

International Humanitarian Trips: Objectionable or Estimable?

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Abstract

The ethical considerations surrounding student international humanitarian trips are complex. This article considers the benefits and drawbacks of such trips by examining existing literature and discussing personal experiences. The positive aspects of these trips for communities include essential work being accomplished, economic support, and job creation for support staff. The benefits for students include professional, personal, and technical growth, global awareness, research opportunities, leadership development, and the cultivation of empathy in engineering. The concerns associated with international humanitarian trips include environmental impacts, the cost-effectiveness of travel versus direct donation, resource allocation, short-term or ineffective solutions, and the concern of unequal opportunities among individuals who are able to participate. The discussion reviews social injustices, questions whether benefits disproportionately favor students over the communities, considers the appropriateness of requisite complexity of engineering skills, and examines the potential pitfalls of “voluntourism.” This paper contributes to the ongoing debate surrounding the ethics of short-term, international service-learning experiences through a critical evaluation of the ethical implications.

Introduction

Planning, implementing, and evaluating short-term international humanitarian trips, as the student leaders and participants on the trips, provide ample opportunities to question the appropriateness of these experiences. The most prevalent questions are whether these projects have a sustainable and long-lasting impact on the communities and whether they are genuinely beneficial for all stakeholders [1]. In their article, “International Humanitarian Engineering: Who Benefits and Who Pays,” the authors explain, “an international engineering placement in a marginalized community for an academic credit is neither intrinsically good or bad. Reflective thinking about who benefits and who pays is critical” [2]. This article, written by two student leaders on an international humanitarian trip, a participant, and their instructor, delves into the complexities of navigating cultural differences, ethical dilemmas, and the long-term impact of these initiatives on both students and communities, outlining the importance of community partnership, sustainable practices, and ongoing dialogue in shaping responsible engagement in international volunteerism.

Considering first-hand experiences and available literature, the paper offers insights and recommendations for future initiatives, specifically emphasizing the need for holistic approaches that prioritize social justice, mutual benefit, and ethical integrity. By considering whether international humanitarian trips are objectionable or estimable, or simply, “who benefits and who pays” [2], these published reflections could be useful for institutions considering similar international humanitarian trips to better prepare their students and encourage reflective practices. This article is divided into three sections: (1) background information on the experience, authors, and terminology in international humanitarian trips, (2) benefits for students and community, and (3) reasons to question participation.

Background Information

To provide context for the resulting discussion, this section contains a description of the international humanitarian trip, a land acknowledgement and positionality statement, and a discussion on common but not synonymous terms for humanitarian projects.

The International Humanitarian Trip

In February 2023, a group of 17 engineering students at the University of Prince Edward Island took part in a 10-day international humanitarian trip with Global Brigades to partner with a community in Honduras to work towards meeting the community's health and economic goals [3,4]. During the trip, students collaborated with a team of engineers, translators, and community workers in Honduras to address pressing challenges faced by the rural community, specifically towards the United Nation Sustainable Development Goal 6, to "Ensure access to water and sanitation for all" [5]. The initiative involved the design of a new water system for 50 households. The existing system consisted of a water tank and deteriorating rubber pipes, with access for only a few households. This system was insufficient to meet the expanding needs of the community and resulted in unequal water distribution. The Canadian and Honduran team worked together to design a sustainable solution that could contribute to equitable access to clean water for all residents. At the end of the experience, the community members received a certified report with a materials list, budget, and drawings, which they could circulate to seek funding from governmental sources. If the community could cover the material costs, a future Global Brigades team of staff and students would provide the labor to continue the long-term partnership.

Through a corresponding International Humanitarian Engineering course, the students became aware of the broader implications of their work, which extended beyond the technical solutions to encompass more profound social justice considerations [3]. The course was designed to help students prepare, reflect, and integrate their experiences with their other courses. It culminated in a debate about whether the experience was ethical or not, and students completed reflective essays which summarized points brought up in the debate that resonated with them and their concluding thoughts.

In February 2024, a team of 22 students travelled to Honduras for a 6-day experience to design a water system for a different community. Six of the students attended both trips, and a Humanitarian Engineering course was again offered to help students reflect on the experience.

