: student leadership, extracurricular existence, international travel and mission of aid. In other words, a group must be student-led, meet outside a classroom setting, have a physical presence in a foreign place, and attempt to improve a place or disseminate some kind of benefit to the people they are working with. The regularity of these characteristics, and their importance in framing and patterning of student perceptions is described below.

Student Leadership

The leadership structures of any given ISSP vary in a myriad of ways. They may be decentralized with committees, have strict hierarchical structure, or be more communal based. Group A, for example, travels to a third-world country and facilitates community-based participatory research (CBPR) methods in order to build capacity for an area they have identified as marginalized. They have a professor advisor, but the students run outside meeting without the professor present. In this sense, they are student-led. They were also student-conceived and have no over-arching organization developing the CBPR methods for them. This comes from the professor (and a class component) and their personal interest. Students describe themselves as fairly egalitarian in decision-making, citing their committee structure and shared leadership

within the group. Group B, on the other hand, reports to a higher administrative organization that is prevalent in many higher education settings. This leads to a more rigid, and more hierarchical, structure overall because there needs to be a point person to report back to the overarching organization. Additionally, this type of group does not have an on-campus advisor usually because the overhead organization acts in its place. On campus, it is completely student-led. Groups vary between various structures like these, but all describe themselves as being student-led and perceive themselves to have effect over the trajectory of the project.

The position of students as leaders, and the power and agency resulting from that position, is an important part of student perception. Even if an ISSP has a structured class component and professorial advisor, all of the ISSPs on William and Mary's campus describe themselves as student-led. This is an essential feature because it indicates that students involved in these projects consider themselves to have meaningful influence over the trajectory and effectiveness of the project overall. Student leaders may not have the facilities and understanding to effectively teach the cultural and methodological theories deemed necessary for effective engagement (though some do), which is where an advisor or over-arching organization often fills a role. What these leaders do have is control over the next group of students to join the ISSP, the application process, structured interaction between students within the group, structured interaction between students and the international community and the purpose or mission statement submitted to the school.

As of last year, any student interested in a particular global social justice issue or place had the ability to form an ISSP. This represents a great ability for freedom of expression on the part of students, but additionally can be the cause of some concern regarding risk, saturation, and sustainability. School administrators in the Office of Leadership and Development are currently

re-examining this process (Anne Arsenau, April 8, 2015). The institutional name of “William and Mary” is attached to William and Mary extracurricular groups, meaning there is some concern about the possibility of under-qualified students traveling to a place and giving medical aid, or traveling to a place known to be unsafe. However, students see it as their right and prerogative to form a group around their well-intentioned purpose to improve the livelihood or resources in an international area. The idea that, based on student leadership alone, this purpose can be accomplished, is especially salient for an understanding of how students comprehend their place in these projects.

Extracurricular Status

The extracurricular identity of these groups means the majority of work and effort is produced outside a classroom setting. As previously mentioned, a class component is included in the structural plan for some groups. Curricular involvement may range from a three-credit-hour class each semester of each year a student is involved in the project to none at all. Entry is facilitated through the extracurricular avenue: students present their interest through an application and students determine applicant acceptance. This means that any class associated with the extracurricular is a component of the extracurricular group, not that outside group meetings are a component of a class. Distinguishing this is critical because it means curricular involvement results only from prior extracurricular involvement, and ISSP curricular components maintain independence from strict grading or credit guidelines. The more meaningful association is the individual purpose of “helping” for a given ISSP, and any curricular aspects are perceived only as pathways to this purpose. Regardless of curricular components, all ISSPs have meetings outside an academic context. A bulk of the work and decisions are made during these times, or even outside of the official extracurricular meetings.

More crucial to the understanding of student perception and this extracurricular status is the fact that, because it is outside of the classroom, membership is both a decision of how a student spends their free time and a mechanism for social connection. Rather than choosing one of the over 400 other clubs the college has to offer, students choose this one to spend their time. At the very least this time commitment is one hour per week in addition to the one-to-four week-long international travel. This commitment means that students spend quite a lot of time together, and will have to cooperate and work respectively while at school, but especially in-country. This comes into realization during the application and joining process for students, and reflects a social element in which a student perceived to have the potential to cause unrest or conflict may not be chosen for entry. Additionally, some student groups take the social aspect even further, having “mixers” with other clubs and organizations on campus, during which a group of students from the ISSP would interact with a different extracurricular, such as an a cappella group on campus, purely for the purpose of social interaction (ISSP Meeting, October 20, 2014). This interaction, as part of the clubs’ identity, serves to both attract students who want this social component as a part of their ISSP experience and to implicitly inform how students are selected for membership.

International Travel

ISSPs have direct international effect in terms of physical travel and presence in a foreign place. This may involve any from 1-3 trips per calendar year, and trip lengths of 1 to 4 weeks. During the trips, students often stay outside of the communities they are working with, with hostel-like accommodations by an NGO, but some groups include home-stays as a part of the process, more similar to traditional study-abroad efforts. Logistics vary from one ISSP to

another, as well as within each ISSP from trip to trip. Their continual, regular and scheduled physical presence in the area is what is pervasive in the ISSPs overall.

This trip component is enticing for students looking to become involved with a service-oriented international group, and is considered essential by students who are already members of the group. Some have considered sending money as a way of assistance, rather than spending it to bring students to the area. When asked about this, Colleen replied,

“...we debated early on in the semester just sending money and had a lot of discussion on what does that look like. I think generally its better to send people down there, because not only do they have a greater understanding of [those people’s] culture, but they have a greater understanding of the community itself, so they might be more likely to donate in the future or come back in the future.”
(Student Interview “Colleen” February 9, 2015).

Aligning with Colleen’s ideas, all have come to the conclusion that the trip is vital and fundamental to their purpose. One of the trip’s websites describes the categories in the budget for the ISSP; costs cover travel expenses for students, homestay expenses for students, the materials used to teach English (this group’s method of enacting benefit), stipends for their in country co-teachers, and general operating costs. For an individual trip, that group aims to raise \$15,000. The high monetary value needed to cover the budget makes the decision to include or exclude student travel and accommodation expense a hefty one. That money could go far if used in other ways.

Another student, Howard, said that he believed 99% of what he learned happened during the trip itself, and prior learning was for preparation only (Student Interview, February 19, 2015). One student said that is only during this travel that students can really understand what it means to be a global citizen (Student Interview “George”, February 20, 2015). Other students re-iterate the idea that what was abstract becomes real during this trip, and that the realization is something that will stick with them for the rest of their lives. Students agree that without going on a

physical trip, any individual would not be able to understand the depth, scope, or gravity of the international issues addressed.

Aid Mission

The last component of ISSPs can be called “service”, “capacity building”, “improved livelihood” or any other of a number of labels that indicate the ISSP’s helping mission. This is a valuable distinction operationally because an ISSP is not a research trip in which the students aim only to observe. They observe *and* change. The change is always designed, intended, and hoped to be positive, and students generally believe that it is. Whatever methodological orientation the ISSP bases its decision-making on, the goal for all includes an attempt at benefitting the area they work with in accordance with the focus of the trip on a particular social justice issue.

