

# **An Interpersonal Engagement Approach to International Study: Lessons in Leadership and Service Learning from South Africa**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In an increasingly global community, institutional encouragement for international study is rapidly increasing. Such offerings often involve “parachute” programs in which students “drop in and out” of international locations and experience the setting as if planned by a tourist operator. Existing data suggests that participants come from a small number of academic fields, are often underprepared for the cross-cultural experience, and frequently dismiss applying lessons learned upon return home.

We present a model of international study addressing these short-comings. Rooted in the practice of interpersonal engagement and sustained for over a decade, this model attracts students from a wide range of disciplinary fields to international opportunities that help them form meaningful relationships with cultural others. All students complete a semester long course prior to international travel that provides them a cultural context for learning. Through research-based service projects designed in consultations with South African community leaders, students forge connections that move well beyond tourism and motivate post-program engagement within their home communities. Student participants in our South African programs perceive increased competency in ethnographic research, leadership skills, heightened awareness of their global community, and an increased interest in service.