Land Acknowledgment, Positionality Statement and Partnerships

Before proceeding, first, we must acknowledge our respect and gratitude to live, work, and learn in Epekwitk, Mi'kma'ki, the traditional, unceded, and unsundered lands of the Mi'kmaq people, where we composed this article. We also acknowledge and are grateful to have been in Honduran territory, especially in areas of the Lenca people.

We are four women of European descent who have participated in multiple international humanitarian trips and struggle with the complexity of the positive and negative implications. Two of us are student leaders who organized the two international humanitarian trips. One is a

student participant in both trips, and one is the accompanying instructor who has been involved in numerous humanitarian trips.

Lastly, we acknowledge that the international humanitarian trip was only possible through the dedication of Global Brigades' staff, their long-term partnerships with Honduran community members, and the collaboration of community members. We do not attempt to capture their perspectives in this article, and we speak only from our experiences and what we read in the literature.

Terminology As Found in the Literature

This section documents the literature on the intersection of social justice, service-learning, international humanitarian trips, and volunteer tourism. Though the terms are related, there are important distinctions between the concepts. Figure 1 proposes a model to relate the terms.

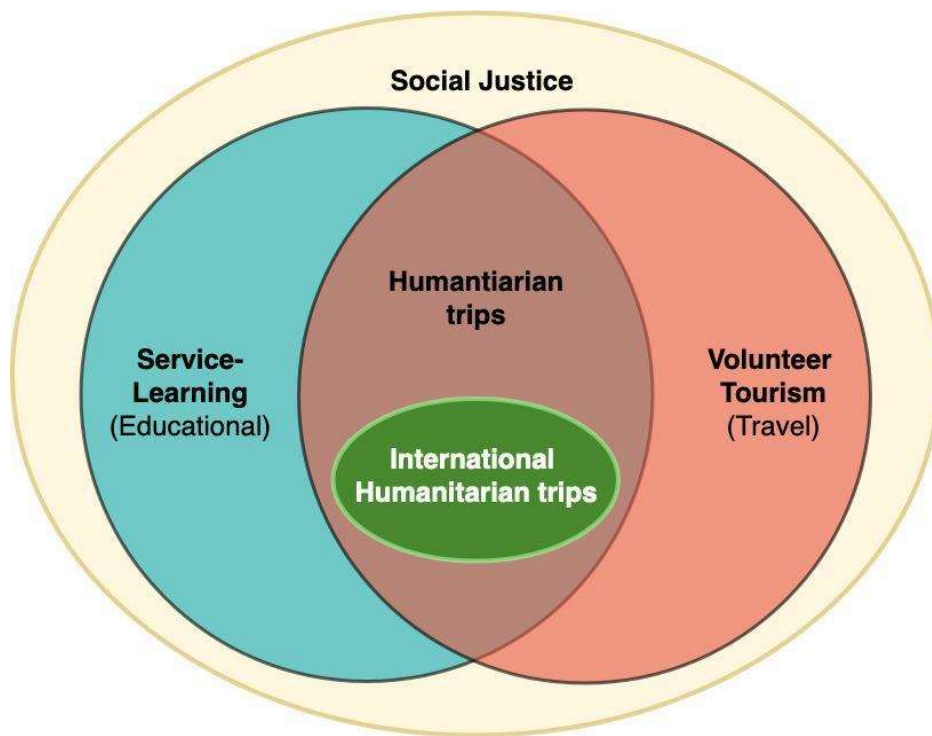


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Humanitarian Trips Terminology.

First, social justice is a concept that considers whether a person has equal opportunities within a society [6]. It is both an examination and actions towards developing a more equitable society. Social justice encompasses the conditions that people face in their daily lives, how they are addressed, what they feel they can and cannot do based on societal and cultural practices, and whether there is a just distribution to access what is required to live a dignified life [7]. In an engineering context, social justice questions include: considering the purpose of the design, who is affected, where the expertise lies, and the impact on stakeholders [7]. Essentially, social justice is the foundational principle that drives people to work towards a more equitable global society.

