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# Latino Students' Experiences in a Latin American Study Abroad Semester Program

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LATINO STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN A LATIN AMERICAN STUDY ABROAD  
SEMESTER PROGRAM

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A Thesis

Presented to

The School of Graduate Studies

Department of Higher Education and Student Development

Taylor University

Upland, Indiana

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Masters of Arts in Higher Education and Student Development

By Melissa Lima

May 2011

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**Higher Education and Student Development**  
**Taylor University**  
**Upland, Indiana**

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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MASTERS THESIS

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This is to certify that the Thesis of

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entitled

Latino Students Experiences in a Latin American Semester Study Abroad Program

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the

Master of Arts degree

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## ABSTRACT

As the Latino population increases in the United States, developing a better understanding of Latino students' experiences within higher education benefits both the student population and those interacting with these students. Due to the limited research literature focused on the experiences of Latino students going abroad, the researcher aspired to contribute to the literature about Latino students. By using a phenomenological qualitative framework, the study intended to offer a deeper understanding of the study abroad experiences of Latino students. The study revealed that a community of learning, relationships, and the need to continue diversifying student groups impacted the identity development of Latino students. Faculty and staff of study abroad programs and those who work specifically with Latino students are able to gain a deeper understanding of the unique experiences of Latino students.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Recently the Chronicle of Higher Education presented an article on ethnic minorities and study abroad. Based on a recent study, Peter Schmidt (2010) addressed the issue that the population for minority students is increasing; however, there has been no increase in minority student participation in study abroad programs. Schmidt stressed that effectively diversifying general study abroad population programs requires the reevaluation of programs in order to address the needs and concerns of ethnic minority students. The Latino population in the United States falls under the ethnic minority status. Therefore, focusing on Latino students' experiences can contribute to a deeper understanding of a portion of ethnic minority students' needs (Teranishi, 2008; Teranishi & Hannigan, 2008).

The Latino population in the United States is made up of diverse subgroups that emigrated from or descended from a variety of Latin American heritages (Central American, South American, and Caribbean countries). The largest population groups of Latinos in the United States are Mexicans, followed by Puerto Ricans and Cubans (Sosa, 1998; Torres, 2004). In 2000 the Latino population comprised 35.3 million out of 281.4 million residents in the United States (Guzman & Bureau of the Census, 2000). Estimates show that the overall Latino population in the United States will increase to "47 million in 2040 and 60 million in 2080" (Spencer, 1986, pp. 10). According to the 2005 Open Doors report, only 6% of North American undergraduate students are Latino (Institute of International Education, 2007). To help understand this disproportionately small number

of Latino students, research on their experiences and development in higher education is becoming more important (Teranishi, 2008; Teranishi & Hannigan, 2008; Torres, 2004).

Curiosity about other cultures has been growing within American higher education. The option of traveling to different countries for a different educational experience is gradually becoming a more common part of the college experience. “Study abroad is one of the most powerful tools available for internationalizing the curriculum in American colleges and universities” (Kauffmann, Martin, & Weaver, 1992, pp. 1). In 2008 studies showed that about 50% of incoming students expressed an interest in studying abroad, and 44% of students look for colleges that have study abroad programs available for students (American Council on Education, Art & Science Group LLC, & the College Board, 2008). According to the Open Doors 2009 report, the number of North American students who studied abroad during the 2007-2008 academic year increased by 8.5% since the 1987-1988 academic year; this reflects a positive increase in study abroad participation (Institute of International Education, 2009, pp. 262, 416).

As study abroad programs are gaining popularity among college students, higher education institutions are responding to embrace the opportunity. The study abroad experience provides students with an educational opportunity to be exposed to different learning experiences. This cross-cultural encounter enhances the overall development of students (Chaison, 2008). Recent research has stated that Latino students who have the resources and support to study abroad are impacted in their ethnic identity development through their experiences (Teranishi, 2008; Teranishi & Hannigan, 2008). For example, Christy S. Teranishi (2008) performed a study entitled *Impact of Study Abroad on Latino/a College Student's Ethnic Identity and Cross-Cultural Adaptability*, which

looked at how service learning influences Latino identity, relationships with others, and connectedness to community. The participants of the Teranishi study were both graduate and undergraduate students enrolled in a service learning summer course in a community located near the Mexican border. The study reported that the experiences were valuable to students' identity and relationships and to how they connected to the community where they worked (Teranishi, 2008; Teranishi & Hannigan, 2008). Based on Teranishi's (2008) study, this study attempted to contribute to the literature on the relationship between the study abroad experiences and the ethnic identity development of Latino students from different areas of the United States.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to explore the experiences of Latino students who participated in a semester study abroad program located in a Latin American country. Through exploring their experiences, the researcher aspired to better understand whether the semester study abroad experience contributes to the ethnic identity development of Latino students. This study aimed to unveil a unique part of the development of Latino students while adding to the existing research. In addition, this study sought to provide practical implications for institutions and study abroad programs that serve Latino populations.

### **Research Questions**

Based on the review of the literature, the following questions were developed to gain deeper insight into the study abroad experiences of Latino students and the possible impact on their ethnic identity development process:

- What are the experiences of Latino students studying in a Latin American country following a semester-long study abroad program?
- How are Latino students' semester study abroad experiences significantly different and contribute to their identity?

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Identity Development**

Throughout the college experience, students go through the psychosocial process of understanding their identity. While going through the identity development process, students develop an ability to differentiate perspectives, which provides their own foundational perspective of their identity (Baxter Magolda, 2003). Students begin to wrestle with their sense of self. This sense of self, including personal attributes and characteristics, shapes the process of developing identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000).

Arthur Chickering was one of the first theorists to study the identity development processes of students while integrating the impact of the environment (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Integrating the environment and context, Chickering used seven vectors to explain the process. The first five include: (a) developing competence, (b) managing emotions, (c) developing autonomy, (d) developing mature interpersonal relationships, and (e) establishing identity (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). The last two vectors, (f) developing purpose and (g) developing integrity, contribute to and redefine the identity development process, (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998; Hurst, 1978). The environment and context of students are major contributions to their identity development process. Major influences of the context could be race, gender, family influence, faith and spirituality, relationships, and perceptions of oneself (Jones & McEwen, 2000).

## **Ethnic Identity Development**

Undergoing the identity developmental process is beneficial for ethnic students because it provides an understanding of a deeper sense of self (Phinney, 1996). Ethnic identity development is unique because it pinpoints what students are learning from their family and community, which is “the shared culture, religion, geography and language of individuals who are often connected by strong loyalty and kinship” (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998, pp. 79). Student context and experiences influence the ongoing process of ethnic identity development (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003; Phinney, 1996). The development awareness process occurs when students realize the difference of their status within the institution or environment (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito). Through a crisis or an exposure, students tend to immerse themselves in the history and culture which provide a greater sense of their ethnicity (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003; Phinney, 1996).

Both Vasti Torres (2003) and Jean Phinney (2003) use a three-stage model to describe ethnic identity development. Torres labels the three stages “environment where they grew up,” “family influence and generational status,” and “self-perceived status in society” (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003, p.56; Torres, 2003). Phinney has a similar model, but uses different names for the stages: (a) diffusion-foreclosure, (b) moratorium, and (c) identity achievement (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998; Phinney, 2003). In Phinney’s (2003) first stage, diffusion-foreclosure, students have not yet developed a sense of importance or interest in their ethnicity. External influences from families and surrounding communities have influenced the student’s sense of self and their views towards other groups (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). One

problem with this is that the individual may accept these external influences and could internalize them. This tendency leads to foreclosure, where the individual does not show signs of development and stays in a stage that feels comfortable (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998; Phinney, 2003). In other words, ethnicity is not a major issue in this stage and students are not interested in seeking different perspectives.

