

EXAMINING BENEFITS IN INTERNATIONAL SERVICE LEARNING FROM  
COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES:  
A CASE STUDY OF THE SUNY-BROCKPORT VIETNAM PROGRAM

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of Cornell University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

by

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May 2015

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EXAMINING BENEFITS IN INTERNATIONAL SERVICE LEARNING FROM  
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Cornell University 2015

In recent years, international service learning (ISL) has become very popular at many institutions of higher education. Integrating academic instruction with experiential learning to provide meaningful international experience for university students while addressing the needs of communities around the world has shown to be one of the most effective and powerful pedagogical practices. Because ISL has proven consistently positive benefits for students, many institutions of higher education have begun to embrace it as an innovative teaching concept in their curricula.

Using a case of the U.S.-based international service learning program of SUNY Brockport, this doctoral research offers a close study of how benefits are manifested and perceived from various perspectives. The study examines different aspects of benefits including the notion of the *perception of benefits* from both sides of the program, the service providers' side as well as the local communities in the host country, the recipients of the service. Understanding how different actors in an ISL program perceive their own benefits and those of others may bring about knowledge of how benefits are conceptualized, manifested or constructed, and what factors inform their views. In addition, the findings may offer insight into how benefits are factored into

the equation of international service learning – for whom the benefits intended are, who the beneficiaries are, etc.

While previous studies indicate that international service learning has a potential to benefit all parties involved, the findings from this case study suggest that the perceived benefits can vary greatly depending on whose perspectives are being considered. Further, the perceptions of benefits may be shaped by factors including socio-economic and cultural differences, historical legacies and personal backgrounds, in addition to the program location and country-to-country dynamics. These factors can significantly shape how different actors perceive their own benefits and those of others. The findings of this doctoral research offer recommendations for both research and practice of this newly uncharted yet increasingly popular field of international service learning in higher education.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Thúy Tranviet is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Asian Studies at Cornell University where she has taught Vietnamese language studies for more than 15 years. Born as Trần Việt Diễm Thúy in Nhatrang, Vietnam, she immigrated to the United States with her family at a young age. Her family eventually resettled in California. After earning her Bachelor's degree in Chemistry at the University of California at Santa Barbara, she went to Asia for several years. She considers her years studying Mandarin Chinese and living in Taipei, Taiwan, as a "happy accident," and the time traveling throughout Asia and other parts of the world has had a profound impact on her life. She later returned to the U.S. to attend graduate school at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor in Asian Studies. From there she went to Cornell University. Although doing a Ph.D. degree while holding a full time job can be challenging at times, she is thankful for having had this opportunity, especially at this time of her life. It has always been her contention that one has to keep on learning to have a meaningful and active life. Obtaining a new degree in International Education, to her, is to embark on a new adventure. Having great fondness for international travel coupled with an independent spirit guided by deep interests in global development issues, she looks forward to a new journey wherever it may take her.

*In loving memory of*

my mother Công Huyền Tôn Nữ Như Ý  
and my sister Trần Việt Minh Thanh

the two most creative and courageous women I know

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My academic journey would not have been possible or as pleasurable as it was, without the support of some very special people along the way. I would like to thank my committee members. Dr. N'Dri Assié-Lumumba was the chair, and I am grateful for her encouragement, enthusiasm, and support. Dr. Lindy Williams has been a colleague for many years: her caring and right-on-the-mark comments have been very helpful. Dr. Royal Colle has given me friendship, guidance and support over the years. I truly appreciate his close readings of all the chapters, and I've been most inspired by his "gotta keep it going" spirit. I hope to still have his sense of adventure when I'm 85 years old! I am grateful to have Dr. Richard Kiely on the committee. His insightful comments and suggestions have challenged me to revise this dissertation and make it much better than the earlier drafts. I have benefited greatly from every conversation that I have had with him. All the members of my committee have been important for my long journey, and I appreciate all of them equally.

I feel very fortunate to have come across the SUNY Brockport Vietnam program. It came to me at a low moment when I even had doubts about the process. I am indebted to the late Kenneth Herrmann for allowing me to study his program. I am truly sorry that I will not be able to share this dissertation with him. His work changed and touched many lives in Danang. I would like to give special thanks to Susan Herrmann for her warmth and generosity. I hope she will be able to continue with the program to carry on Ken's work.