I have categorized the ways groups incorporate aid into their mission in terms of resource administration, collective action, and empowerment. ISSPs may incorporate a combination of these, or focus on one way of benefitting the community. Resources administered include anything from a medical clinic to constructing a school building or other needed infrastructure. Collective action is most often called capacity building and rests on the theories of community-based research. The more an ISSP can facilitate the realization of shared understandings in a community, the greater potential for collective action and the production of solutions from within a community itself. This coincides with individual aid attempts, most often associated with some form of empowerment in which individuals (most often children) are taught skills such as English or video-making that are meant to instill values of non-violence and inter-cultural appreciation. It is the belief of students in ISSPs who guide benefit in this way that having these skills will empower those individuals to make a better life for themselves and their community.

None of these three kinds of aid are exclusive, and often ISSPs attempt more than one way to help a group of people.

The way that aid is enacted requires more emphasis than the way student incorporate aid into their mission. Students say that quantifying benefit is difficult, citing methodological principles as the best indicator that benefit was achieved. This does not mean there were no good outcomes, but student perception does not distinguish between process and outcomes. Students' desire to enact positive change and the ability of a student group to do so, blurs the distinction between attempted and achieved aid in communities, and is basic to the understanding of how students regularly perceive their role.

Findings

Across the array of different ISSPs studied I have discovered a number of regularities regarding the organization of student experience within ISSPs, and resulting student perceptions. These regularities are categorized in terms of the process of marketing, recruitment and screening, socialization, instruction, activity, and project-evaluation. While ISSPs emphasize some categories over others, an interesting component of these findings is the contrast between the freedom of student groups to organize however they wish, and the adherence of ISSPs to these recognizable patterns. Furthermore, the experience of ISSPs is principally self-organized. Student members are necessarily put in the position of assessing the result of their own actions. The regularity of these actions in light of the freedom to organize in any way, leads to an understanding of ISSPs as purposefully and ubiquitously designed to process through particular steps and produce students with a particular sense of self, and sense of fulfillment in their desire to “do good.”

Process of Self-Referential ISSP Formation and Participation

The findings of this research are best conceptualized through a process of ISSP formation and participation by way of students' self-referential action and communication. The process described is at the same time individual, because the student is advancing through the process as one person, and communal, because students are sharing in this measure of ISSP involvement collectively. ISSPs display definitive stages, and seek continuity, which can only be assured with the annual recruitment of new underclass members. This is a result of the four-year time limit for participation, the ongoing admission of new students, and the ideal of sustained existence as an index of sincerity of purpose. The students who have negotiated these stages of entry, socialization and instruction, engagement, and reflection become those who facilitate other students' passage through these stages.

Here I am describing cultural conventions within all groups, not a conscious model or philosophical approach. I am not aiming to delineate how students perceive or evaluate specific pedagogical, research, or service models. Rather, ISSPs' conformity to a similarly scripted process reflects underlying cultural codes and modes of organizing and communicating students' efforts to do good in the international realm. The formation of groups and the annual cycles of socialization of students within these groups requires that a large part of the communication regarding group activities and attitudes will be self-communicated, a needed flow of information that enables student-led voluntary associations to act collectively and represent themselves to outsiders. The remarkable ability of students to form and maintain such groups in the absence of any overt set of guidelines implies that students are independently drawing on a series of cultural distinctions regarding organization and meaning available to them as bearers of North American culture. ISSP adherence to this process reflects underlying cultural codes, derived from the effort of students to enact some desire to do good in an international realm.

Desire to Do Good

During interviews, students have expressed their belief that William and Mary students are especially oriented towards service or “doing good,” and that this orientation is realized in ISSP membership. Howard, when asked why so many ISSP groups exist on campus explained,

“I think one thing that is very unique about the William and Mary student is they are very transposed [sic] to community. They are very turned towards service to the public, and I think that’s really strong. So in the end that kind of comes out in the form of these service trips, and William and Mary students wanting to get involved in a capacity that different from just travel or study abroad” (Student Interview, “Howard” February 19, 2015).

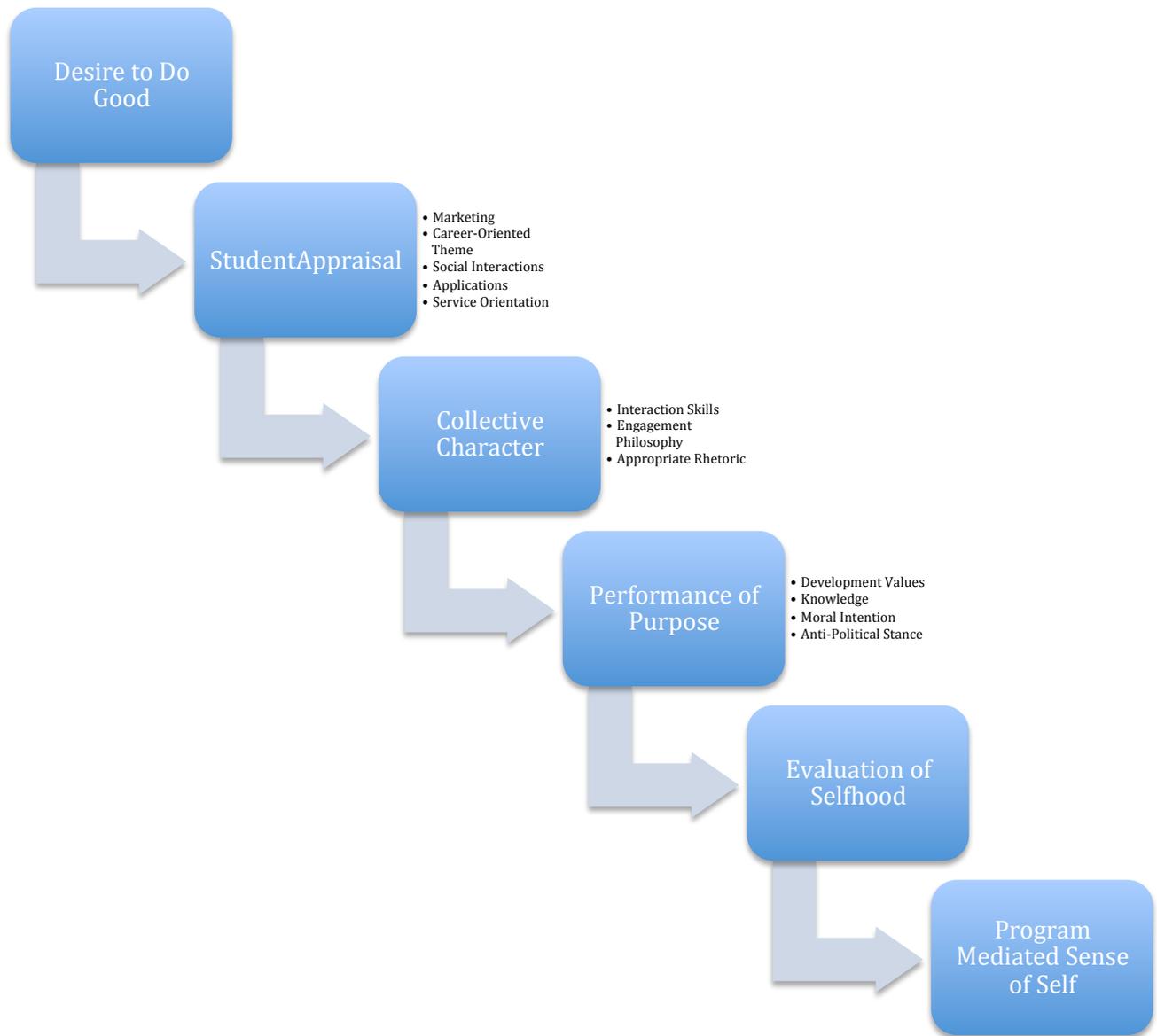
Here Howard draws a direct connection between the desire and/or predisposition to want to do service, and ISSPs. Other avenues, such as travel and study abroad, in the students’ minds, do not provide this opportunity for service. Routes for service outside a service trip or ISSP were not mentioned in student interviews. Another student, Colleen, when asked what motivates people to join an ISSP replied,

“Being William and Mary’s campus, people are very sort of community oriented and very public service oriented and so I think there’s a lot of people that just want to do good. So they find whatever service trip they can find to sort of feel like they are doing good and contributing back to the society” (Student Interview, “Colleen” February 9, 2015).