In Phinney's second stage, moratorium, students become aware of their ethnicity. This awareness can occur when placed in a new environment or when a crisis happens that is related to their ethnicity (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Usually this awareness is triggered by an experience of exploration. Students are curious and want to engage in their cultural background to learn more about themselves and their cultural history. Knowing one's origin, as De Vos and Rommanucci-Ross (2006) explain in *Ethnic Identity: A Psychocultural Perspective*, "is to have not only a sense of providence, but perhaps more importantly, a sense of continuity in which one finds the personal and social meaning of human existence to some degree" (p. 375). In other words, students seek a deeper understanding of their cultural background to gain more of a sense of self and an explanation of behaviors and actions within their cultural context (Phinney, 2003).

At this second stage, students may gain a sense of pride and a positive attitude towards their ethnicity which may be evidenced by a bit of ethnocentrism (Phinney, 1993; Phinney, 1996). As students continue to explore their ethnic cultural history, they discover how racism and discrimination impact their history (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). At the same time students develop empathy toward fellow members of their ethnic group, which can cause a greater sense of bonding within ethnic minorities (Phinney, 1996).

During Phinney's (1996) identity achievement stage, students have a better sense of reality and a positive view toward their ethnic group. As students arrive at this stage, other aspects of their lives increase in importance and require more attention. Students feel comfortable with different aspects of their lives into which they integrate their ethnicity. Their ethnicity becomes a part of who they are and why they do what they do. At the same time, students become comfortable with other groups. Embracing diversity within other groups is another important factor that helps students become proactive about creating an awareness of diversity (Phinney, 1996; Phinney, 2003). Therefore, students develop an understanding that both minority and majority groups can work together in a community.

### **Latino Ethnic Identity Development**

Due to cultural expectations, Latino students are in a balancing act of pleasing their family yet fulfilling their desire to have a normal college life (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003; Torres 2004; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). Latino students experience these cultural and family tensions as *family influence* and *generational status* experiences during their process. Family influence is defined as a cultural norm of the strong connection and association with both immediate and extended family where a strong loyalty and solidarity mindset is practiced (Torres, 2004). While exploring their family influence, students explore “whatever label and description their parents use to describe their culture of origin” (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003, p. 56; Torres, 2004). Latino students whose parents have integrated into the United States culture have an easier time intertwining the two cultures versus those whose parents are less acculturated (Torres, 2004). Therefore, the generation status (first, second, third, etc.)

of students often contributes to the struggle of balancing cultural and family expectations with college life. A tension existing in these cultural conflicts is that students tend to hide their experience because they feel they will not be understood (Torres). Therefore, parental and family support does contribute to the academic success of students, especially those of lower socio-economic status (Ong, Phinney, & Dennis, 2006; Arellano & Padilla, 1996). Latino students with supportive family members also have a positive and hopeful outlook on their future (Arellano & Padilla, 1996).

Latino students who are at the Phinney's (1996) identity achievement stage gain confidence in making choices between the two cultures and increase their ability to move back and forth between cultures. At this point, students may become advocates for the Latino population (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Torres, 2007). They continue to educate themselves on the impact of the Latino culture within the United States and pertinent contemporary issues facing Latino Americans. In this stage, Latino students are also willing to open up their circle of relationships to those who are able to understand the Latino perspective but are not necessarily Latino (Torres, 2007).

Latino students are able to make decisions and have knowledge influenced by both the American and Latino culture. Thus, students are comfortable expressing their culture in their demeanor and actions. Even though there are sharp distinctions between the two cultures, Latino students embrace both cultures and are able to distinguish between the two. Also, Latino students are able to maintain relationships with people from diverse backgrounds but also be secure in their own cultural values (Torres, 2007). Reaching this point in the developmental process results in higher academic achievement

and enables Latino students to explore more opportunities for advancement (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Ong, Phinney, & Dennis, 2006).

Latino students who spend most of their time in a white majority environment are challenged by the tendency to relate primarily to the majority culture. This does not necessarily mean that Latino students reject their “culture of origin,” but rather that they feel more comfortable in the majority culture (Torres, 2003; Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003). Usually this tends to happen with Latino students who are from later generations, but they are also more likely to be educated in their ethnicity and even advocate and express their ethnicity (Torres, 2003).

As mentioned before, Teranishi (2007) focused primarily on Latino college students’ development through a study abroad program emphasizing experiential education and service learning. The study employed a mixed-method approach using students’ journals and analyzing a survey with three scales: the Civic Participation, the Career Preparedness, and Service Leadership / Self-Efficacy scale (Teranishi). The students were “seven graduate and four undergraduate psychology and education students (nine women and two men) attending a public university in a Southwest border community enrolled in an intensive summer course taught in Guanajuato Mexico” (Teranishi, 2007, p. 55). All the students had a Latino background but had various countries of origin and generational status. Teranishi’s study demonstrated an effect of relational development (with family, peers, and professors), a heightened “awareness of structural inequalities” (p. 63), a desire to “fit into their new culture and community” (p. 64), increased positive attitudes toward community service, and an understanding of diversity (Teranishi). The study also showed that all eleven students had a significant

increase in the overall theme of self and identity development; these themes involve achieving personal goals and an increase in self-confidence and self-efficacy (Teranishi).

A year later, Teranishi (2007) discussed a limitation related to the location of the sending institution located on the Southwest border: students reported having a “fairly strong sense of ethnic identity before they left on the program” (Teranishi & Hannigan, 2007, p. 59). Teranishi further explains that “it may be that college students who have a clearer sense of who they are and where they come from are more likely to want to study abroad and explore new cultures” (p. 59). The study continued to support Phinney’s (1993) model as “students moved from concrete dualistic thinking about their ethnic/cultural identities, through a period of increasing awareness, to a more abstract, differentiated, and integrated sense of ethnic identity” (Teranishi, 2007, p. 60). Through this experience, students were able to show a “greater acceptance of complexities of cultural differences, and began to integrate these differences into their worldview” (p. 60)

### **Study Abroad**

Study abroad is defined as a program that provides students with an opportunity to travel cross-culturally to study at a partner institution or location while achieving a learning objective of the curriculum set by the home institution (Tiechler & Steube, 1991). According to Teichler and Steube (1991), “Study abroad programs comprise an organizational and educational infrastructure aiming to ease mobility and to promote successful educational experiences abroad (not merely a regular provision of student exchange)” (p. 326). While many students pursue this opportunity to earn credit and pursue an international career, other students desire to study abroad for personal development and growth (Carlson, 1990)

**Intellectual growth.**

Through study abroad, students are able to experience firsthand the cultural places, people, traditions, and practices they have studied in the classroom. According to Younes and Asay (2003), students reported that the “factors that promoted learning were “being immersed in the culture,” “interacting with the people,” and the expertise of the local guides (p. 144). Studying abroad provides the opportunity for students to develop a beneficial international perspective. Students demonstrate an international perspective in different areas, including the view of their home and host cultures and their global understanding (Kauffmann, Martin, & Weaver, 1992). In a different culture there is a requirement to address different views and mindsets that require students to grow (Kauffman & Kuh, 1984).