The following individuals provided assistance while I was in Vietnam: Mỹ Hòa and Nga along with other household staff, Xuân, Liễu, Hoàng, Đậu – all made my stay at the SUNY Brockport

Vietnam program house in Danang a pleasure. I was especially welcomed by Chairman Huỳnh Đức Trương of the Danang Friendship Organization. I am grateful to Ms. Lê thị Phương at the office of Labour-Invalids and Social Affairs for providing statistics for the Hòa Vang district; Ms. Nguyễn thị Hiền and her staff at Agent Orange Group Homes; Sister Lê thị Phục and her staff at the Loving House nursing home; and Tạ Thanh Vương for sharing numerous conversations about the English classes. A special thanks goes to a group of student participants who allowed me to have multiple in-depth interviews while in Vietnam and in the United States: Apostolos Hatzigiannidis, Felisa Erway, James Lachman, Kate Jordan, and Harriet Paterson, who welcomed me to her house when I visited the SUNY Brockport campus.

I have a few homes at Cornell University. First, in the Department of Asian Studies, I would like to thank Keith W. Taylor for hiring me and for being a supportive colleague for nearly two decades. I consider myself fortunate to have been able to count on him as a friend. The Asian Studies administrative staff has been wonderful and understanding. I appreciate the sincere encouragement from Rosemary Caffarella, John Sipple and Rose Hulslander of the former Department of Education. My Southeast Asia Program colleagues have been supportive, positive and encouraging. Thanks also to Cornell University's Division of Human Resources for providing some tuition support in the early stage of my program.

There are many friends and colleagues that I have encountered throughout my time at Cornell. I am always happy to see them: Su George, Thess Savella, Anne Blackburn, Dan Boucher, Randy Barker, Heng Xue, Nancy Loncto, Vladimir Micic, Dick Feldman, Dorothy Shaffer, Connie Fairbanks, and Christine Leuenberger.

I am constantly inspired and humbled by my students. Over the years I have taught many, and have learned a lot from all of them. My special appreciation goes to groups of students in recent years, who have been more than accommodating with me during the time I was working on this dissertation. Other graduate students/friends/former students have seen me through good times and bad, and shared a few laughs along the way: Keenan McRoberts, Eileen Vo, Pamela Corey, Tim Gorman, Paula Carpenter, Mindy Appold, Nguyet Tong, Lam Ngoc Hanh, Anto Mohsin, Đặng Thái Sơn, Hoà Dương, Alana Butler, and John Dương Phan.

The following people who were my sources of inspiration throughout the process. Sanjay Dharmavaram Muralidharam was always available to lend an ear or a hug. Trần Nguyễn Nhị Thừa has been a wonderful friend over the years. Andrea Hòa Pham has become more than a colleague; she is like a sister to me. Bernardo Brown, independent and carefree, warm and cheerful has an innate sense of decency and a kindred spirit. Thank you to B for reading my dissertation – and more. Alfred Sjödin is a dear friend among friends: true and loyal. No matter how long it has been since I last saw these people, when I meet any of them again, hopefully soon and often, there will be talks, humor, and feeling good and being present.

Finally, to my family, Dad Trần Việt Tịch, the Trần Việt brothers Thành, Trí, Thức, Thắng, and my sisters Hạnh Trang, who gives me unconditional love and support, and Diệu Trang, who is generous and devoted to us all; also, my nieces and nephews Claire, Nicolas, Melody, Martin, Camille and Tatiana: love to you all!

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

In recent years, service learning has become extremely popular in higher education. Many institutions of higher education have begun to embrace academic service learning as both a pedagogical and teaching concept in their curricula. Campus Compact, the national higher education association that promotes campus-based community engagement, reports that there are more than 1,200 colleges and universities in the U.S. that have implemented some form of campus engagement or service learning. Service learning in higher education or academic service learning is a credit-bearing course or program comprised of instruction with clearly outlined learning objectives and organized service activities. While educators adopt service learning as an effective instructional tool, many administrators recognize the potential role of service learning in civic engagement, which has been given top priority in many institutions of higher education around the nation including Cornell University<sup>1</sup> (Watson et. al, 2011). As of 2015, the course roster at Cornell University shows that there are more than 100 courses with service learning components being offered in an array of disciplines, from agricultural economics and environmentally sustainable development to history, education, horticulture and

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<sup>1</sup> The Carnegie Commission of Higher Education recognizes Cornell University as an “Engagement University” for 2010 (<http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/>). In Oct. 2011, Cornell University announced the establishment of the Center for Engaged Learning + Research (ELR) to connect teaching and scholarship to community engaged learning. In the commencement address on May 27, 2012, President David Skorton called upon new graduates to ‘engage the world’ (<http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/May12/CommenceCov.html>). On October 6, 2014, the university launched “Engaged Cornell”, a \$150 million initiative to deepen the university’s commitment of public service to communities around the nation as well as abroad (<http://chronicle.com/blogs/ticker/cornell-to-put-community-engagement-at-center-of-undergraduate-education/87577>).