From her description here, we can surmise that students perceive other students at William and Mary as more service-oriented than other colleges, and that this translates into a wide swath of students having a desire to “do good.” Further, ISSPs are perceived to be the sole avenue for doing good and, as an interviewee said, “contributing back to society”. Students “find whatever service trip they can find,” meaning that, to do good, a student must choose from the ISSPs, and doing good is perceived to be within the context of ISSP membership on William and Mary’s campus.

The overarching desire to do good could be attributed to the desire of the students' generation, or the desire of people in general, to want to take action for the betterment of humanity. Evidenced in the quotes above and the resulting distinction that ISSPs are *the* avenue for students who want to fulfill this desire, is the hegemonic presence of this form of organization for international service. A club without the components defining ISSPs-- student leadership, extracurricular duration, international travel, and attempted aid -- is not perceived to fulfill this desire to do good.

A visual representation of the communication necessary for each regular categorical stage to be realized within ISSPs is shown below. Students interested in ISSP membership and action must transmit and receive messages regarding their own performance as they progress through the stages of student appraisal, collective character, performance of purpose, and evaluation of selfhood. Student appraisal is the stage through which students enter the process, encompassing advertisements, social relations, and admission. During the next stage, students establish a collective character, by learning an engagement philosophy and particular manner of interacting with an international community. The third stage includes the physical trip itself, and the student's performance of the mission their group publicizes. As students return from this trip, they evaluate their sense of self, reflecting on the trip, its goal, and their position in the achievement of it. Finally, a student passing through these stages resolves these stages into a sense of self whereby they perceive themselves as "doing good", reinforced each time the stages are repeated with new membership. Only through the fulfillment of these stages does a student become an ISSP member, and achieve the outcome of a program-justified sense of self. Additional diagrams detailing each stage lie below.



I. Student Appraisal

In order to join an ISSP, a student must initially be interested in its existence and accordance with the desire to do good students proclaim to be present for William and Mary's

student body. This interest is facilitated in the form of marketing, social relations, career-oriented trip themes, applications, and service orientation.

A theme associated with a given career or life-path is attractive for a student interested in ISSPs, and is utilized within marketing by ISSPs across campus. Themes of medical relief, education, environmental sustainability and public health are invoked in career paths (i.e. medical doctor). Some ISSPs acknowledge this thematic categorization outright, capitalizing on it as a mechanism for garnering support. Other ISSPs do not identify with a theme, as much as an overall message of “doing good.” The theme is structured by the area in which those students are most skilled to work within and one in which the community they work with has identified as a need.

Social relations represent the most informal and most indirect way to become interested in an ISSP. Many students cited a friend who was already involved in an ISSP as an impetus for their interest, application, and involvement, examples of which are listed below:

“A friend of mine on my freshman hall....” Colleen

“I had heard about [the ISSP] from a friend...” Elaine

“My girlfriend did it... she had a good time...” Kyle

“One of my childhood friends was on [the ISSP]...” Alice

Their friendship or high opinion of this person who was involved in an ISSP led the student to think of the overall ISSP with the same appraisal they associate with the character of that person. This represents a blurring of the lines between the appraisal of a person in an ISSP and the ISSP itself. The perception may be that the group identity becomes intertwined with the personal, individual identity of group members.

Students also incorporate their own service-orientation when considering applying to join an ISSP. Kyle, when asked about his reasoning for joining, replied, “*I’ve been doing service-oriented things since I can remember...I needed to be involved in some sort of service,*” (Student Interview, September 22, 2014). Likewise, Craig responded, “*I think for me the real draw was service,*” (Student Interview, September 26, 2014). Service-orientation directly coincides with the ideas of “doing good.” Those oriented towards doing service are likely to fulfill the appraisal and join the group, based on previous experience or personality traits. This orientation of self flows into the whole process, and is reflected in the way students already involved in the ISSPs consider other students for entry.

Students not identified by social ties rely on more impersonal cross-campus marketing to learn about ISSPs. Marketing often means posting an advertisement on the bi-weekly email of student activities, posting flyers across campus, and creating Facebook events or webpages. It entices students to join an ISSP through language indicating this desire to do good. An example of this is as follows:

Volunteer in Nicaragua Over Winter Break With BTC!

Bridges to Community is a week-long International Branch Out trip dedicated to building houses for much deserving Nicaraguan families while living and working in the community. Applications due April 6. For more information visit: www.wm.edu/offices/...to-community/index.php or visit us on Facebook at [/www.facebook.com/williamandmarybridges](https://www.facebook.com/williamandmarybridges) (Student Happenings April 3, 2015).

Small blurbs like this effectively incorporate words such as “dedicated” or “much deserving” to indicate the service component of the trip. A student is considered to have a high personal character if they are enticed by the idea of dedicating themselves to a project, and to devoting time and energy to deserving families.

There is another side to this student appraisal. Already established student ISSP members (those who have participated in every step of this model) test interested students for their

character and desire to do good, ultimately using that test as the best indication of entry qualifications. These appraisals of good will for interested students reflect in the way appraisal is facilitated by ISSP members through marketing, career association, social relations and the application process.

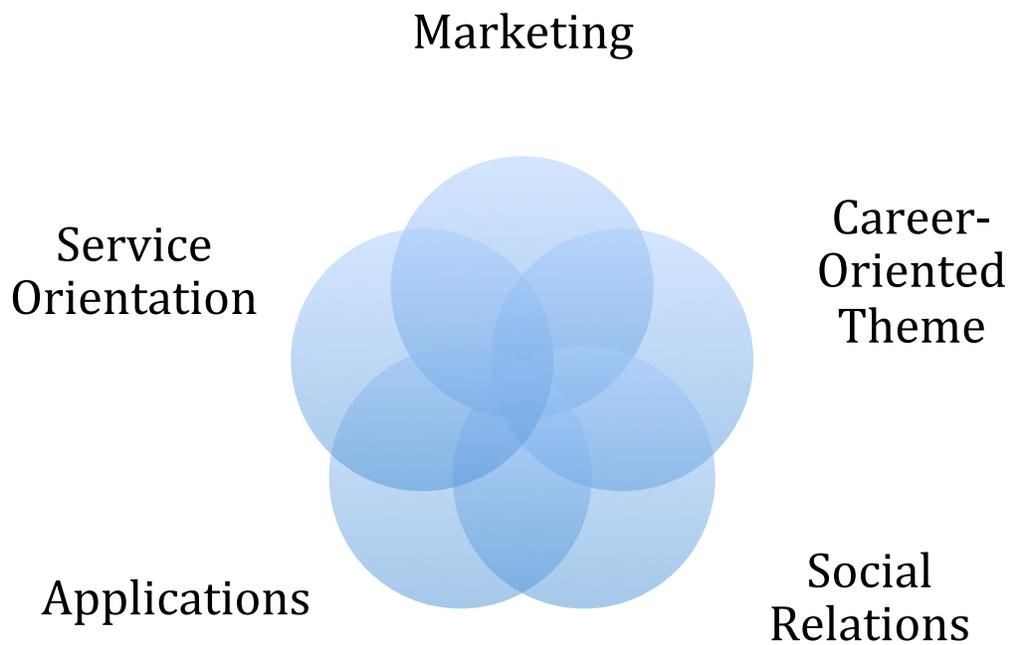
The good character component implicit in the marketing materials is at the same time meant to indicate the character of the ISSP, as well as that of the student who digests those materials and becomes interested in joining. Likewise, the careers associated with trips—medicine, public health, education or community development—are those that attract service-oriented people. If they want to have a competitive application to a career in those fields, this is a useful and important practical step. The social relations are often more directly traced to the students already involved in an ISSP because they choose with whom to discuss their involvement and the pending application periods of ISSPs. The application process is generally quite simple, with a few questions asking about basic skills and disposition. An important factor is the emphasis on disposition over skill. Elaine, when interviewed, said,