**Global understanding.**

Students also gain a global understanding that flows into their perception of their home culture and other international affairs. For the purpose of the study, *global understanding* is defined as the ability to begin to see the world from another perspective while obtaining an interest and concern for international affairs and humanity (Kauffmann, Martin, & Weaver, 1992). Global understanding can be influenced by the perceptions and experiences that students bring to their study abroad experience (Kauffmann, Martin, & Weaver). Students commonly realize the ethnocentricity of their mindset and how their cultural perceptions play a role (Younes & Asay, 2003). There is great value in learning how to engage with the culture to see the values and norms, which results in having a more comprehensive and complex view of the world (Kauffman & Kuh, 1984). While embracing the courage to travel, students also take the initiative to

really understand more about cross-cultural topics and issues (Younes & Asay, 2003). This provides a foundational view on how education can be built to continue further learning.

### **Personal development.**

Study abroad provides the opportunity for self-exploration and personal development. Experiencing a lack of power in unfamiliar culture forces students to form new relationships, engage in different peoples' behaviors, and distinguish culturally appropriate behavior (Kauffman & Kuh, 1984; Thomas & Harrell, 1994; Younes & Asay, 2003). Not only can students see and reflect on their own behaviors but they also recognize how their behaviors affect others (Younes & Asay, 2003). Study abroad also opens up the opportunity for students to experience a change in their mindset and behavior (Kauffman & Kuh, 1984).

When confronted with different values of cultures, students self-reflect and tend to reshape personal values (Kauffmann, Martin, & Weaver, 1992). Students who are considered mature in the beginning start off with a deeper understanding of the culture and embrace its values. Students who have had prior experience living or traveling abroad, especially in Europe, tend to show greater concern for international relations and cross-cultural interests (Carlson & Widaman, 1988; Younes & Asay, 2003).

On the other hand, there is a risk for students to have a surface level contact in the experience (Kauffmann, Martin, & Weaver, 1992). In order for students to fully understand and transcend culture, students must have a sense of self-awareness. Students struggle with the responsibility to hold onto their home culture and identity while engaging with the host culture. *Separation* is considered the process in which students let

their dominant culture prevent them from interacting within the host culture (Thomas & Harrell, 1994). This separation happens when students choose activities or living situations with others who speak the same first language or have the same primary culture as their home culture. In the end, students eventually move from focusing on self to focusing on others (Kauffman & Kuh, 1984).

Study abroad also provides a chance to gain self-confidence and foster a positive outlook. In Armstrong's (1984) study, students claimed to have "developed self-confidence, individual maturity, and objectivity" (p. 3). In a similar study, Kauffman and Kuh (1984) also reported results of students increasing in self-confidence gained from their appreciation for other cultures. Students are able to do a self-reflection of who they are and develop confidence to explore more. They also have the opportunity to embrace independence (Armstrong, 1984). This is gained through students being honest and secure with who they are and their outside relationships (Kauffmann, Martin, & Weaver, 1992). Students must be able to take the extra step to be confident and to humble themselves in a context that is not their own and build relationships with unfamiliar people (Armstrong, 1984). Through this, students are free to ask new questions, seek new interest, and develop different perceptions of life (Kauffmann, Martin, & Weaver, 1992). It is important for students to undergo development because it contributes to self reflection while contributing to their academic learning and intellectual development (Kauffman & Kuh, 1984).

### **Reentry.**

As students return home or return to their sending institution from a study abroad experience, their reentry process is part of the overall educational experience. Many times

the reentry process can be overlooked because students are coming back to their home culture (Hoffs, 1993). While the study abroad experience provides students the opportunity to be immersed in a different culture, it can also potentially diminish the “academic rigor of the experience” (Wielkiemicz & Turkowski, 2010, p. 660).

Reentry is a process that can either have a positive or a negative impact on students. Since personal development is an ongoing process, students will continue to change throughout the reentry process. Students develop a different set of values and beliefs than their home culture, which may “produce feelings of anxiety and stress” (Wielkiemicz & Turkowski, 2010, p. 660). During reentry, students tend to feel “disorientation, alienation from family and friends, rejection of one’s own culture, boredom, and lack of direction” (Hoffs, 1993, p. 148). Those who have felt alienation from friends and family tend to react negatively to the home culture’s attitudes, values, beliefs, and behavior patterns (Kauffmann, Martin, & Weaver, 1992). Students wrestle with tension and alienation while missing their host culture, but family and friends are grateful they returned (Constantinian et.al., 2008). Students should be counseled when adjusting to life back in their home country. Family and friends commonly make the mistake of assuming that the process of coming back home is not stressful (Kauffmann, Martin, & Weaver).

Constantinian et al. (2008) mention a couple of misconceptions students have when returning in *Personal Transformation and Readjustment in “Homecoming.”* A common mistake for students returning is the unrealistic expectation of returning back to normality. They do not realize that they are changed people. Students also make the mistake of searching for the same sense of security in their home culture that they had

before they left. They fail to realize that they are trying to integrate new and old ways of how they interacted with the world (Constantinian et al., 2008)

### **Summary**

Both Latino students and study abroad programs are increasing within higher education (Institute of International Education, 2009). As institutions continue to provide more opportunities for students to study abroad, it is vital for institutions to see the importance of considering the needs of the students while embracing the educational benefits of study abroad. “Education abroad programs that are intentionally designed to support students’ global learning and intercultural development will meet this demand by contributing to the progress of students’ journey” (Gillespie, Braskamp, & Dwyer, 2009, p. 464)

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach was utilized to describe the study abroad experiences of participants. The qualitative method draws results from “constructivist perspectives” and promotes “advocacy/participatory perspectives” (Creswell, 2003). This approach allowed the researcher to retell the experience and stories of the participants. By looking at the participants’ lives and asking them to tell their stories, the research was able to combine experiences, views, and perspectives into a collaborative narrative (Creswell, 2003).

#### **Phenomenology**

The phenomenological style focuses on how each participant understood his or her experience and its contribution to developing an understanding of the world (Patton, 1990). Since the study is retelling the participants’ identity development processes and their study abroad experiences, the phenomenological approach was used. By capturing the experience as a phenomenon, the researcher’s goal was to communicate the experiences of the participants. Through the participants’ “lived experiences,” the researcher drew out common patterns and relationships (Creswell, 2003). The researcher’s main goal was for the reader to gain a deeper understanding of the participants’ experiences that will contribute to the preliminary research of related topics.

#### **Research Context**

The participants were or are currently enrolled in one of a number of faith-based institutions located throughout the United States. These institutions are members of the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU). Due to the location of the

researcher and the participants, interviews were conducted over the phone or Skype. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions (Appendix A) that allowed the participants to elaborate and expand upon their experiences. Using two recording devices to ensure the security of data, the researcher recorded the interviews in preparation for the transcription process.

### **Participants**

The participants are from a Latino background; for the purposes of this study, 'Latino Background' is defined as having either one or two parents with a Latino origin or being originally from the background country. Participants had studied abroad in the past five years in a study abroad program that is located in a Latin American country and is offered to students at all CCCU member institutions. During the program participants took a Spanish class and a core seminar class of Latin American history and contemporary issues. Throughout the semester abroad, participants had two opportunities to visit other Latin American countries and journal about their experiences. Halfway through the semester, participants were split into concentration groups to study culture, business, or literature.