global health and nutrition.<sup>2</sup>

Service learning has also emerged in an international context. In the age of increasingly global interdependence, many universities are seeking to integrate academic instruction with community service in the global sphere, and they have begun to offer programs and courses with community-based service or service-focused components in countries around the world (Annette, 2002; Bringle & Hatcher, 2011). Some of the programs are full semester credit-based study abroad programs with community service as a central part of the curriculum. Other programs are short-term faculty-led trips at home and more importantly, in foreign countries with a goal to provide students opportunities to carry out services in underserved domestic and international communities so that they might experience first-hand the problems that affect these communities while engaging experiential learning in the process (Miller & Fernández, 2007; Florman et. al, 2009). The global programs are all considered as international service learning (ISL).

The main components of ISL consist of a) coursework with b) organized service activities taking place in a foreign country and including c) structured reflection with an aim to improve students' learning outcomes. For example, this is how Cornell University's School of Industrial Relations describes this new pedagogical practice:

GSL is the experience that can help students understand the problems that plague a local community through collaborative work and solution based efforts. For students it widens the extent and possibility of scholarship, but for the world it can offer an invaluable means of relief. Service learning projects provide for a more educated and informed student (a responsible global citizen) who can use this experience to think critically about the theory of an issue, the real world outcomes and how to change them by hands-on practice. Students are forced to engage in the problems that afflict global communities at even the most local of scales. Service learning motivates reflection with one's own humanity and inspires personal growth, while significantly aiding the global community in its quest for a better tomorrow.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> [http://courses.cornell.edu/preview\\_program.php?catoid=22&poid=11039](http://courses.cornell.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=22&poid=11039)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ilr.cornell.edu/academics/special-study-options/service-learning>. The programs at Cornell University are called **global** service learning (GSL), which is basically similar to ISL.

Unlike traditional study abroad programs, due to the service nature of service learning, many of these programs' field service components often take place in developing countries, specifically in some areas that are quite disadvantaged and marginalized. As an interdisciplinary study abroad program, international service learning provides students opportunities to connect classroom instruction with experiential learning while addressing the needs of a (poor) community to enhance the students' cross-cultural understanding of global issues (Grusky, 2000; Craft, 2002; Kiely, 2004).

As service learning – domestic and international – is becoming more institutionalized in higher education, numerous research projects have been conducted on this new instructional practice. They range from student learning outcomes to curriculum development to institutional engagement and community development (Jacoby, 1996; Jacoby & Brown, 2009). The majority of research has been dedicated to student learning outcomes (Parker & Dautoff, 2007; Cruz & Giles, 2000; Worrall, 2007). Among many positive outcomes students are poised to gain are academic achievements, civic engagement, global awareness and personal growth (Eyler, 2000; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Jacoby & Brown, 2009). As a new field in international education, ISL involves faculty expertise and encourages faculty participation in developing new ways of teaching and doing research. In addition, international service learning is a mechanism that helps universities become more relevant to the communities and society around them. This is an issue that has become more prominent in recent decades (Kezar, Chambers & Burkhardt, 2005; Watson et al., 2011).

## **1.2. Problem Statement**

As stated above, the appealing factor of service learning lies in the benefits that accrue to all

parties involved. Many studies have indicated that service learning benefits students, by providing them with cross-cultural immersion, transforming their learning intellectually and morally (Erickson, 2009), enhancing their personal growth, and shaping their sense of civic duty making them more responsible citizens (Brown 2011, Bringle 2008; Kiely, 2004; Parker & Dautoff, 2007). Service learning provides students opportunities to gain practical experiences to develop their leadership skills while improving their academic achievements (Parker & Dautoff, 2007; Jacoby & Brown 2009). International service-learners also gain global competence and pluralistic worldview to become more responsible global citizens (Brown, 2011; Single, 2008; Skelly, 2009). Because service learning has shown consistently positive benefits for the students (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Bringle & Hatch, 2011), it is now considered to have the potential to be one of the most effective and powerful pedagogical practices in higher education (Bringle & Hatch, 2013).