“...generally the deciding factor is, in the interview, could someone think critically about something? Do they look at things from different perspectives, and do they recognize tensions and hypocrisies and things. I think that’s definitely a huge factor and asking questions is also an important point, having a desire to learn and a desire to interact, things you can’t quantify as much.”

Most trips conclude that, because of this lack of quantification, interviews are very necessary parts of the trip. I have not been privy to interviews except in my own involvement of an ISSP. These are generally closed, hidden, and hushed affairs, which lead back to social relations and the importance of a student-led extracurricular. In the interviews, and the interview decision process, students discuss these harder to quantify variables, generally based on first impression unless the student is well known to the group, and the applicants chosen are done so

based on the student's perception of the applicant, not necessarily anything tangibly recognized; the students do not have to evaluate their application decisions with anyone but each other.

The graphic below indicates the five avenues through which an unaffiliated student may negotiate entry and student members facilitate appraisal. The assumption of good will or high personal character is inherent in each listed category. A student may consider entry through one or all of these methods; often students cited more than one in interviews.



II. Collective Character

Once students have established entry into an ISSP, they enter the stage in which character is collectivized. For this, they must be introduced and incorporated into the group's engagement philosophy. Engagement philosophies may be strictly attached to a named methodology of community engagement, such as Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR), or they may

be more loosely founded on ideas of individual liberty. These methods have principles that guide ISSP development. According to Blumenthal et al. (2013: 3-4), these principles for CBPR include:

1. Recognizes community as a unit of identity...
2. Builds on strengths and resources within the community...
3. Facilitates collaborative partnerships in all phases of the research...
4. Integrates knowledge and action for the mutual benefit of all partners...
5. Promotes a co-learning and empowering process that attends to social inequalities...
6. Involves a cyclical and iterative process...
7. Addresses health from both positive and ecological perspectives...
8. Disseminates findings and knowledge gained to all partners...
9. Involves a long-term commitment by all partners...

This is an example of the types of tenets student ISSPs attempt to follow, and the way students are thinking about their engagement with a community.

Regardless of their origins, all students who have been granted admittance to the ISSP traverse a learning process through which they must learn and understand the given engagement philosophy of the group. Important here is that an understanding of any engagement philosophy is not a requirement for membership in the first place, but something ISSP members suppose students can learn within the time constraints of membership. When asked about the learning curve, one student responded, *“I think anyone on [the ISSP] would say it takes a year or so to actually figure out what’s going on”* (Student Interview, “Stacey” February 16, 2015).

This learning process facilitates two categories of philosophy expression: interaction skills and appropriate rhetoric. Interaction skills encompass the actionable methods by which

students will interact with community members in accordance with the given engagement philosophy. This takes form in focus groups, household interviews, and general, colloquial interactions. Blumenthal et al. cites these methods as well as “establishing a shared agenda,” (2013: 119). Additionally, part of knowing how to interact is having knowledge of the cultural and historical aspects of the area and people an ISSP is interacting with. From this ISSPs can ensure, “...*that community based is truly community based and not just we are going to get some information and then we are going to say that this is community based but its only some of it...*” (Student Interview, “Margaret” February 13, 2015). Margaret means fulfilling the principles of CBPR listed above, or a given methodological program an ISSP is following.

The use of appropriate rhetoric is intentional and debated consistently within ISSP frameworks. It is a deliberate decision to use certain words to describe an ISSP’s engagement. The decision not to use particular words derives primarily from the connotation associated with them. Formally, the literature on service learning and community engagement creates these distinctions, as well as informal media sensationalism of certain “buzzwords” leading to dubious meanings. In response to a question about her ISSP’s description and the term “service”, Elaine responded,

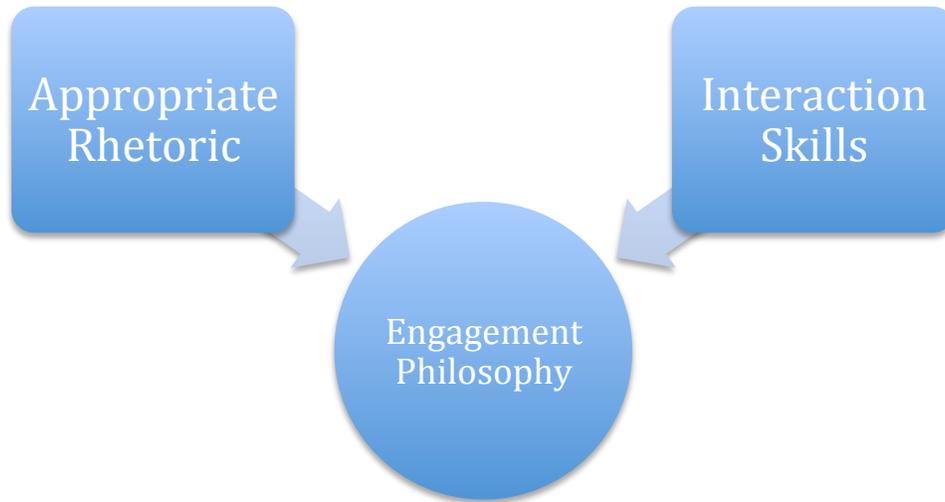
“...we will say “research team” or something like that because its really not a service project, ... I think the connotation with service is ‘oh, we get something out of it because we’re exploring a new culture or something like that and then we leave’ and there’s a short term type resource that you’re giving, but this is very research-based.... it’s very research based and just in general we shy away from like a lot of those typical labels” (Student interview, “Elaine”, February 16, 2015).

Alice, in a different group, responded, *“I think we tend to just shy away from the title of service learning just because our professor always talks about de-centering the students,”* (Student Interview, “Alice” February 13, 2015). Clearly a conscious choice is being made to use

words such as “capacity building” or “research based” in replacement of words perceived to be morally ambiguous. The personal character connotations associated with of “capacity building” are clear because it has not been criticized in the same way “service learning” has through the lenses of academia and the media. Operationally, students believe there is a difference in the way their actions are described, but the actions’ separation from the “service” description is more muddled. Research signifies observation, but these ISSPs involve change. When I asked Elaine the difference between the term service and what her ISSP was actually enacting in practice, she responded, *“I think mainly we make the distinction because of the connotation of service. I don’t know that it is that black and white. I think maybe some of our activities do overlap, but I think the connotation is mostly what we shy away from.”*(Student Interview, February 16, 2015).