A pilot face-to-face interview was conducted with a Latino student who had studied abroad in the past two years and was currently enrolled at a small, Midwestern CCCU-member institution at the time.

### **Procedure**

With the consent of the participation of the study abroad faculty member (Appendix C), a list of participants was provided by the study abroad program faculty members who personally knew each of the participants. After receiving Institutional

Review Board (IRB) approval, prospective participants were contacted by the program faculty member of the study abroad program. The program faculty member expressed the purpose and importance of the study and invited them to participate by telling their stories. Prospective participants expressing interest were contacted by the researcher with further instructions and were emailed the informed consent form (Appendix B) prior to the interview. The prospective participants then returned the informed consent form with an electronic signature prior to the interview.

After receiving the consent form, the researcher scheduled a time for a phone interview with each participant. Before interviewing the participants, a pilot interview was conducted to receive feedback on the interview protocol (Appendix A). Following the pilot interview the researcher contacted the participants and began the interview process. The researcher provided an explanation of the study clarifying any potential bias with a brief personal background and the importance of the consent form. The researcher also emphasized to each participant the study's commitment to maintain confidentiality. To protect the identity of the participants and ensure anonymity, the participants were given the option to pick an alias or were assigned one. The researcher also ensured and provided anonymity for the institution of each participant.

### **Data Analysis**

After conducting the phone interviews, the researcher transcribed the recorded interviews for the coding process. Coding was essential for the researcher to develop a good grasp on the material and dig deeper beyond the surface level (Creswell, 2003; Patton, 1990). The first step in coding was to grasp the general categories presented. By reading the data several times, the researcher went through each sentence to ascertain the

main ideas. Next, the researcher looked for meaning behind the statements. Through that method, themes were grouped together in topics and were put into a formation of abbreviated topics. After all the codes and themes were placed in topics, an analysis of the data was performed (Creswell, 2003; Patton, 1990). The researcher took the topics, codes, and themes to determine whether they were a reflection of the process of Latino ethnic identity development. The actual recordings of the interviews were kept in a locked drawer, and the recordings were destroyed after transcription when the study was completed.

While listening to the recordings, the researcher read through the interviews to generate a list of significant quotes. The researcher also underwent a peer debriefing process to remove any potential personal bias. After coding and drawing results from the themes, the researcher then triangulated by “examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification for themes” (Creswell, pp. 196, 2003) that emerged in the discussion. In the discussion, the themes were elaborated for further explanation of implications and practical applications for student affairs professionals to gain a deeper knowledge about Latino students.

### **Summary**

Using the phenomenological approach, the researcher hoped to communicate the experiences of the participants. By following the procedures, formalities, and anonymity cautions, the experiences were analyzed for results and then used for practical implications for the benefit of professionals working with Latino students.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

Results of this study were produced from major themes that emerged from 8 interviews. The participants represented a variety of Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) institutions across the United States. Participants shared similar experiences of identity issues, learning experiences, re-entry processes, and lasting memories with personal character change. Their overall experiences were impacted in numerous ways: they experienced (a) living with host families, (b) building relationships with others, (c) engaging in thought-provoking discussions and lectures, and (d) undergoing immersion experiences. To get a beneficial understanding of participants' experiences, questions were asked about their specific experiences and their perceptions.

#### **Participants' Backgrounds**

In order to fully understand the experiences of the participants, their backgrounds are described. Each of the participants considered themselves Latinos. Among the participants there were a variety of bi-racial and generational statuses. As each person had their own story to share; it is important to acknowledge that they have similar ethnicities but may or may not share similar experiences. The participants were quoted by their aliases in order to ensure anonymity. Some of the quotes were edited to eliminate unnecessary verbal language and to enhance comprehension.

To gain a deeper understanding of the Latino students' experiences, the results were placed into overall themes for further explanation. Not all the participants had the exact same experiences, but there were a number of general similarities. Community of

learning, identity development and diversifying were the three over-arching themes with sub-themes categorized under them.

### **Community of Learning**

All the participants stated that through various forms of interaction, they were able to have a deeper and fuller experience abroad that contributed to their learning. The main contributors to the participants' learning were relationships, development in relating, and the challenge of their global understanding through materials, lectures, and discussions presented in class. Sub themes were broken down to explore the contributors of the community of learning.

#### **Ability to relate with others.**

Through their descriptions, each participant confirmed that relationships impacted their experiences. In particular, when asked "What were the positive highlights or the struggles of the study abroad experience?" the answer always included how they benefitted from a relationship or had a negative experience with one.

Four out of the 8 participants expressed that the trip provided different ways and opportunities for them to learn how to relate to others. For example, Jason values relating with others, and he felt that the trip provided him many opportunities to do that. Through that experience, he gained a deeper insight of relationships. He also learned about Latin America's culture and way of life. Maria had a similar experience to Jason's:

My own objections and views on that and just kind of [make me] realize that the importance and spending time in relationships and staying with people and engaging with people. Because I feel like that was a really big part of the culture in Costa Rica, was that you are never too busy to stop and have a cup of coffee

with someone – have a ‘cafecito’ – so that was something was really important and that I held with me.

**The impact of the host family.**

The host family component is a unique and special part of the LASP experience. Host families provide an opportunity for students to develop insights about living life in the Latin American context. All 8 participants claimed that they had an overall positive experience with host families. Several claimed that they developed influential and deep relationships. Maria said:

My first host stay in San Jose was incredible. I had a host mom – she didn’t really let me ever go into a shell. I’m not really very shy. I feel that is really not really my problem, just not being able to express myself all the time because I wasn’t really conversationally proficient in Spanish – that was a little hard. She was always explaining things and really loving. The family was just so wonderful and inclusive and I had an incredible time in the city – in San Jose. And it was actually funny, because I actually hated the city. I really, really did not like the environment there but my host family made it so worthwhile. Such a positive experience that actually made me love that.

Similarly, Myra recounted that

...living with the host family, I felt really, really being able to handle things and really allowed me to see, like, the culture and the day-to-day stuff. The stuff that kind of like books wouldn’t really [have] allowed [you] to see your house, it’s about experience – I think – in that relationship...I really, really had a good

experience and time with them – so much that I still like keep in contact with them and consider them family...it's really good.

Even though there was an overall positive reaction to host families, six of the eight participants stated that they had one negative host family experience. These negative experiences may have occurred because of different expectations, personalities, or relational styles of both participants and host family. Yet when they recalled those host families, they were grateful for the other host family experiences and surrounding communities that made up for it. Describing a partially negative experience, Ann said:

The family pretty much never engaged me and talked to me at all. I felt very alone. I found a lot of my comfort in the community I lived in. So I hung out a lot out with people there and not my family as much, which was fine with me because I didn't really enjoyed them that much. So I have seen different sides. I have seen a very machismo culture and how that affected relationships and I have also seen a family that was very Spiritual and religious and how that was very different. So I got to see two very different sides. So I enjoyed it.

When asked how much they reflect on the memories, half of the 8 participants mentioned regularly thinking about their host family. Some even stated that they have been in contact or tried to stay in contact with them.