Compared to student learning outcomes, research on community outcomes is not as robust (Stoecker, 2003; Strand et al., 2003; Reeb & Folger, 2013). While more reports have surfaced in recent years examining community outcomes (Nelson & Klak, 2012; Reynolds, 2014), there is a significant absence of comprehensive evaluations done from the standpoint of the host communities (Stoecker, 2003; Worrall, 2007; Reeb & Folger, 2013). Explanations for this include the complexity required in operating and implementing a program across the distance. For example, language barriers and cultural differences may be factors (Crabtree, 2008). Other complexities hinder how researchers conduct community research such as collaboration across distance and a long-term commitment to follow up. Also, there is the newness of the field; many ISL programs are still at their nascent stage and have not conducted effective evaluations on the community outcomes. Few studies, if any, focus on the

community's *perceived benefits*. More studies can be done to examine the perceived benefits determine these outcomes, especially from the standpoint of the host community.

### **1.3. Purpose of the Study**

This doctoral research explores one of these emerging international service learning programs in higher education. Using the College of Brockport: State University of New York (SUNY) Vietnam Program as a specific case study, my project examines a close-up study of a U.S.-based, semester-long service-focused study abroad program. The research examines the concept of 'benefits' in international service learning: how benefits are manifested, acquired or perceived from various perspectives. The perspectives include those of the faculty member who established the program, the resident directors who manage the program in Vietnam, the American students who provided the services. More important are the perspectives of the members of the local communities in the host country Vietnam, where the services take place.

In order to identify benefits, this project closely examines how different actors in this ISL program perceive benefits using what I introduce in Chapter Two, a concept that I call "perception of benefits": how each entity views its own benefits and perceives benefits of others. For instance, how do the students view their own work, what do they think of the services that they performed, and how they perceive their own benefits from providing the services. In addition, how do they perceive benefits acquired by the communities in which they have rendered the services. Assessment from the students' viewpoints is needed to understand how the international service learning experience has shaped their social and civic consciousness, or how it has enhanced their academic learning or helped them to develop personally.

The study poses similar questions to the host communities to find out their views compared to those of the students. Specifically, how does the host community perceive their own benefits? The goal is to find out how benefits are perceived and to address the assumptions related to whether or not the perceived benefits from the students are similar or different from those of the administrator's or the community's. Assessing the community benefit factors offers insights into whether or not the program has equally benefited or mutually impacted both sides - the students as well as the host community. Further, knowing if and how the communities value and respond to the services is important in determining if the program was effective, whether or not the services have made positive impacts in improving people's lives in the serviced communities and whether the ISL program has truly responded to their needs. In addition, to document how the community views their own benefits, or how they perceive the other side's benefits is a novelty notion in itself, given that there have not been many studies assessing the benefit question from the community's perspectives (Stoecker et al., 2009).

Ultimately, understanding how each side perceives their own benefits reveals the program's service learning philosophy, for example, how were "benefits" factored into the equation of service learning: for whom were the benefits intended, who were the (intended or unintended) beneficiaries, etc. Understanding how benefits are perceived, manifested and conceptualized through these actors is critically important in improving the program planning to benefit all parties involved.

#### **1.4. Rationale for the Case Study**

This project stemmed from my long-term interest with study abroad, community service and

international development. As a senior lecturer in Vietnamese language study at Cornell University I have come across many study abroad programs. I have served as field director for a Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad program to take students to Vietnam. I selected the SUNY Brockport Vietnam program as my case study because it is unique in many ways. Not only does this program have the field service components in Vietnam, it is the only full semester service-focused study abroad/ISL program in Southeast Asia. Second, established in 2000, it was the first and is the most long-lasting international service learning program in Southeast Asia to date. In addition, the service dimensions of this program are complex and robust. The participants get to work with many different types of populations and with many diverse service activities providing a unique opportunity for a case study on many aspects of international service learning that have not been studied. Also, being a Vietnamese-American, I have a personal and intellectual interest in understanding various dimensions of this program. Having in-depth understanding of the country's cultural, historical and socio-political backgrounds and being familiar with the language was an asset in collecting data and interpreting information.

This case study also looks at issues of operating ISL programs in challenging contexts. ISL programs can provide outreach to underserved populations such as the elderly, people with disabilities, people suffering from severe mental and physical conditions afflicted by war. The literature of international service learning regarding these special circumstances, such as elder care or people suffering from physical and mental illnesses (Agent Orange in this case study) are currently missing. The findings of the research in all of these aspects, notably from those of the host country's standpoints, which intersect with the goals of a U.S.-based international service learning program to provide cross-cultural perspectives, will be useful for improving the design, development and implementation for future ISL programs. These findings will also help shape

the discourse of future research and teaching in international service learning in higher education.

### **1.5 Research Question**

In examining the question of benefits, I intend to find out how various actors on both sides of the program perceive their own benefits as well as those of the others. The aim is to examine not only whether their perceptions are similar or different, but also what factors influence their perceptions of benefits. My study is motivated by the following research question:

***Q: How are benefits manifested and perceived in international service learning?***

*Specifically:*

- How do various actors of the program – students, faculty, administrators, and the host communities – perceive benefits?
- Are these perceptions different or similar, and what factors contribute to these differences or similarities?
- Are perceptions of benefits culturally, historically or socially shaped and/or constructed?

### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

In juxtaposing and comparing these various perspectives from this case study, the research aims to contribute to the knowledge on these issues:

- Understanding how different actors in an international service learning program perceive benefits may bring about knowledge of how benefits are understood or constructed, and what factors inform their views.

- Assessing whether or not the services benefited the host communities is crucial for knowing if the ISL program has made real impact in the community, and shed insight into the effectiveness of the program.
- The findings offer implications for both research and practice in ISL, such as how to improve the design and development of future program planning to achieve better outcomes for both sides.
- The findings of this study will also contribute to the much-needed literature to help shape the discourse of future research and teaching on international service learning.

## **1.7 Organization of the Dissertation**

The dissertation has seven chapters, which are organized as follows:

- *Chapter One – Introduction.* Chapter One gives a brief introduction and the overview of the study including the research question of the project.
- *Chapter Two – Conceptual Framework.* Chapter Two looks at the conceptual framework underpinning the study. This Chapter is framed with background literature that motivates the study to contribute to the knowledge in this emerging field. It explores the notion of benefits, different types benefits, and how they are defined and contextualized or measured.
- *Chapter Three – In the Host Country.* Chapter Three provides the background of Vietnam and the host city of Danang. It provides basic information regarding Agent Orange/dioxin, its effects and consequences. This Chapter contextualizes the case study by introducing the SUNY Brockport Vietnam Program. The aim is

to familiarize the reader with this international service learning program as the chapter explores in detail the types of services provided by the students and the environment of the communities where these field services take place. It also introduces the local partners of the SUNY-Vietnam program: The Danang Union of Friendship Organizations (DAFO), the host country partner; and the Danang/QuangNam Fund, an NGO established to facilitate funds in the form of direct aid to the disadvantaged communities in Danang.

- *Chapter Four – Methods.* Chapter Four outlines the methods used in the study as well as providing an overview on the research process. This Chapter discusses phases and mechanism of data collection.
- *Chapter Five – Findings.* This chapter presents the findings based on the data and other information collected from the field study. The findings are framed in the contexts of the research question on the notion of “benefits” from various perspectives.
- *Chapter Six – Discussion.* This chapter discusses the results presented in Chapter Five. It analyzes and frames different types of benefits and the factors, which contributed to how benefits are perceived. The Chapter also discusses some related issues that emerged from the program.
- *Chapter Seven – Conclusion.* Chapter Seven summarizes the significance of the study and offers recommendations resulting from this research for improvement. It concludes with suggestions for directions for future research in international service learning.

## CHAPTER TWO

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter addresses some of the key literature associated with service learning. It begins by examining the definition of service learning to provide a meaningful background to international service learning. I then look at the main characteristics of this emerging pedagogical practice and examine some of the international service learning program models in higher education not only in the United States but also at universities in countries around the globe. While the literature of international service learning is still relatively new, various studies have conducted in recent years exploring a number of topics ranging from student learning outcomes to global civic engagement and community-based development. Given that the over-arching principle of international service learning is to bring about positive outcomes, many studies show that international service learning is poised to benefit all parties involved: the students, the academy and the community where the service takes place.

In this dissertation I have employed a case study, namely the SUNY Brockport Vietnam program to examine different types of benefits, notably how benefits are manifested on both sides, the students as the service provider side as well as the host community as the receiving side of an international service learning program. In that light, various types of benefits that inform my research are discussed. I will re-visit some of the types of benefits later in Chapter Six when I analyze and discuss my findings. Last but not least, I discuss the notion of what I term as the “perception of benefits” in international service learning, which inspires this doctoral research in the first place. I am particularly interested in the perceived benefits as seen from both

sides of my case study program, how each side views their own benefits as well as those of the others. For the reasons stated above, Chapter Two serves itself as the opening dialogue for my case study of the SUNY Brockport Vietnam Program.

## **2.2 The Emergence of Service learning**

Service learning is not a new concept. In the United States, the tradition of public service, which is defined as an activity rendered for the public, reaches back to the early 1930s and this service learning concept has been around for at least forty years. In the words of Alan Waterman, “We have been doing ‘service learning’ in our society far longer than we have applied the label to this approach to experiential education” (Waterman, 1997). Many people probably have volunteered or offered public service at one time or another. The tradition of organized volunteerism has been around for a long time, dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In modern days, volunteerism is generally understood as a non-paid activity carried out to benefit others and service learning could be argued to be an extension of volunteerism and public service. That said, the concept of service learning as an academic pedagogy is complex and relatively new.