These factors of engagement philosophy, and the work they do to establish collective character for the students involved in an ISSP, reflect the organization an ISSP must simultaneously develop and adhere to in order to fulfill its mission. Students are in charge of the formation and leadership of the group meaning their ideas create a pathway to “doing good” based on the principles of ISSPs (i.e. emphasizing mutual benefit), which simultaneously creates the only perceived pathway to fulfill the personal character goals necessary to adhere to this order. Due to students’ dedication to this engagement philosophy and the integration of a student’s individual character into the collective character of the group, a student is reluctant to evaluate the group philosophy itself as flawed. This means that methodologies are often adjusted in response to unexpected or disappointing results, but that the overall trip itself is never evaluated negatively in terms of effectiveness.

The graphic below visualizes the contribution of interaction skills and appropriate rhetoric as facets of the engagement philosophy overall.



III. Performance of purpose

Performing the purpose of an ISSP involves the physical travel to and interaction with a place and group of people. During this period of time, students are enacting the development values, knowledge, good intention and anti-political stance of their ISSP.

Development values are enacted simply through the manner in which benefit is facilitated. A medical clinic, for example, is set up in a particular way, with particular medicines for particular diseases and health problems, based on the westernized way of thinking of illness, thought to be universal (or that it should be universal) within development regimes. In my own experience in one of the villages we worked with a cyclone shelter was built for the benefit of the community by a large development organization. While this shelter had all the amenities that would be needed in a disaster situation, the people found it inadequate for use because there were not separate rooms for women and children. That community's code of decency and gender relations, then, could not be upheld based on the values informing the development workers who made it. Kyle shared an anecdote of a similar instance, which he calls "cultural bleeding" in his interview.

“Shin [the leader of the group] told me that at the beginning, there’s definitely been some kind of cultural bleeding. At the beginning, because [the people] are a pretty patriarchal, sexist society. They [Shin] finally bought the land, and they were going to start building the homes, and then the men, when they found out that the women [students] were going to be helping to build their homes, they said ‘we’re not working with them’.”(Student Interview, September 22, 2014).

When asked the follow up question of how they, as an ISSP, addressed this issue, Kyle responded further,

“I think Shin just told them this is way it’s going to be. If you want a house, then suck it up. I mean, they got over it. Which, one small part of my brain feels a little guilty for imposing our values on them, but also it’s not a horrible part of society to lose. And also, I don’t know, I would say that by and large, the main things that the community there have taken away are that they have houses, that they have plumbing, they have electricity, that aren’t going to be washed away in a flood. So I’d say overall they’re pretty happy.” (Student Interview, September 22, 2014).

Kyle’s assertion “it’s not a horrible part of society to lose,” indicates that he has the value that patriarchal aspects are not part of a “developed” society and therefore are able to be lost in his description of “cultural bleeding” and his goal to do good and “build capacity” for this area.

ISSP performance of knowledge is closely associated with this. Students are teaching and showing community members a certain way to organize their lives, socially or otherwise. In response to a question regarding what the community gains from student ISSP involvement, one student replied, *“I really like to hope the power of like organization and collaboration”* (Student Interview, Cindy, February 16, 2015). Another student said,

“I don’t think we taught them or implied to them that research was inherently valuable or anything...I don’t want to act like we somehow imparted the wisdom of research upon them at all, but I feel like going forward they’ve expressed interest in sort of doing some kind of information gathering in a similar way which is good to see” (Student Interview “Alice”, February 16, 2015).

In this quote the student affirms what she does not want to “act like” by indicating that communities benefit by learning research processes from them. The idea that it is “good to see”

implies that the uptake of knowledge systems brought by the ISSP is a marker of “capacity building” or “improved livelihood.” This contributes to a large conversation about knowledge formations and a hierarchy within them. ISSPs impart the idea that knowledge based on this westernized formation of research is privileged, or hierarchically more valuable than experiential knowledge, or the methods by which a community may have been gathering knowledge prior to ISSP involvement.

The good intention is an aspect that maintains students’ actions as “good” within the ISSP context regardless of actual action or ignorance. While two separate groups indicated their belief that “good intentions can be dangerous things,” (student interviews February 16, 2015, February 9, 2015), intention still seems to be privileged within the idea that ISSPs are “works in progress” (Student Interview “Cindy” February 16, 2015). ISSPs are allowed to fail at certain projects and still believe that they are justified in their existence/work because students are working hard, putting in a lot of effort, and communities are willing to try again. Cindy said of this willingness, *“I don’t think it’s at all a blind faith or anything, because we’ve tried and failed at many different things. I think that’s very well understood. I think there’s still a determination to move past it and do things we [the ISSP] might try moving forward.”* (Student Interview, Cindy, February 16, 2015).

The anti-political stance is inherent in this performance internationally as well as on campus. Internationally, it governs what aspects of a community’s problems ISSPs identify as ones they can help with. This is encapsulated in the quote, *“...everyone wants to see children have a better future. That, anyone can get behind. If we get into rights, or rule of law, I think we’ll get into stickier topics”* (Student Interview, “Craig”, September 22, 2014). Students either directly or indirectly focus on themes considered not only associated with morally-just careers,

but also with anti-political aspects. Other topics may be “sticky” in the sense that there is no morally clear choice. For ISSP-involved students, the theme of the ISSPs engagement, and therefore the ISSP itself, must be something “anyone can get behind.”

The performance of the ISSP goals may or may not fulfill the principles of community-based research they claim to adhere to it. It is clear from these student voices that an alternate script is being enacted—one of disseminated development values and knowledge, supporting moral intent and anti-political status for the students in the ISSP.

IV. Evaluation of Selfhood

When students return from the trip there is a limited form of evaluation in self-reflection and discussion. It is during this time that students may express qualms they have with the project. Students rarely devote effort to resolving these qualms because of the self-referential organization of the group. Students must create the world of ISSPs so they can live within it, and the blindness to the concerns raised below is a result of the cultural creativity inherent in self-referential evaluation; these concerns upset the moral order on which ISSPs are founded, and therefore cannot be mitigated without changing this order. Students perceived the moral order produced and adhered to through the process of ISSP membership to be fixed. Students raise opinions regarding the ethical nature of ISSPs, the weight of good intentions, and the difficulty of the process in general.

“I mean there’s people on our team too that have completely dissenting opinions, and some people on our team that say ethically this is wrong, I don’t know if we should even be going down there, and so like that opinion is brought up again and again in different areas.” Elaine

“We are people with good intentions but do, does that like actually matter, ultimately? Because are we really going to make that much of an impact? Which is frankly just negative thinking that I don’t really care to entertain” Kyle

“I think you need to be prepared for the experience, it’s not, its not easy. It’s a very advanced sort of trip. I had trouble, I think, going as a first year here. So, in that sense, yes I think everyone should do it, but it is not an easy experience. You’re being put in a very different society.” Howard

The discussion of the difficulty, ethical adherence, and intentionality of the trips themselves all come into question as evidenced in these quotes. The qualms expressed may become incorporated into the engagement philosophy in small ways, such as changing the building strategies or areas for a school, but not in an overall evaluation framework of the efficacy of the ISSP in general. This relates to an evaluation of selfhood because, as established earlier in the process, becoming a member of an ISSP and enacting a given engagement philosophy ties students together in evaluation. A student may dissent in terms of the unexpected or difficult experience they found abroad, but they are quieted by the ISSP group through other students’ adherence to the engagement philosophy as the best indication of the ISSPs’ fulfillment of “doing good”.