#### **Program faculty and staff.**

The overall response from the participants was that they had a positive and beneficial experience from their interaction with faculty and staff. Many indicated that they learned from the thought-provoking and challenging discussions with the faculty. The participants also felt that the faculty and staff were intentional about relating to the

students, and the welcoming and openness of the faculty and staff provided an outlet for the participants to express what they were feeling. This impacted the participants in their learning and processing experience. Jason remembered that

...they were awesome people. I loved – they were fascinating people. Their insights were amazing and to talk to them was pretty cool as well I definitely – the director of the program, he was the director of our concentration and I would talk to him his beliefs and how it is to be in Costa Rica – was a pretty cool experience and we talked to him a couple of times, more about identity and talking to him about, you know – he was an economist, so talking to him about my passion about that and his office was pretty cool.

**Classmate interaction.**

When asked about interaction with their classmates, 5 out of the 8 participants claimed that it was not easy at first. Jason stated that he never really felt that he fit in, but he stated that he never really fit in any context due to his mixed identity. Carlos stated that he never developed a deep friendship due to his unique situation of doing an individual study versus attending the language school with the rest of his classmates. Ann stated that she never felt understood and resents having “white people” telling her about her own culture. Myra felt she could not relate with her classmates due to their reaction to the locals. Myra described this at length:

...in the beginning of my experience – I would say within the first month I preferred not to hang out with any of them just because I felt – honestly I felt kind of offended by the way they reacted to [the] locals and I felt like, “Hey, I’m in this group too. I’m Latina and they’re Latinos and Latinas – here in this country

and when you put them down, or, like bash them, like, you are doing that to me.”

I used to get very hurt.

### **Identity Development**

Participants stated they were impacted by the experience or different contributing factors of it. Through their purpose and motivation some stated that they were searching for their identity. For some the reentry process is where they felt the most crucial impact. Participants have also stated that biological family influence shaped their understanding and the experience provided a deeper understanding to relate with them. By having their global understanding formed, participants also claimed that they changed their habits towards others. Lastly, the actual word “identity” was rarely used in terms of development. However the participants responded how purpose and motivation of attending LASP, the reentry process, their biological family influence, and increased global understanding impacted them as people.

#### **Purpose and motivation.**

Since LASP is an optional program offered to all CCCU schools, participants were asked about their purpose and motivation for participating, and this question elicited two responses. The first initial response was that 3 out of the 8 participants stated they needed to fulfill a curriculum requirement of studying abroad to receive a foreign language credits or a cross-cultural experience. The other 3 participants also stated that they went with the desire to learn more about the Latin American culture in order to have a better understanding of their cultural background. Two participants had both responses. For instance, Ann said “A huge part of me wanted to go to Latin America because I was

so curious. This is who I am. Why do I look this way? Why do people think that I speak Spanish but I don't?"

Carlos, Jessica, and Maria specifically stated they wanted to know more about their "Latino roots." They all expressed how they felt that they lacked knowledge about their culture and wanted to gain more knowledge. By stating their purpose and motivation for attending, the majority of the participants were hoping to establish their identity through the experience. For instance, Carlos stated:

I don't want to forget about my cultural upbringing...I want to express it better.

And I simply don't want to forget my roots...I do think there is a value to that-in Latin America in general; especially Central America is similar to Mexico. So my desire sparked that-to begin learning to cultivate my identity.

### **Reentry process.**

The overall response for 7 of the participants was that their reentry process was difficult or challenging in some form. Three participants specifically expressed that they felt that no one could understand or relate to their experience, while 2 other participants felt that during that time they were processing how they changed and how they viewed things differently. Ann remembered:

That was hard for me. I think because I haven't been able to process much of it with people – I had so much in my mind. I had so much going in my mind. I had so [many] questions asking about myself still processing in my head the whole experience. I haven't been able to fully process it...it's still difficult.

Similarly, Maria said:

It was hard because I just want to talk about everything I learned and experience and how I grew from studying abroad but at the same time – when people asked you how it was there was no way – if they are really interested – they are going to want to sit down and have an hour long conversation with you about it. The great majority of the people...asked me about how my study abroad went just weren't that interested.

None of the participants mentioned support staff from the sending institution, peers, or fellow Latinos assisting in their reentry process. Half of the participants stated that they had major life transitions to deal with once they got back, but they were able to come back into the swing of things. Overall, participants stated that the LASP program did inform them about the reentry process occurring, but they still did not feel prepared for how difficult it was.

### **Biological family influence.**

Throughout the experience and reentry process, participants were able to relate back to their family influence and how much that played a part in their identity. Similar to exploring cultural roots in purpose and motivation, 4 of the participants stated that they wanted to grasp a better understanding of Latin America to have a connection with their family. Maria said

...just because [of] my grandma, she died when I was in high school and I think when I started to get in my four years of Spanish in high school...and actually learning is what intrigued me about learning the culture and the language. It wasn't until after the four years in high school that I really had a desire to learn more about my culture, and I kind of missed that opportunity because my

grandma is gone. And so I knew, once I got into [sending institution] that I was going to study abroad in a Latin American country. I was about to learn the language even more and in doing that being able to connect with the people by showing them that I actually trying to [get] out of my comfort zone of learning their language and their culture. In a way I think it was connecting back to my grandma because I lost the opportunity and didn't really think about it when I was in high school.

When asked how family impacted the reentry process, 5 of the participants responded that family did not play a major part in facilitating a smooth reentry. As mentioned before, some claimed it was due to the transition of moving onto the next thing or their family was not around. Four out of the 5 respondents mentioned that it was difficult to relate to family after the experience. For example, both Jason and Carlos felt that they could not discuss their experience because they felt a lack of relationship or difference of opinions. Lola felt she did not let them help her in her reentry process because she felt they would not understand. Myra felt that her relatives reacted negatively to her reminiscing about Costa Rica, stating

I found myself talking about like – “in Costa Rica, we did this. In Nicaragua, we did this.” And kind of wanting to share a lot – I would say to my mom, “‘Mom’ did this and ‘Mom’ did that” and – a couple of my aunts say like “Your ‘Mom’? Like, your Mom is right here.” And they were getting a little offended by it. And my mom was like, “No, no. She’s just, you know, talking about her time in Costa Rica.” So I felt a little tension between my relatives in the United States. But they influenced me – my mom influenced me in a positive way. Some of the other

family kind of didn't. In a kind of negative way, like, "Stop talking about it. You are going to hurt your Mom. Your Mom is here." So in the sense they had different influences on me.

**Global understanding development.**

Participants expressed their appreciation of the experience because it challenged their thinking and expanded their knowledge to help them form new opinions for themselves. Six out of the 8 participants stated that the program did an effective job of providing different insights and opinions about topics pertaining to politics, historical context, standards of living, and religious views. The main components that contributed to the participants learning were lectures and materials presented in class and exposure experiences. Maria remembered:

...and there are so many different beliefs and religions and just different opinions of what...how man manifests himself and how we can be interpreted by different cultures and different people. So it really made me really rethink how I held as truth...and made me take that in account – that all the beliefs I have [were] based solely on my own culture and I haven't really been exposed to any other.