Engineering students can engage in social justice work in their classrooms through service-learning projects, which involve real community needs being met while also addressing academic objectives [8]. During these experiential learning opportunities, there are potential linguistic, cultural, and technical barriers [9] which can occur between students and community partners. Therefore, continuous development and reflection are necessary for students to better relate and understand their community partners to foster an effective partnership. Similarly, community partners must adjust to working with students, as the university schedule can be constraining [10], expectations must be aligned, and communication and technical barriers complicate partnerships. Thus, long-term continuity with community partners is particularly important to contribute to ongoing project sustainability and make a genuine difference in developing communities [11].

Next, humanitarian trips are one form of service-learning projects that incorporate domestic or international travel for mutually beneficial experiences between students and community partners. Further narrowing the scope, an international humanitarian trip has many definitions but is collectively described as a program allowing individuals to work to improve lives in developing communities. Note this is not limited to students, but when tied to curriculum, it is a form of service-learning that is performed out of the country. These trips can provide an introduction to intercultural perspectives and “learning to work effectively with people who define problems differently” [12]. It is essential that through these experiences, individuals recognize that differences in perspectives are not inherently right or wrong; the quality is not superior or inferior, merely different [12]. International humanitarian trips are opportunities to develop global competency, which is inherent in many engineering careers, helping students to understand ways of thinking about work that differs from personal experiences [12]. While the core focus of engineering is problem-solving, engaging in varying ways of thinking to solve and define problems is imperative for a successful career [12].

In global contexts, engineering students may be exposed to ethical issues such as exploitation, bribery, and corruption, which can cause them to reconsider their own sense of right and wrong, further developing their personal morality [13]. Though standards may be less stringent in the international setting, engineering students should continue to apply the same standards, regardless of their location [14]. Through these differences in practices, students learn how to communicate respectfully, working towards a mutually beneficial outcome. Additionally, differences in practices, expectations, and culture can become points of conversation, inducing curiosity instead of alienation [15]. Upon returning to their home, it is important that they integrate these learning experiences with their other courses and share the information with colleagues. Then, there is a broader reach to ensure that the “time, money, and energy” spent during the experience are not wasted [16].

Lastly, international humanitarian trips can be considered a form of volunteer tourism, which is characterized as an individual who vacations while also working to reduce poverty, help the environment, or perform research [17]. Though volunteer tourism can occur domestically, often it is an international experience in a developing country to support disaster relief or humanitarian, environmental, or social issues [16]. Voluntourism, which is the act of a volunteer tourist, has been criticized as a new form of colonialism that creates dependency and potential exploitation of the developing nation [16,17]. Though voluntourism can have negative connotations, individuals who desire a more altruistic experience that differs from a typical vacationer can contribute to

beneficial outcomes for the environment, ecological conservation, education, and communities [16,17].

Benefits for Students and Community

International humanitarian trips allow students to learn technical skills and develop global awareness while being exposed to real-world engineering problems that address existing adversities that communities face [18]. Additionally, these real-world experiences help institutions to meet curricular engineering accreditation requirements, such as the Canadian Engineering Accreditation Board (CEAB) graduate attributes or the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) criteria [3, 19]. Written from the students' perspective, this section describes community benefits, skill development, adopting a global perspective, and assessing accreditation outcomes.

Community Benefits

Though little research is available that focuses on the community partners' experience in service-learning partnerships [10], there are advantages for the communities. Primarily, through effective humanitarian partnerships, communities benefit from the work performed by the organization and participating volunteers.

Secondly, the organizations that coordinate international humanitarian trips may require communities to formally organize themselves to promote change [19]. For example, Global Brigades supports communities to establish a water board made of community members who oversee the fee collection and maintenance of the water system. Additionally, the water board is responsible for fundraising the initial material costs for the water system from the government and donors, at which point Global Brigades will send a water brigade to help build it. In Canada, we can take it for granted that we have organized communities and different levels of government, each focused on keeping our communities healthy on different scales. Places that do not have this level of organization may be restricted in their ability to develop. By organizing themselves in preparation for an international humanitarian trip, communities could be able to grow more easily [19].