Personal Reflection

When I think back on my time involved in an international student service project, thereby enacting the touted “reflection” portion of every group’s organization, and the evaluation of selfhood stage in the process, I know that I believed in the power of this system to work. The very first interest meeting for my project that I attended, I was enthralled. I could fulfill my desire to be a good person by doing service and also interact with really interesting and diverse communities in an exotic place (though I most certainly did not put it this bluntly to myself). I did not immediately question the idea that people from these communities were benefitted (as is more common now with the media critiques of “voluntourism” running rampant (Borland & Adams 2013)), and it became something that permeated my entire college career.

Several of my classes and experiences over my college course load led me from enthralled excitement to disillusioned discouragement. As I discovered, it was not that these systems did not work per se (the efficacy of community livelihood improvement is a whole other area for study), but I had discovered what they were working for and what my performance was enacting. After dispelling the idea that I could do good by virtue of my personal conviction, I knew that we, as students, likely do not have the skills, time, means, or knowledge to enact the change we thought would be meaningful (or even have a hand in deciding what change would be meaningful). The purpose of our project, and our insistence on traveling, was a reflection of our dedication to our aspirations of engagement in the absence of any concrete results. The system, then, was a self-servicing one. I now get to say in an interview for a job or graduate school that I traveled abroad in a service-giving capacity- gaining inter-cultural skills and proving my own morality, but I could not tell you if the trees planted in 2012 in the area we visited are still alive, let alone helpful.

V. Program Mediated Sense of Self

At the end of the process, students involved in ISSPs possess a sense of self as “doing good” produced, reinforced, and reiterated by this program and progression of steps. By fulfilling the application process, learning the engagement philosophy, interacting with the community, and reflecting on this interaction, students become full members of an ISSP, culminating (implicitly) with their development of a sense of self as a “good” person. The process and organization of ISSPs leads to self-actualization with patterned regularity, implying some sense of design to generate this result. This suggests a disconnect between the scripted goal of community development and the inherent design, which produces this selfhood.

This selfhood is then used to justify marketing strategies and the full application process meant to find people pre-disposed to good will in the next round of recruitment. In this sense, the progression of membership is not linear, but cyclical. Additionally, students take this membership in an ISSP as an indication of their morality later in careers. One student said, *“There are a lot of career benefits, I think in terms of like smart moves I could have made it really was a big one”* (Alice, February 16, 2015).

Students also consider citizenship and global identities a partial result of this process.

“I think that it makes you aware, in some ways, how fortunate we are to have the opportunities we do at William and Mary. Not to say that all Americans even get this opportunity. It made me very aware of that. It did give me a better sense of global citizenship” (Howard, February 22, 2015).

This process is an example in which the product and the production of it are not discreet. At the same time students are enacting a good purpose or learning engagement philosophies to do good, they are cultivating their own sense of self to be good, which is deemed necessary in order to enact the goal of the ISSP: some form of benefit to an international community.

The graphic below shows the full process by which students are credentialized as ISSP members, and develop a program-mediated selfhood. This process is depicted as cyclical because new members enter each semester, and the established members go through these steps again, now as a full member facilitating the movement of others through these stages.

Influx of New Students



This model above describes the cyclical nature of the stages of ISSP organization. The constant influx of new students beginning this cycle, and the responsibility of student members to facilitate their passage through it, maintains the self-referential communication throughout, resulting in a student possessing a sense of self in reference to a fulfillment of doing good created within the system meant to adhere to it. Students evaluate their own actions based on a framework by which their actions are formed—the methodological principles—making the order by which good student selfhood becomes a product of and ISSPs adhere to, produced within it.

Discussion:

Unchallenged Premises

Within my own personal involvement, I noticed some premises unchallenged when thinking back on our conversations, plans, and even manner of speaking regarding the people we were engaging with and each other. I could identify implicit assumptions about development

that, in my eyes, were unfounded. There are a set of premises we relied on as being true in order to uphold the script that we were “doing good” with our project, and that informed the self-referential morality we all held in our person and selfhood.

The first: Well-educated Americans with good intentions can be helpful by virtue of this identity. This refers back to Cathy’s original argument, that because we are Americans, we can bring more help to a foreign area. This identity is perceived and assumed to not only bring us more resources, but also more understanding and therefore, in the eyes of students involved in my project, more efficacy.

Secondly: Western neo-liberal lifestyles are a representation of improved livelihood. So much of our trip goals were based on ideas such as “improving livelihood” or “building capacity” but what did this really mean? This meant providing people with the tools and resources to promote individual economic gain and profit. The aid given by the students, be it material or otherwise, is given and thought of in a particular type of way based on our student cultural codes steeped in common western thought and knowledge.

Lastly: Students traveling to an international community to facilitate aid is the best organization of student time, effort and money to enact change. I’m not entirely sure that all the students involved in the project believe this, but it is most certainly a premise that grounded the actions of my ISSP. There was a reason we were not a vegetarian club, or a recycling club, or a club focused on petitioning for US policy changes (all of which may have impact with far less personal social reward). While we may not believe it, it informs the research we draw on, the actions we take, and the way we present them.

In my experience within the project these ideas permeate every understanding, every decision, and every action. These service projects and trips similar to the one I was involved in

were what “was done” if an individual student wanted to make an impact on a global scale. Personal gains are acknowledged, to be sure, but the unwavering faith that these programs worked is never questioned.

Moral Vector

Within the process described above, I interpret an intersecting moral vector, evidenced by the adherence to a desire to do good over a particular enactment of purpose. I used Beldo’s (2014) description of morality as an “ought” proposition and Robbins’ ideas of valued ideas (2007: 297).

Robbins (2007: 297) describes these ideas saying, “the more valued elements tend to be more elaborately worked out, more rationalized as one might put it in Weberian terms, and to control the rationalization of less valued ideas such that they can only be worked out to the extent that they do not contradict more valued ones.” He then goes on to describe a culture in a western liberal society. They hold the value of equality of opportunity very high, as a method to support achievement, but hold equality of outcome much less highly because it in part contradicts this possibility of achievement (2007: 297). I believe this is mirrored in the process of ISSP organization and the development of a selfhood deemed moral or good by the students who involve themselves in ISSPs. These students value the purpose of doing good, and the enactments of good will it entails, as it affords the construction of a “good” selfhood. However, this is contradicted by the actual performance of this purpose, and the value of efficacious good action, whereby students do not have the knowledge, skills, understanding, or right to intervene in another area of the globe. It is paradoxical that students can uphold the purpose of doing good and the value of learning by doing, when, in order to perform the good in their mission, they

must hold the knowledge and skills they are learning in accordance with this performance prior to doing so.