The Learn and Serve America’s National Service learning Clearinghouse defines service learning as “a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities” (NSLC, 2013). A number of research articles have examined comprehensive definitions of the term *service learning* and identified characteristics that were constituted as significant in a service learning program. “Service” can be a series of planned and organized activities or practicum in community service for students to perform in a

local community. The “learning” part is the outcomes gained by the students; students learn from direct interaction with the community and through a reflection process. While service learning builds on the traditions of volunteerism and service (Kenny in Gallagher, 2002), the fundamental difference between service learning and volunteerism or internship lies in the linking of both terms “service” *and* “learning.” Students are not only learners but also active participants of the activity of service (Brown in Bringle et al., 2011). Thus, the definition of *service learning* can be summed up as an academic-driven activity that has definitive *learning* objectives for students to learn from the experience of providing *service* in the community in need.

In higher education, academic service learning is a credit-bearing course or a program comprised of instruction with learning objectives and service activities to provide students opportunities to link classroom learning with practice while addressing the community’s needs. By taking learning beyond the classroom instruction and applying it to meaningful projects with the local community, service learning aims to enhance university students learning experiences as well as the strengthening of local communities (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Cress et al., 2005). From the educational institution’s standpoint, service learning is viewed as one of the best pedagogical practices because it expands the role of the higher education institution into a civic mission while providing students opportunities to engage in experiential learning.

### **2.3 International Service learning**

Service learning has also emerged in the international context. Service learning abroad, or, as more aptly called, International Service learning (ISL) or Global Service learning (GSL). In the last decade, ISL or GSL programs have become very popular in higher education. There has

been an explosion of interest in integrating some kind of service components in some of the study abroad programs at many universities in the U.S. and around the world; nearly every university or college in the U.S. is offering some kind of these study abroad programs with community-based service component.

Bringle and Hatcher (2011, pp. 4-18) describe international service learning as an educational domain that intersects with three elements: (a) service learning, (b) study abroad, and (c) international education. Using a Venn diagram as illustrated in Figure 2.1, the authors demonstrate the intersections of the three domains in order to show how ISL can draw the best from each of the three domains to enhance educational outcomes. The “triple intersection,” area 4, is where Bringle and Hatcher argue that international service learning exists.

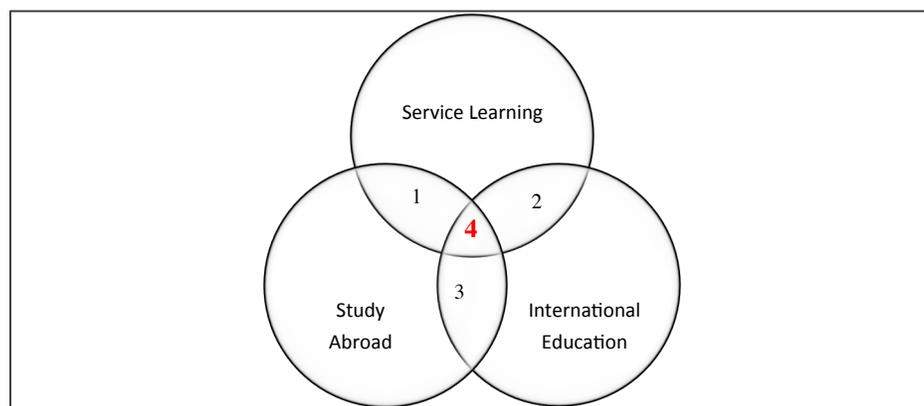


Figure 2.1 ISL as defined by Bringle and Hatcher, 2011, p.4

The authors describe international service learning as:

A structured academic experience in another country in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that addresses identified community needs; (b) learn from direct interaction and cross-cultural dialogue with others; and (c) reflect on the experience in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a deeper understanding of global and intercultural issues, a broader appreciation of the host country and the discipline, and an enhanced sense of their own responsibilities as citizens, locally, and globally. (Bringle and Hatcher, 2011, p.18)

Due to the special interrelationship situated within and intersection among the three aforementioned concepts, ISL programs possess qualities that differentiate them from domestic SL programs, traditional study abroad programs, or international education. The interrelationships among the three elements, encompassing internationalized curricula, cross-cultural immersion, civic engagement, and community development form a diverse and dynamic discourse of international service learning.