Skill Development

Students participating in international humanitarian trips sometimes have little to no real-world engineering experience. These opportunities allow students to learn how to apply their classroom knowledge to a problem and teach valuable life skills to the students. A study on a 9-day engineering service-learning project determined that students applied their engineering knowledge by developing their understanding of hands-on project experience [18]. Projects also allowed students to understand constraints, such as limited availability of materials, sizing constraints, and local issues [18]. During our experience, we also dealt with limitations and constraints. Though we wanted to recommend more sustainable materials, we were limited to selecting the PVC and hydro-grade steel pipes that were locally available. This experience taught us that not every project has expected or ideal conditions and the geographic location impacts the design. Thus, participating in an international humanitarian trip allows students to learn about the varying standards present when designing in a different country [19].

International humanitarian trips also develop professional skills (formerly called “soft skills”) that are becoming more necessary in the engineering profession. These skills include cross-cultural communication, teamwork, leadership, and sustainability awareness [18]. Participants from this study developed cross-cultural communication skills by interacting with team members who spoke a different language and belonged to a different culture. Teamwork and interpersonal skills were developed by working as a team to produce a product while overcoming language barriers. Though leadership was not as prevalent in this study, one student reported that planning was crucial as a leader and they gained experience managing a team. Lastly, sustainability awareness is important on international humanitarian trips because there are different materials available in various countries, and designs need to be modified based on the climate and available resources [18].

A second study on international humanitarian trips showed that developing professional skills was a predominant outcome [20]. Leadership, communication, and teamwork were heavily emphasized as sub-outcomes by the participants, matching findings from [18]. One student highlighted that they learned how to be a better leader, noting that people avoid taking responsibility when making a decision. In response, the group needed to create a new system to keep track of who was responsible for each task. Another student described how they felt that their communication skills improved by the end of the trip because they worked on a team. They indicated that it was difficult for them to stay organized as only one person would be told something imperative to their work, causing issues when working as a team. These situations demonstrate that teamwork and conflict-resolution skills are practiced throughout service-learning.

Similarly, teamwork and communication were present in our international humanitarian trip. Throughout the community surveying process, we divided into two groups so that we could reach all of the houses and measure the locations of the water tanks more quickly. One group started from the water tower, and the second group started from the middle of the community. However, there was a communication error, and two houses were missed by both teams, causing additional work the next day to collect the necessary data. Additionally, we practiced communication skills with Global Brigades staff, other students, and community members, particularly during the surveying process.

Lastly, adaptability and creativity are professional skills that are developed through service-learning [18]. Adaptability is necessary because individuals are typically in a new environment and applying skills that have only been learned in the classroom. In addition, students have to adapt to the materials that are available and the custom practices of their new environment. They work with community members and other volunteers from different places, with differing languages and customs. Creativity is similarly important as trips typically have strict timelines, and everything needs to be completed during the experience. Thus, creativity is required for organization, project management, ideation, and presentation preparation [18].

Adopting Global Awareness

Engineering students in a study on global understanding and cross-cultural abilities self-reported marked improvement in: understanding global issues, capability to recognize their own bias, prejudices, or stereotypes, cross-cultural sensitivity, knowledge to compare and contrast their

host country with their own, capacity to relate to and work with people from other cultures, understanding of issues that affect those in the larger global community, ability to respect others despite cultural differences, and the amount they care about problems of people in other countries [21]. This demonstrates that international humanitarian trips greatly impact students and their global awareness. Additionally, it allows students to become more socially aware and responsible and to design solutions with global implications in mind.

A second study identified four areas that the students felt that they developed through their international humanitarian trip: cultural intelligence, heightened global awareness, motivation to use new knowledge, and a desire to encourage more service-learning opportunities in their home country [22]. The students reported that they realized that effective communication is not only about the language but also the culture. Additionally, they gained more confidence by communicating with people from other countries during their experience. Their global awareness was also increased by seeing different circumstances in other countries and comparing them to their own. Students gained new knowledge from their experience, and this caused them to become more motivated to make a difference using it. One student highlighted that they did not really know what service-learning was before they participated, and now they plan to do more as it demonstrates how what they learn in the classroom can be used to help communities [22].