Likewise, Ann said:

It opened my eyes to – just the US policy and how it connects the other countries – at the point of exploiting other people. And so coming back to the states, I have been watching videos on Cuba more – I have been watching videos on US immigration...It definitely impacted me to think bigger about major issues and not just accept US perspective but get other perspectives like on BBC and other reading like Yahoo!, CNN, and going to BBC and getting other perspectives on

the world rather than the US because the US is a biased country and is going to be and so it got me curious to hear all sides, not just one side.

By having a changed mindset, participants also claimed that they were changed people. Lola specifically stated that now she makes an intentional effort to live out what she learned. She stated that the program made her a better person. Jason expressed that through the exposure of Latin American's reality, he began to ask questions and seek out more information. Currently he still asks the hard questions about society. Jessica, on the other hand, had a more difficult time initially but is now at a place where it impacted her for the good. Gabriella expressed how her Nicaragua experience really shaped her learning and how she viewed her home culture:

I was there in flesh and experienced it...for example, the stay in Guatemala. Just seeing the poverty... in Nicaragua. And just, the two situations really get to me when I see ungratefulness around me here in the US. And how or when I see all the opportunities that people have here in the US – even in today's economy and the way it is – and people don't take advantage of it because of selfishness. And if they could only go where I have lived. If only for a couple of days, and it's not my everyday life and if they can just leave their selfishness and put it aside and live in what other countries actually live [like]. I think that was the biggest impact and I feel I came back appreciating more. Any time that I get I try to share that experience because I think it's a blindfold over the American people. They don't see what they have at hand and they don't see that they really have it coming compared to other places.

**The word “identity.”**

Each of the participants confirmed that the overall experience was beneficial and contributed to who they are as people today. However, only 4 out of the 8 participants specifically referred to the concepts of “identity” or “ethnicity.” For example, Lola specifically stated that the experience definitely impacted who she was as a Latina. Jessica also stated that the overall experience impacted her for good as she continues to shape her identity as a Latina. Ann and Jason also specifically mentioned that their identity and how they view themselves as Latinos came from the trip. Ann said:

I definitely cherish my culture now more than I ever [did before] because of being in LASP. I definitely have seen a different side of poverty, and I have seen [a] different culture and all these things have helped me appreciate my own [culture]. So it definitely made me a more well-rounded person.

Similarly, Jason stated:

I had a lot of identity issues – personality issues – that I don’t think were met. I don’t think will ever be met. I think it’s the decision that I’m going to have to face and just kind of decide what is it going to be and just go one with my...personality and identity issues. I was really hoping to talk to some other people that are in my position. I definitely don’t think I’ve found anyone.

Lastly, 6 out of the 8 participants claimed that after the program they felt that they knew about their Latino culture or have a better understanding through a different lens. Some claimed that they did not have much knowledge about the culture or the language before their time abroad. For instance, Maria recounted

After studying abroad, I feel like I have a lot of better knowledge of the culture...and I feel like I have a better insight into what exactly the values are, cultural norms. So I think, but I mean, before my [LASP] semester – I don't really think I really understood my culture...so that whole experience definitely changed that.

All but 1 participant stated that they would go through the experience all over again in one form or another. The participants all agreed that a Latino student should experience a trip similar to LASP. The experience provides opportunities and experience for the Latino student to learn more about history and culture that shapes their view on the Latin American culture. For instance, Gabriella said:

I definitely think they should. I feel that a lot of Latinos that have grown up in the US, and don't necessary have been born here, don't have a grasp of their roots or culture. Because the parents came here with the American dream and kind of shunned their children from embracing who they are and where they came from. And I think that if more Latinos experience study abroad in Latin American countries [they] would get a better grasp and appreciate more benefits they do have here in the US and possibly push them to strive for [being] better. And maybe if they all got, maybe not all got together, but if somebody started something. The stereotype that Latinos have on them would change because they would be different.

### **Diversifying**

Due to the context of the participants' sending institutions, classmates, faculty, and staff tend to be homogenous in ethnicity. However, there has been an increase of

local faculty and staff in the study abroad program. Sending institutions and LASP program continue to be proactive about diversifying the student populations abroad. Participants' responses confirmed the necessity of how these two populations have an impact on their experiences.

### **Local faculty and staff.**

Four out of the 8 participants expressed that the Latino staff interaction was a major contribution to their experience. The Latino staff members are native Costa Rican; for many staff members, Spanish was the first or only language that they speak. Due to sharing a common language, participants were better able to connect and relate to the Costa Rican staff on a deeper level. This was a unique avenue of encouragement and support for the participants where they felt that they had someone to whom they could relate. Myra is one example of this:

I loved the fact that they have a mixed faculty not just Americans down there teaching about a country...So I really, really, really enjoyed that and really liked that. One person in particular that I had a really connection with was one of the locals that worked there. We would have – I don't know what they call it there – a debriefing or circle times – in our group, I talked about feeling discriminated and feeling offended when [other] people would make comments towards our host families or towards the buses...And she responded back in Spanish and just like “I know actually know how you feel. I am Latina. I am Costa Rican. I am a *Tica* [Costa Rican] – this is normal – you are going to feel this” – it was just one of those moments – you just feel connected. It was just after that point, I was like “I

love you!” They feel it too. I really, really, really appreciated that. It was good...it was really good.

### **Fellow Latinos.**

When asked about fellow Latinos and relationships with them, there were a variety of answers. Six participants expressed how they benefitted from them and how they appreciated having someone there. Jessica and Lola both expressed how valuable it was to have someone with whom to process and relate. Ann, in particular, shared an incident where she spoke up to her class about struggling with being a Latina in that context. In that moment, another Latina in the class was able to relate to Ann. Ann recounted:

I think in that time I spoke up, it brought us together because she sees how we can understand each other and understand why we don't fit in. So that brought us closer together and like those issues we were feeling, that bitterness and that anger brought us together and so it was really comforting to have her there...and throughout the whole time there we got closer and I felt that we have that common issue.

Jason shared about his friends with similar life experiences; he said that he mainly spent time with a missionary kid from Bolivia and a fellow Latina. They also were able to relate to each other and discuss their similar experiences. He also stated that he appreciated his relationship with them because they were a part of his overall LASP experience. Participants who lacked a close relationship with someone from a similar background felt that they would have valued that interaction. Carlos stated that he would have appreciated another Latino voice to gain a different perspective. He felt that his

classmates relied on him to be the Latino perspective during class discussions. He thought that he and his classmates would have benefitted engaging in conversations with another Latino. Carlos remembered:

...people would want me to voice my opinion, which it was fine with me, but just because I am Latino. It would have been interesting to have another Latino in there...just the fact that there were two Latinos does not mean they will have the same views. I think that would have been cool. I guess I would have enjoyed it more, but I wouldn't say it would have made – a significantly greater impact.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

#### **Implications**

The study hoped to provide support for the study of the identity development of Latino students, especially within a Latin American study abroad program. As Teranishi & Hannigan (2008) elaborate:

By taking a semester or a year abroad, students can explore the various meaning of their ethnic and cultural identities. Furthermore, study abroad increases important aspects of cross-cultural adaptability, such as emotional resilience which benefit students in the cross-cultural exchanges that take place every day as they negotiate their multiple identities and relationships across the contexts of family, school, peers and work. (p 61)

Results from the study have shown that the experience is beneficial for students in several areas which are divided into three general categories: (a) community of learning, (b) identity development, and (c) diversifying.