Beldo (2014) allows that morality can be used as an analytical concept, and that defining morality is an ‘ought’ judgment that is unconditional and does not rely on consensus. Beldo describes it as such:

“‘The word “ought” thus used is no longer relative’, writes Segwick (1884: 7), for whom moral approval is ‘inseparably bound up with the conviction, implicit or explicit, that the conduct approve is “objectively” right—i.e. that it cannot, without error, be disapproved by any other mind’ (p.28). To this, Ladd (1957) adds one important caveat: moral principles are not necessarily invested with this special authority and legitimacy, but are thought to be so by those who advance them.” It is the pretense of unconditional obligatory status—variously described by theorists as ‘intrinsically valid, beyond negotiation’ (Much and Shweder, 1978), ‘categorically obligatory’ (Gewirth, 1978), ‘unalterable’ (Turiel, 2002), and so on—that sets the abstract notion of morality apart as a particular dimension of knowledge and judgment.” (2014: 268)

Applied to ISSPs, this ‘ought’ categorization is one in which students perceive that they ‘ought’ to intervene with international aid because an area is marginalized or in poverty. This is the central ‘ought’ distinction behind ISSPs and implicit within this process that I am attempting to describe. While ISSPs may have great variation on campus, all believe in this ‘ought’ distinctions that students ‘ought’ to help internationally, and further that they can. This moral imperative to help is implicit in the existence of all ISSPs and in their organization within this process. It relies not on any contingent factors, but the way students in ISSPs perceive or assume the world to be.

Beldo uses the example of abortion disagreements regarding pro-choice, pro-life, and at what point a fetus is “alive.” Even if two individuals disagree, one opposing all abortion, and another opposing late-stage abortion, both are upholding the value of life, and both are considered “pro-life,” they just disagree on exactly what this means. The same underlying

assumption that killing a life is immoral is there. All ISSP groups agree upon the underlying assumption that student development projects do good and ‘ought’ to extend an arm into foreign places to do this good. This is the idea that helping is moral, and thereby the students who do this help are moral. The variation in ISSPs occurs in the question of what helping looks like exactly, but the idea of ISSPs as moral is upheld regardless. This process described above is a mechanism by which this underlying, ubiquitous moral agreement within ISSPs, that ISSPs are moral (and the students who do them are moral), is upheld. It does not, as explained above, incorporate contingencies regarding the efficacy of the group in actually, but these groups extend in perpetuity and cycle in student moral selfhood production because of this underlying moral assumption about their existence as helpful.

Further, I uphold Beldos’ assertion that ‘morality’ and ‘ethics’ are synonymous for this work because there is no consistent distinction used for them (2014: 276).

Contradictory Perceptions

The contradiction inherent in student perceptions of ISSPs is elucidated clearly in the following set of quotes from a student leader in an ISSP regarding his benefit on a community:

“They’re just brilliant people. We found out very quickly when we got over there that it didn’t seem like they necessarily needed anything from us.” Craig

“...we wouldn’t go if we didn’t feel like it was going to be a help for them.” Craig

In one frame of understanding, Craig traveled to the community and was in awe of the community members’ ability, and confused by his feeling that the community did not need anything from him specifically, despite the conventional American thought that they were in need of international aid. This idea is coupled with and reinforced by the prolonged existence of

the ISSP he was involved in. In another frame, related to Craig's position within the group and the group's mission, he feels that it is obvious and clear that this international aid is necessary because they, as a group, would not go if their attendance was not believed to be beneficial.

The very existence of the ISSP and its history in the area is a qualifier of the beneficial work they are doing. The two perspectives evidenced in these quotes are contradictory, and represent a conflict between the individual perspective of the student (as a part of moral self) and the perspective of the student as a member of a larger group (as a part of a moral order). Proven by the frequency, popularity, and abundance of ISSPs, the perspective described in the second quote is dominant over the second. Craig explained later on in the interview that, "*ultimately, our goal was to benefit them,*" and the ISSP he was involved in spent the longest time in the area (one month) and was the longest running on campus (17 years). Related to those facts, Craig said, "*So I think we've proven that we are committed to coming back, and that we're committed to staying for a good enough time that you know our intentions, you know that we care, and you know that we're learning from you.*" It is important to note here that Craig mentions a proven commitment, but does not mention a proven result, or a proven accomplishment of the goal listed above: to benefit them.

The qualms from the first quote emerged in many of my student interviews. One student, Kyle, said, "*...when I think about that [whether or not students/ISSPs are doing good] it tends to turn into more of a philosophical thing. I don't know what I'm supposed to do about it exactly. It might just be us liking to say that we do good things, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't do good things.*" Here this student represents the break between the philosophical problem of ISSPs' existence and the implicit operational assumption that there is a need or pressure to engage

international communities with attempted positive change. This is further evidenced in the following quotes:

“Whatever we do is always going to be controversial, and I don’t think we are ever going to get it right.” -Cindy

“I guess, sometimes I feel like we aren’t absolutely necessary in the equation. It’s good that we’re there, but in the long run, we’re there just to facilitate it, speed things along. But, apart from that we aren’t the most important part of what we’re doing at all.” –Charles

Here Cindy is referencing the generally obscured understanding and efficacy of these trips. There are many ideologies in the academic and non-profit communities detailing a methodology through which to “get it right” as she mentions. The controversial nature of this lies not only in the methods used, but in the potential for both positive and negative change, as well as the historical, economic, and social factors across the globe that have made situations in these areas something to “get right.” By this, she is implying that there is something to be fixed or bettered about these areas and, while conventional wisdom may be in disagreement, there is sufficient founding for students to try to “get it right,” or fix it.

The quote from Charles displays a division between the perceived need that brought about the existence of the ISSP in the first place, and the role of the student within it. As he says, they are interacting with a community to “speed things along,” implying that the positive change is already in place. The assertion that we (the students) are not necessary in the equation implies that, without the students, the community would be “improving livelihood” just the same.

These perceptions displayed in the quotes above are manifested in a regular and ubiquitous form of ISSP involvement and participation that placates the raised concerns, and promotes focus on ISSP’s mission, and not necessarily the achievement of that mission. The structural process detailed above provides a place for these contradictions to be ignored. The

moral order created and adhered to through the process assuages these concerns that manifest out of this initial contradiction.

Contradictory Structures

There are contradictions implicit within ISSP structure that inform their international involvement and provide a basis on which further contradictory ideas develop. The conflict between the short-term position of the student and long-term goals of ISSPs, the individual student and the ISSP as a group, and the campus influx and selectivity of ISSPs all mark contradictions that are mediated by the ISSP organization and process.

Long-term v. Short-term

As previously mentioned, a student is bounded by their looming graduation regardless of when they become involved in an ISSP. The nature of ISSPs as student-led extracurricular groups means that, once a member is no longer a student, that person is no longer a member. While some have strong alumni networks and gatherings, involvement is peripheral for non-students previously within the ISSP framework. This is in direct contradiction to the long-term goals of the project. Ideally, cycles of students will be able to carry on this goal over time without any fixed, stationary leader. However, in practice, this becomes too difficult. ISSPs are student-led meaning that whichever students are in a leadership position become the stewards of the long-term goal encompassed in the ISSP existence. This stewardship takes many forms and alters the goal by its very nature of changing hands and changing times. What may have been the right goal for an area during certain political, social, and economic conditions five years ago, or even one year ago, may not be currently relevant. This means that enacting long-term change is a contradictory notion, because the definition of this long-term change is always changing. With

the exception of faculty advisors/overarching organizations, there are no constants in this process. The students are cycling, and the community members are continuing to live their lives in whatever way that see fit, which may entail large or small scale changes. The short term nature of student involvement and the long-term vision for these ISSPs, coupled with the lack of possibility of involvement post-graduation, contradict to reflect the self-referential creation of the moral order on which ISSPs are evaluated.