Our experience also highlighted that global awareness is gained or greatly improved through international humanitarian trips. Most of the students had little to no experience with service-learning. Collectively, we felt that we were greatly impacted by our experience, and we became more aware of issues impacting people from different countries and cultures. Also, we live in communities with unfettered access to clean water, and this was our first experience where we did not have unlimited access to clean water. For the first time, we had to regularly think about our water usage and its source throughout the day. Through this experience, we are more aware of the daily reality for large portions of the global population. Additionally, after our experience, many of us also wanted to continue participating in humanitarian experiences, and the three authors returned to Honduras in February 2024 with Global Brigades for a second time.

Assessing Accreditation Outcomes

Though few students have the opportunity to participate in international humanitarian trips, viewing the experience through an accreditation lens is a rigorous way to evaluate program success and identify beneficial elements. Adopting a methodology in which international humanitarian trips were viewed through the lens of the National Board of Accreditation in India [23], in this section, we offer a brief evaluation through the seven criteria outlined by ABET [24], followed by a summary of a similar evaluation for the CEAB graduate attributes [3].

Throughout our experience in Honduras, we encountered each of the criteria defined by ABET [24]. The first criterion on problem solving using foundational knowledge was addressed through the structure of the experience. We used our knowledge of thermodynamics to estimate the water flow rate, and we used mathematics to estimate the population density of the community. The second criterion for designing engineering solutions that meet specific needs was evident in the design of the water system to meet the needs of the community. The third criterion to communicate to various audiences effectively was met through our conversations with the community members, staff, and teammates. Also, after we completed the design, we presented it

to the community using posters and attempting to speak in Spanish, having practiced our sentences numerous times. Though translators often had to repeat what we said with the correct diction, the community members appeared surprised by our desire to emphasize and connect through their language.

Criterion four concerns the ethical and professional responsibilities of an engineer, which are common outcomes of international humanitarian trips [25]. During our experience, we shadowed a professional engineer, and he generously conversed about ethical obligations and the reality of being an engineer in a developing nation. We realized our ethical obligations did not stop when we left Canada, and we were diligent in our data collection and analysis to ensure we produced the correct result. We developed a deeper understanding of how engineering can be used to solve real-world problems and impact communities.

The fifth criterion describes teamwork and leadership, which were addressed in the skill development section and are documented outcomes of international humanitarian trips [18,20]. Criterion six is essentially data analysis and data interpretation. During our trip, this outcome was present in the manipulation of the design software and in interpreting survey data to determine the appropriate pipe sizes. The last criterion is the ability to gain and apply new knowledge. During our experience, we learned and applied surveying techniques and how to design water systems in rural communities in Honduras. Thus, all seven ABET criteria [24] were addressed to some extent during the international humanitarian trip.

Next, to use the lens of the Canadian accreditation system, CEAB defines 12 graduate attributes and three levels to attain for each attribute: introduced, developed, and applied. After returning from their experience, four students documented that all 12 graduate attributes were addressed through 39 impacts [3]. Additionally, more than half of the impacts were at the application level, which highlights the applied nature of the international humanitarian trips.

Reasons to Question Participation

Though many benefits have been discussed, this section documents the reasons that participation in international humanitarian trips are complex. The literature identifies that students benefit more than community partners, primarily due to living in a cross-cultural experience [2]. Additionally, this new form of colonialism, in which communities in developing nations become classrooms for students of developed nations, can create dependency and exploitation of host countries [26]. One engineer described crossing the border as “intrusive, exploitive, and patronizing” for the community members [2]. Written from the student perspective, this section contains discussions on the environmental impact of travel, inequitable allocation of resources, the social injustice and burden on the community, and unequal opportunities to participate.

Environment Impact of Travel

As a student in a sustainable design engineering program, one of the main arguments against participating in an international humanitarian trip is the environmental impact. Travelling to countries that are thousands of kilometers away produces large amounts of emissions. If students are travelling to participate in a project that involves manual labor that community members could perform, the environmental impact may not outweigh the educational outcomes, particularly if the same lessons can be learned in the student’s home country. While it has been

said that hands-on work and manual labor are beneficial for engineers, it can be argued that you do not need to travel thousands of kilometers to perform it.