#### **Community of learning.**

Gillespie, Braskamp, and Dwyer (2009), discussed how a surrounding community, within the study abroad context, contributes to the student's learning and development process. In this case, host families are part of that learning community. Whether the question asked about specific or general interactions, relationships came out to be the ending result. Similar to the findings in Teranishi's study (2007), the participants showed instances of heightened relational development but even the negative

experiences were viewed by the participants as opportunities for growth. This study also demonstrated that Latino students related to the culture more through their host families. The relationship with the host families provided another avenue of learning and impacted their overall experience. Those who had a strong relationship with the host families stated that they felt more immersed in the culture. This result supports study abroad programs having host families as an important part of the programs. Also, this study encourages faculty and staff on the field to continue to encourage students to be more intentional in building relationships with host families. Programs that do not include this interaction are missing out on a learning paradigm of host families and significant exposure.

The faculty and staff provide an aspect of security and structure by creating a sense of community where a “shared purpose, mutual respect, and program identity” can be fostered with the constant turnover of students (Gillespie et.al., 2009, p. 453). Results from the study promote the importance of faculty and staff in study abroad programs, but there are few resources addressing this important topic. As Latino students continue to explore their identity and raise difficult questions, faculty and staff have an opportunity to provide insight and experience in the development journey. Study abroad programs should consider hiring native faculty and staff. Through this unique and personal interaction, students are able to grow and learn a different side of the culture.

This study showed that knowing the language deepened students’ relationships. As participants state, this broke down barriers and created a common bond with locals. Prior to sending the students abroad, the sending institution should encourage the students to take advantage of all options of learning the languages. Once in the host country, the program should continue to encourage and challenge the students to learn the

language. Because the majority of Latino students speak the language, they have an advantage of having a deeper understanding in the culture and surrounding relationships.

### **Identity development.**

Identity was a rare word used among the participants when they spoke about their experiences. Yet, through their experiences and answers, some sort of development was evident. This study supported Gregory K. Armstrong's (1984) discussion of personal development through study abroad in his work, *Life After Study Abroad: A Survey of Undergraduate Academic and Career Choices*. Participants stated that the experience provided an opportunity for exposure and allowed them to increase positive personal development. This study aligned with oth Teranishi's (2007) and Phinney's (2003) studies; due to exposure Latino students gained new perspectives and opinions. Many of the participants wondered and asked questions, which is similar to what Kauffman, Martin, and Weaver (1992) found in their study. The participants expanded their views and developed a sense of awareness that contributed to their sense of identity (Phinney, 1993; Teranishi, 2007). Latino students are not only asking questions and seeking out new perceptions of their identity in a Latin American context but also about their individual identity in general.

Constantinian et al. (2008) claim in their study that students who journeyed abroad are proactive in their "progression in one's own psychological development" (p. 55). This statement is similar to Teranishi's (2007) study in that the purpose and motivation of her participants was that they wanted to have a sense of who they are and where they came from; however, this study also reflects that participants wanted to explore their identity further in order to connect back to their family. Those who were

closer to first-generation status had a stronger sense of desire to learn more about their culture and family roots. This encourages those who work with Latino students who are currently in this transition to motivate their students to explore their roots and develop a sense of self.

Based on Phinney's (2003) ethnic identity model, the participants' purpose of exploring their roots aligns with the moratorium stage of wanting to explore more of their cultural roots and origins and being intentional about educating themselves. Participants simply stated that they wanted to explore their roots or that they had a strong interest in Latin America. This study supports the notion that a study abroad program could be chosen by the participant to seek out more of their cultural identity. Similar to Teranishi's (2007) study, this study also challenges institutions to encourage incorporating study abroad and similar learning opportunities into the curriculum for the purpose of increasing the "awareness of self and others across diverse cultural contexts" (p. 71). As institutions continue to provide more opportunities for students to study abroad, they must embrace the educational benefits while addressing the developmental needs of the students as well.

Participants had the unique opportunity to build relationships which contributed to the overall experience; this is similar to Kauffmann, Martin, and Weaver's (1992) work. They state that through study abroad programs, Latino students have the opportunity to learn about themselves in ways that contribute to outside relationships (Kauffmann, Martin, & Weaver, 1992). Throughout this study, participants stated the importance of how relationships with others impacted them. As Latino students experience independence from their home institutions and surrounding support systems, they are

provided with an opportunity to step out of their comfort zone and experience how they relate with others (Armstrong, 1984; Kauffmann, Martin & Weaver, 1992). The study reflected this in relationships with fellow Latinos and classmates. The participants felt there was a unique bond or relationship when there was a fellow Latino on the trip. The difficulty of the participants in relating to the overall classroom impacts the participants' experience. Due to participants feeling that there was no one to relate to the study displays that there is still a lack of Latinos on the trip. Therefore, sending institutions and recruiters need to be more intentional about sending a more diverse group abroad. As the Latino population increases within higher education, study abroad programmers must be aware that this increasing population will flow into the study abroad context.

As mentioned before, Teranishi's (2007) study was supported in that, through the relationships, the development of the participants was impacted. Phinney (1993), states that as students move toward more open views and ideas, their identity is impacted. Whether participants specifically stated it or not, it is evident through their perceptions that their identity was impacted.

Throughout the study abroad experience and reentry process, participants were able to relate back to their family influence and realize how much that played a part in their identity. Similar to Torres' (2004) literature about *Family Influence*, participants claimed that their biological family had an impact on their identity development process. One major area of family influence was in the reentry process. As discussed in the literature review, the study addressed how participants experienced tension from the lack of family influence (Constantinian et al., 2008). This reflects a contradiction as participants state that they go abroad to connect with family. They are coming back

feeling disconnected. One way this can be addressed is that sending institutions can encourage both the participants and families not to be afraid to engage in conversations about the student's time abroad. Sending institutions can also be aware that this could be the case for why Latino students have a difficult reentry.

This study supports William Hoff's and others (1993) discussion in *NAFSA's Guide to Education Abroad for Advisers and Administrators* about how Latino students can suffer symptoms of alienation from family and friends and even rejection in their own home culture. The participants specifically stated that people did not understand them. Those who felt they were dealing with identity issues felt that no one understood them. Related to Hoff's statement that the reentry process is being overlooked, many of the participants thought that they could handle reentry but did not receive adequate support. As mentioned in the literature review, Kauffman, Martin, and Weaver (1992) discussed how Latino students could feel alienation and have negative reactions. Participants expressed similar feelings and that it took time for them to process reentry.

Participants expressed how they longed for someone who had a similar experience to walk them through the process. Thomas and Harell (1994) advocate having someone who has had similar experiences and can easily relate to Latino students and assist in techniques to continue the process. Constantinian et al. (2008) addressed that some institutions are acknowledging the importance of providing counseling and processing. They also expressed that the expectations of having students come back the same as before they left is unrealistic, which this study reflected through the reentry results. Those on the receiving end should continue to encourage and help connect returning Latino students with those who have had similar experiences. The general

population of students going abroad must increase in order to increase the reentry support.

### **Diversifying.**

Results from the study supported that Latino students have a unique study abroad experience (Picard, Bernarding, & Ehigiator, 2009). The results drawn out can provide a deeper understanding to practitioners who work with Latino students. As Torres (2004) explains, practitioners should look at related research “to better understand the population of Latino/a students they serve and understand the conditions and the dimensions that explain the influences on how they situate their identity within the college environment” (p. 468).