### **2.3.1 Characteristics of International Service learning in Higher Education**

As mentioned, some institutions in higher education called the service-focused study abroad programs “International Service learning” while others refer to them as “Global Service learning.” These ISL/GSL programs are being offered in an array of disciplines with a variety of models and methods of operation. Some of them are full semester or yearlong study while other programs are much shorter, ranging from one to a few weeks in length. Some programs (usually the shorter term programs) are faculty-led while others are in collaboration with a third party study abroad providers such as SIT Study Abroad, CIEE (Council on International Educational Exchange), CET Academic Programs and the International Partnership for Service learning (IPSL). Some ISL programs are managed through the Study Abroad office while others are operated from a center for International Education /Studies. These operate like traditional study abroad programs except with a community-service focus. At some institutions, ISL programs may be operated from a school or college of the university independently from the study abroad office. For example, at Cornell University, the Zambia and India Global Service learning programs are run, respectively, by the School of Industrial and Labor Relations and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

The types of community service are diverse, ranging from project-based activities such as building a garden or a community center to service-based services such as teaching English. All programs work in partnerships either with an institute or organization from the host country. Some of the organizations are government-run agencies while others are development or a non-profit organization, or non-governmental organizations (NGO). Some programs have a third-party provider that acts as a local resident contact agency to facilitate the work for the students while they are overseas. In addition to the service-based programs specifically designed for service learning purposes, students also have an option to participate in their own individual projects across the globe (DukeEngage, CET, IPSL). The models of international service learning programs are summarized as follows:

***Types of International Service learning programs***

- a. In-house, faculty/staff-led programs offered at their own university - usually short term.
- b. In-house, organized through the study abroad/international education office.
- c. Third-party study abroad providers as indicated earlier.

***The lengths of the programs***

- a. Short term, 1-2 weeks (usually faculty-led during spring or winter break).
- b. Intermediate term, 3-4 weeks (faculty-led or third party provider).
- c. Semester-term or year-long program (in-house study abroad/international education office or third party study abroad provider)

***The core components***

- a. Pre-departure orientation or pre-requisite seminar courses: Students get information about the country and obtain language or specific task training. The lengths of the orientation are varied, from a few days to a full week to a semester. Some programs

require participants to attend weekly seminar workshops one full semester prior to the beginning of the program.

- b. In-country service. This is when the actual work begins; the service activities are often designed by the program (faculty or staff or team of leaders) in collaboration with a local NGO or from the community hosting the work-site.
- c. Post-program assignments. Structured reflection often in forms of journals, presentations, or final papers. In some programs students are given exit questionnaires or surveys to evaluate the course and their experience. Some programs offer post-trip meetings to allow students opportunities to discuss and reflect on their experience with their peers, classmates or program coordinators.

### ***Types of partnerships***

- a. Faculty/university establishing local partnership directly with the host country via an institution or a university, or with an agency from the host country.
- b. Faculty or the university working with an NGO (domestic or foreign based) that has established local partnerships in the host country.
- c. Third party study abroad or international service learning provider working with local partners of the host country.

### **2.3.2 International Service learning Programs Across the Globe**

The popularity of international service learning has spread across the globe. Besides the United States, many universities around the world, from the United Kingdom and Europe to Asia and the Asian Pacific region to Africa have also embraced some form of service learning in their curricula (Ma & Xing, 2010; Erasmus, 2011). In recent years, many conferences and

international symposia on this topic have been held at many places around the world including the U.S., Europe, Asia and Africa. Some of these programs have service initiatives in the local communities within their countries, thus, might be considered as domestic service learning. However, many programs have both domestic and international components. Some of these programs are not only international bound but also have international participants as service learners, for example, a foreign exchange student from China who attends a university in Japan and participates in an ISL program in the Philippines (Ma & Xing, 2010).

At Cornell University, the participation of international students adds to the richness and complexity on cross-cultural studies of international service learning, although these cross-cultural comparisons are rarely studied by U.S. service learning scholars. In fact, some scholars have expressed concerns that the current research and theoretical analysis of international service learning tends to be “too frequently presented by American researchers” (Bringle, Hatcher 2012). While international service learning is largely defined as a service learning program that takes place in a country outside the home institution, some scholars propose to reframe “international” service learning into “global” service learning to be in-step with today’s global interconnectedness (Longo and Saltmarsh, in Bringle et al., 2011).