Individual v. Group

The individual student undergoes the process of ISSP involvement and membership as a individual, and the process culmination in a program mediated moral sense of self is individual by definition. However, the group as a whole has full control over decisions and actions and must act according to the moral order it has created. They do not represent any one student's goals or ideas, but the collective joining of those goals and adherence to the morality within them. When ISSPs are described as student-led, it means led by the "student" as a conglomeration of ISSP members, not any particular student. This leads to contradictory ideas regarding agency. A student as an individual can have a negative idea about the trip in general or the trajectory of the project itself, but the group overall glosses these ideas into the mentality of cohesive positivity. Social relations play a part in this; individual students may have varying opinions of ISSPs, but the desire not to disappoint, disregard, and/or disagree with the other members leads to either hiding or diminishing these opinions to better coincide with the group ideas. However, an individual will talk in first person when discussing the action of the ISSP and the good work done because it is "their" experience. The group is something they were a part of, but that student as an individual had a transformative experience as an individual, the group cannot self reflect as a whole.

Influx v. Selectivity

ISSPs have been growing in number on William and Mary's campus over the past 15-20 years. As service learning and international engagement becomes more popular and plausible, so too do student aspirations to help international communities with various issues in health, environment, and education. This results in competitive groups vying for the best, brightest, and most ethical students on William and Mary's campus. But as interest in these groups increases, so too does selectivity. It is as if the supply of ethical students is static on campus, whereas there is no limit to the places, people and themes through which international benefit can be enacted. ISSPs are becoming something students can envision every student doing, something that might be a perceived box on the college checklist, but the increasing selectivity makes that idea implausible. This contradiction even perpetuates the nature that creates it, because those students who are rejected from the selection process of certain other groups, may start their own ISSP as a result of their desire to do good, unrecognized in the previous ISSP.

The contradictions described are necessary in an ISSP context because of the time constraints for a student to interact on behalf of the ISSP, as well as time needed to learn the proper philosophy of interaction for a new member. They are real in description, but do not disrupt the process by which students enter and engage internationally through ISSP membership. These contradictions in perception and structure are direct results and products of the moral order ISSPs are attempting to adhere to, and the general acceptance of ISSP involvement as an index for ethical personhood.

Ethical Personhood

The ISSP structure and organization has the effect of ratifying participants as exercising ethical personhood and moral selfhood, irrespective of any ISSP content, community development, or student skill development. Ethical personhood represents an adherence to a social organization predicated upon a particular moral order or in which morality is practiced. I interpret the regularities shown in trip organization, contradictory patterns, and self-referential communication as acting like ritual to produce certain kinds of persons that enable students to present themselves with a felt moral authority. Drawing on Comaroff and Comaroff's (2001: 15) description of the "more radically individuated sense of personhood," that results from neoliberalism, I identify the ISSP process as a practice deemed ethical on William and Mary's campus, and the development of particular kinds of ethical persons that come from this distinction. This means that an ISSP itself indicates this ethical personhood, by which members are perceived to adhere to a particular moral order because of their involvement in an ISSP. In the case of moral selfhood, this process is internalized and a student develops a moral sense of self as a result of a personal process, including mastery of the philosophy of interaction for the group.

The process acts in a ritual capacity, not necessarily in adherence to a particular canon or a resulting change in social status, but in the way students perform a script that has the function of regulating activity and moral purpose. Following this script provides the evidence to students and to others that they have enacted this purpose in the world, regardless of actual outcome. Students derive ethical personhood from their involvement, as it references their ascription to a moral order, indicated by ISSP involvement alone. Outsiders also identify this personhood, contributing to the cycle of ritual-like production of order-adherence without effect.

Rappaport focuses on the different streams of meanings produced as consequence of ritual's formal properties. Interpreting the results of my research I use Rappaport's exposition of ritual structure as, "a more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers" (1999: 27).

Observing the stages of group organization I focus on the way that this sequence of activities encodes a moral commitment that is shared by group members as a result of their participation in the group. The expression of this commitment is not merely a one-time or repeated verbal assertion, but is an index "a sign which is caused by, or is part of, or, possibly, in the extreme case, is identical with, that which it signifies" (Rappaport 1999: 55). The stages of ISSP involvement reflect this indexical relationship, and premeditate participation on the basis of moral commitment, solidifying the identity of the group as indicating moral commitment, rather than material achievement. This ethical grounding is seen in the performative patterns of student members in each stage, and throughout the rest of their ISSP involvement. Three consequences follow from the stream of self-referential messages: 1) The actions of group members represent a commitment to a moral order above immediate self-interest and thus group members' action may be evaluated with reference to this commitment; and 2) Evaluation of group performance in terms of the instrumental results of activities within communities is largely left to individuals and does not affect group commitments; 3) Indexical communication has the capacity to invest participants with a sense of self as a moral actor and this sense of self may be communicated to others, including prospective employers and professional schools. Thus a moral commitment may, in fact, be transformed into a certain kind of agency that certifies the participant as an ethical actor whose personal aspirations go beyond self-interest.

Student perceptions of ISSPs demonstrate how ISSPs act as an index for ethical personhood and moral selfhood. This personhood is communicated to others by nature of ISSP membership. Active involvement is evidence of the ethical personhood; it aligns that person with a moral order of being (i.e. being a good person because they are helping those in need internationally). This personhood is not questioned if the mission of an ISSP indicating this moral order is not fulfilled. Likewise, a moral sense of self results from this same indexical relationship between ISSPs and perceived adherence to a moral order. Again, the adherence to this order (i.e. personal fulfillment of the mission of doing good internationally) is not necessary to complete this association between ISSPs and moral students, as a consequence of the self-referential composition of the ISSP.

Conclusions

In this paper I have attempted to identify and interpret the regularities seen in ISSP formation, organization, and performance on William and Mary's campus. Primarily student interview analysis led to my assertion of an indexical relationship between ISSP involvement and ethical personhood/moral selfhood in student perception. This moral order is based on the ethical grounding of the ISSP itself, not the actions or achievement of it. This creates and reinforces identifiable contradictions, which were the first indication of the cultural creativity evidenced within an ISSP dilemma of morality and unachievable efficacy.

What is the result of ISSPs' similar frameworks, practices, and positive opinions on William and Mary's campus? How does this model facilitate student perceptions that become reified later in life? What is the real impact of an ISSP that emphasized student moral purpose over performance of international benefit? William and Mary administrators are looking into

funding ISSPs on campus (Steve Hanson, personal communication) and/or allowing alumni to fund ISSPs through the college's name. This would be a direct sanctioning of the college of ISSPs and provide more avenues for students to go through the ISSP model. This perpetuates the privileging of student selfhood over international action. The conventional perception of the students on campus that, to engage or benefit internationally, a student must be involved in an ISSP is limiting, and results in an overpopulation of ISSPs in relation to other extracurricular activities.

Students are looking for a way to mediate their service-oriented identity in the American college system and the world. All the students discussed in this paper perceive themselves to be service-oriented and this is a real and just self-description. As I have shown, this framework for realizing this orientation is poorly understood, and it was my intention to provide a frame of reference for students to understand and contextualize their action and positionality within this system.

The purpose of this research was to bring into consideration student perceptions of international service engagement and projects. It was not to make claims about the efficacy of any one group or another, but to synthesize the thoughts students had about the ISSPs into a system of understanding. It was not my intention to advise any student or ISSP on their involvement or existence, but I hope this synthesis of ideas can inform administrative, student, and faculty decisions regarding the structure, pathway, and evaluation of international engagement.

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