Literature exists on providing resources for Latino students to study abroad, but the literature lacks stories of Latino students’ experiences abroad. Picard, Bernardino, and Ehigiator (2009) present the problem of recruiting minorities for study abroad programs. In their study they build a case for increasing minority population participation and why that is part of a bigger picture of global citizenship. They contend:

Study abroad must broaden beyond the middle class White, female demographic to include more socioeconomic representation, greater gender balance, and sharp increases in minority student participation. Only then we can expect to truly achieve the lofty goals that are well within our grasp. (p. 342)

This study hopes to emphasize an awareness of the experiences of Latino students that will contribute to the overall effort of increasing the minority population going abroad. Therefore, this study aims to encourage the formation of practical implications to foster Latino students’ growth and needs during their semester study abroad experience.

Through a community of learning, students gain the greatest learning experience through relationships. While learning, being exposed to new ideas, and developing relationships, the identity development of Latino students was impacted in a positive way. Because students benefit from relationships with fellow Latinos, there is an increasing need for diverse groups of students going abroad. Overall, the LASP experience is an effective way for Latino students to grow and to learn about their identity development.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Due to the limited supporting literature and considering the themes that emerged from this study, some implication for further research includes continuing to contribute literature about the relationships and interactions with other students during the study abroad trip. Even though there is existing literature that briefly touches upon relational development, it would be beneficial to explore how different student populations interact with each other in a cross-cultural educational experience.

Related to the first recommendation, many of the participants also exhibit certain characteristics that reflect a need for further exploration. The overall Latino student population may sometimes be considered to be international students, third culture kids (TCK's), bi-racial, or multi-racial students. Further research is needed on how these characteristics affect their identity as Latinos and contribute to their experience abroad.

Research about the host family experience is scarce. This study reflects how much the host family can impact the study abroad experience in both positive and negative ways. Looking at host families in different cultural contexts can show how much the culture and the host family impact the students.

Similar to the host family experience, more research could explore the importance of the faculty and staff's role. Specifically, research could look at how local faculty and staff provide the opportunity for students to build relationships.

Research for the reentry process is also limited and necessary. This study demonstrates how much the reentry process contributes to the overall study abroad experience. Future research should include how fellow Latinos, sending institutions, and other relationships play a part in that process.

### **Limitations**

Based on the nature of the study, the researcher acknowledges that there are several limitations. Vasti Torres (2003) states, "As a Latina researcher" she values the importance of using the qualitative method to draw meaning out of the students' stories, but states that "it is up to practitioners and other researchers to implement the knowledge and improve the experiences of Latino students" (p. 546). Having a similar philosophy to Torres, the researcher acknowledges the potential for her own bias (Appendix D).

The researcher also exhausted all options of gathering participants. Since the Latino population is only slowly increasing in participation in study abroad programs, there is a small pool of prospective participants; thus convenience sampling was utilized and no randomization occurred. Due to the required characteristics of the participants, only 8 participants were recruited for the study. There was no incentive for recruiting participants in order to gather participants who genuinely wanted to share their story. Therefore, as stated before, 2 of the participants have prior personal relationships with the researcher, and their experiences were only used to support existing themes. The study

could not contribute to a deeper understanding of gender issues due to the uneven number of male and female participants.

Since the interviews were conducted over the phone, body language and facial experiences could not be seen. Therefore, only verbal affirmations could be taken into account. Due to time constraints, member checking did not occur. However participants stated that they did not need to see the transcriptions, codes, or themes. The researcher made sure to perform several clarifications to make sure to capture the participants' experience.

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## APPENDIX A: Protocol Interview Questions

- Introduction
  - Welcome Greeting
  - Informed Consent
    - The purpose of the study
    - Confidentiality
    - Explain researcher's background and personal basis.
    - Risks
    - Freedom to not answer or withdraw from Interview
    - Any questions?
- What is your Latino/a country background?
  - Which generation are you?
  - Do you feel you know about your Latino cultural history?
  - Have you traveled to any Latin American countries prior to this specific experience?
- Can you tell me about your study abroad experience?
  - Where did you go (country/location) and when?
  - What semester and year were you there? For how long?
  - How was your home stay experience? Host family?
  - What was your purpose/motivation of going?
  - When you returned, did you do any debriefing?
- Tell me, about some of your positive highlights and struggles you had?
  - What sparked that positive highlights/struggle? Is there a special event/story that you would like to share?
  - What is one of your most and least favorite memories?
- Reflecting back, how was your overall experience?
  - How much did the study abroad experiences impact you? In a positive or negative sense?
  - Would you do it again?
  - How much do you reflect on the memories from now?
  - What would have been done differently to improve your experience? Did you feel that your needs were met?
  - In your opinion, should a Latino student engage in this type of experience?
- Conclusion
  - Any other comments
  - Feedback
  - Thank you

## APPENDIX B: Consent Form

## Latino Ethnic Identity Development and a Semester Study Abroad

The purpose of the study is a deeper look at the relationship between a semester study abroad experience and Latino ethnic identity development on college students. For this study, you will be asked questions about your experience abroad in the Latin American country you studied in, what you were feeling during your time abroad, and also reflect how much the experience still impacts you.

You will be interviewed over the phone or Skype and the interviews will be recorded. The whole interview process will strictly remain confidential. Once the audio interviews are transcribed and coded, they will be locked up or in the researcher's possession.

Since the interview is completely voluntary, you have the right to stop at any time. Also, if you have any questions, please feel free to ask before signing the form.

Lastly, you will be protected with anonymity throughout the whole research process. You and your represented institution will be given an alias. Please note that any recordings, correspondence, and personal information will be either destroyed or keep in a secure location that the researcher only has access.

If you have any questions about this study and your rights as a research subject, please contact the following person: Director of the Institutional Review Board, Office of Academic Research, Taylor University, Upland, IN 46989, [IRB@taylor.edu](mailto:IRB@taylor.edu) .

I, \_\_\_\_\_ , agree to participate in this research project entitled, "Latino Ethnic Identity and a Semester Study Abroad." I have had the study explained to me and my questions have been answered. After reading the projects description, I give my consent to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's (Electronic) Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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## APPENDIX C: Consent of Study Abroad Program Faculty

(An electronic document was used)

January 3, 2011

To Whom It May Concern:

As an Associate Professor at the Latin American Studies Program of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, I had the privilege of getting to know Melissa Lima when she was a student in our semester-long study abroad program in the fall of 2008. A few months ago she requested my assistance in identifying other former students who are of Latin decent who would be available to answer any questions she may have regarding her research project. I am very happy to help her through the process by facilitating her contact with them.

If there is any other information you need, please don't hesitate to ask.

Sincerely,

Laura Barnard  
Program Faculty  
Latin American Studies Program – CCCU  
San Jose, Costa Rica

#### APPENDIX D: Role of the Researcher

The researcher is a first-generation Guatemalan American and also alumni of the Latin American Studies Program. Through the shared study abroad experiences, the researcher also has an established relationship with two of the participants of the study. Due to the context, the researcher acknowledges that she has her own experiences and views on the material. The commonality of experience could lead to a potential bias over the response of the participants. However, the researcher took precautions of peer debriefing if there was any question of one. Through the similarities of the researcher with the participants, this served more of a common base and an advantage rather than a limitation. Participants stated that the researcher could relate and they could be more open with their responses.