An example of this is when a group of engineering students travelled to Nicaragua to aid in the construction of household facilities [27]. The students dug holes, mixed concrete, and laid cinder blocks for walls, none of which require special engineering skills or are taught in post-secondary engineering education. Potentially, these tasks do not provide a future benefit for students as they are not tasks an engineer would normally perform. It might have been better if one or two staff taught community members to do the tasks, which would have provided them with training and potential employment opportunities.

Even in our experience, though we learned engineering-specific skills, our environmental impact was substantial. Upon returning, we calculated our carbon footprint was 6,000 lbs each due to air and land travel. To offset this, we would each need to plant 120 trees and wait 20–40 years for maturation so that they could absorb 50 lbs each in the following year. Though this may be considered far-fetched, but we felt it was important to calculate our carbon footprint to be aware instead of ignorant of our environmental impact.

Inequitable Allocation of Resources

There is also debate on whether the money used to travel to an international country could be better allocated directly to the community or project. The funds for air travel could have been used to pay capable community members to perform the tasks [27]. During our experience, it was evident that the work we completed as a group of 17 could have been completed by 2 or 3 people. This sparked a conversation during our class debate that there may have been a waste of valuable resources. On top of the cost of air travel, we used other resources such as food, water, electricity, and the time of many trained professionals such as engineers, doctors, and translators. We could have sent a fraction of the volunteers, and the same amount of work would have been completed. Sending fewer volunteers would have cut down the resources significantly, and the volunteers could have stayed in-country longer to see the project through further. In addition, money that was fundraised for the extraneous workers could have been allocated to other projects or donated to the same community to pay for material costs.

Another point of concern was that we had a pool at our accommodations that seemed to be emptied and refilled every week. It did not make sense to be staying at a compound with running water for showers, bottled drinking water, and a pool when the whole goal of our brigade was to design a water system for a community that did not have potable running water in their homes. Though we had to be attentive to drink clean water, and the showers were icy cold, water was always available. It felt wrong to spend a day interacting with community members and mapping out a water system for them before heading back to relax by the pool, enjoy a clean shower, and have hot food served to us. It is questionable whether the amount of work we completed outweighed the resources consumed during the trip.

Social Injustice & Burden on the Community

Service-learning and international humanitarian trips are often marketed as mutually beneficial to both parties. However, they tend to put an emphasis on the student experience [2,10]. For example, research on medical brigades, a Global Brigades experience for healthcare students,

preaches the volunteer experiences as a main benefit of attending such a trip [28]. There can be little emphasis on the long-term impacts on the community due to the experience. In fact, service-learning can amplify harmful stereotypes and paternalistic attitudes, depending on the approach and implementation [29]. Without proper reflection, integration, and relation to academic content, the learning experience we claim students benefit from can be minimally impactful [29]. Birzer references the quote, “the road to hell is paved with good intentions,” and reiterates that the intent to help may actually be a hindrance, especially within engineering-related international humanitarian trips [27]. When service-learning is part of a formalized academic environment, there is a risk that measuring student learning is prioritized over developing qualities such as empathy, cultural awareness, and emotional intelligence. If the drive for a student to attend an international humanitarian trip is simply for class credit and the outcomes are strictly academic, they may be less likely to take responsibility for non-course related material and expand their worldview. While a project may involve some key engineering concepts, the real takeaway should be what cannot be taught in a classroom in their home institution.

True evaluation of international humanitarian trips is necessary to ensure mutual benefits for communities and students. Robert Sigmon defined three principles to measure success in service-learning: (1) those being served control the service(s) provided; (2) those being served become better able to serve and be served by their own actions; (3) those who serve also are learners and have significant control over what is expected to be learned [30]. While the principles provide a framework for organizations to facilitate service-learning in a mutually beneficial way, they are not necessarily recognized or implemented by all organizations. For example, in an evaluation of an international humanitarian trip by the Milwaukee School of Engineering with Global Brigades, it was found that the trip only covered one of the three principles [27]. From our perspective of our experience, the holistic model employed by Global Brigades ensures that all three criteria of Sigmon’s criteria are met. However, the community we partnered with may feel differently as the onus is now on them to secure funding to continue the project. These two examples highlight the potential for imbalance between who really benefits more from international humanitarian trips. The benefit of personal or academic growth for a student should not be at the expense of a community.

A common argument against international humanitarian trips is the white saviour complex. This is a widely recognized term referring to the mindset of white people who impose what they believe on community members in a fashion that poses their way as the only solution to a problem and positions themselves in a favorable light. However, it can be extremely harmful to impose standards from one context to another, as it is demeaning to the receiving community. Though well-intentioned, this may be how voluntourism, which did not begin as a negative term, has developed into a criticized concept.

Without proper training, international humanitarian trips may be doing more harm than good [27]. In our experience, the course and Global Brigades training required us to explore these topics, so we were informed on ethical volunteering practices. However, a more thorough review of the practices in-country reveals social injustices between the students and community members. For example, during our experience, due to the great distance between our residence and the community, we were invited by a community member to sit on her deck while we ate lunches that were packed for us. While the community member ate her meal as well, often other community members sat and watched, unfed. This revealed a clear wealth gap and social

injustice. While our intentions were altruistic, the programmatic duty of the organization to feed students created a social injustice that was likely dehumanizing.

Unequal Opportunities to Participate

Program evaluation should consider more than the stakeholders in the experience. It should also consider who was excluded from participating. For our experience, there are unequal opportunities for international students to participate in international humanitarian trips as compared to domestic students. Though nearly half of the students who were interested in attending the trip were international students, only 1 of the 17 students was able to participate in the first year, and no international students in the next year. With the rising cost of tuition, international students already pay more for their studies, and they do not have the same time availability to participate in fundraisers as many domestic students. Also, domestic students are eligible to receive federal bursaries for international experiences, creating even more of a gap, as international students are ineligible.

Next, the travel to Honduras necessitates travelling through the United States. If a student does not possess a passport with a high mobility score, such as a Canadian passport, it is most likely that they will need to apply for both a transit visa for the United States and a visa for the destination. Acquiring additional visas necessitates additional travel to a passport office for approval, costly paperwork, and additional stress to acquire documentation in a tight timeline.

Other areas that reveal unequal opportunities include cultural differences and language barriers. In a case study on the benefits and barriers of international students' service-learning opportunities, it was highlighted that some students worried that their English was not good enough to talk to children [31]. Some students feared being judged because of their nationality and worried that they may be treated differently by community members if they did not look like foreigners or other students [31]. It is clear that international students do not have the same opportunities as domestic students when it comes to international humanitarian trips. In order for service-learning to truly be mutually beneficial, it must be accessible to all who wish to experience the benefits.

Conclusion

This paper highlights the multifaceted nature of international humanitarian trips, emphasizing the need for critical reflection and ethical consideration of whether the experience was estimable or objectionable. While these experiences offer valuable learning opportunities for students and contribute to community development, they must be approached with sensitivity and awareness of potential pitfalls. Recommendations for future initiatives include prioritizing community partnerships, fostering sustainable practices that empower communities, and engaging in dialogue about the complexity of international volunteerism. It is crucial to provide comprehensive training and support for participants to navigate cultural, linguistic, and ethical challenges effectively. Thirdly, to ensure impactful engagement, educators should advocate for policies and practices that uphold social justice principles and prioritize the well-being of students, community members, and organizational staff.

Though the authors recognize the complex implications of the experiences, they elected to return for a second year, tacitly implying that the benefits outweigh the environmental, societal, and

inequitable harms. However, rather than willfully ignoring the impacts, they elected to perform auto-ethnographic research during their second trip. This paper lays the groundwork for their structured reflections, and they plan to publish findings about their experience as more aware returning students. Ultimately, for the community, the long-term benefit is to adequately and sustainably address a pressing need. For the students, the short-term voluntourism experience has the potential to impact their future employment and decision-making, providing a potentially life-long altruistic trajectory, which could impact the larger world.

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