### **2.3.3 Research on International Service learning**

It has been broadly agreed that the practice of the socially embedded domestic and the increasingly popular international service learning is complex (Jacoby, 1996; Billig & Eyler, 2002). The theoretical frameworks of service learning can be found in many disciplines and concepts, and draws from multiple theories because it is attached to both academic and civic institutions (Jacoby, 2009). The theoretical foundations of the institution side encompassing

learning, teaching, research, student, faculty, curriculum development and such have to be linked to the other side of civic engagement side, which includes citizenship, community and service. Theories related to learning can be found in cognitive and intellectual development to experiential learning, transformative learning and numerous theories connected to learning (Billig & Eyler, 2002) whereas the theoretical frameworks on the community side are drawn from volunteerism to civic engagement and approaches related to community development, for example, community-based research (CBR), participatory action research (PAR), community driven development (CDD), and asset-based community development (ABCD), to name a few.

Compared to the larger body of literature on study abroad, international education, and domestic service learning, international service learning literature is not so robust. However, as a developing field in education, research projects on international service learning have grown significantly in the past several years. Many studies have been conducted on a variety of topics ranging from learning outcomes (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda & Yee, 2000) to faculty development (Driscoll, 2000; Chism, Palmer & Price, 2013; Clayton, Hess, Jaeger, Jameson, & McGuire, 2013) to evaluation and assessment (Gelmon et al., 2001; Tonkin & Quiroga, 2004; Hutchinson, 2011; Rubin & Matthew, 2013). Other research looks at curriculum development for service learning courses (O'Meara, 2013). Many institutions not only are committed to create opportunities for students to participate in service learning programs but also encourage faculty to develop courses with service learning contents or to integrate service learning into their existing curricula (Vogelgesang et al., 2010). Other studies show how faculty members who have embraced service learning can enhance their teaching skills – in addition to having professional opportunities to develop close interaction with students and the community (O'Meara & Niehaus, 2009; O'Meara, 2013).

At the institutional level, international service learning has also emerged as an engine that drives the civic engagement motor in higher education because not only it is providing students opportunities to learn by being engaged with disadvantaged people in the international communities, it also expands the role of the university. Many universities around the world consider international service learning as a means for the academic institutions to engage with and expand their civic mission towards communities at home and afar (Holland, 2000; Furco, 2001). Some universities have adopted social responsibilities as one of their core goals in their strategic plan at their institutions.<sup>4</sup> Both domestic and international service learning have been seen as an effective pedagogical practices not only for the students, but also as a means for the university to engage with and to fulfill its civic mission and social responsibility towards the world communities (Talloires Network; GUNI).

In addition, presentations on international service learning are increasingly making their marks at professional educational conferences and symposia; they were relatively unknown only a few years ago.<sup>5</sup> Many of these papers tend to focus on the international experiences, which is often similar to study abroad literature (Ogden, 2010). Topics such as transformative learning experiences including personalization, processing and disconnecting, dissonance, and adjusting to cultural shock are among those examined (Brookfield, 2000; Tonkin, 2004; Kiely, 2005, 2010). The quest for being better prepared for international careers and becoming more internationally informed or generally “globally competent,” which has long been an overall appealing factor with study abroad programs, also resonates with international service learning (Porter & Monard, 2001; Ogden, 2010; García & Longo, 2013).

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<sup>4</sup> University of Manchester <http://www.manchester.ac.uk/>.

<sup>5</sup> At the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) Conferences in 2013 and 2014, my papers on ISL were the sole presentations on this topic out of more than 2,000 presentations. There were fewer than 10 ISL papers presented at CIES in 2015. In 2014, two international conferences devoted exclusively to service learning were held in Malaysia and Hong Kong.

Whereas the majority of the research on service learning – domestic or international – has been mainly focused on the side of the academy, studies on community outcomes pale in comparison. In the past decade, more literature on community outcomes has emerged, born out of a urgent need due to the dearth of research examining the community side, in addition to a realization of that voice of the community is often unheard (Stoeker, Tryon and Hilgendorf, 2009). Some ISL research projects have looked at how the community responded to the students' presence and their satisfaction with the students' work in the community, with the findings highlighting the students as the main benefactors of the program (Kraft, 2002). Similarly, other studies report service learning has improved the relationship between universities and the local community, again, the benefactor being the former rather than the latter (Eyler & Giles 2001). The literature on community outcomes especially on the standpoint of the recipients or the host country's perspectives in international service learning is still quite thin. For the most part it has been largely due to many complex issues associated with having a program outside of the home institution, which may include program location, partnerships, and language barriers, in addition to the newness of the field (Crabtree, 2008; Niehaus. & Crain, 2013).

#### **2.4. Benefits and Service learning Outcomes**

In order to examine how benefits are manifested in international service learning, this doctoral study is informed by previous research on student benefits, which are often measured by learning outcomes, as well as studies on community outcomes. First, it is necessary to explore the notion of benefits and the “perception of benefits” in service learning.

In broadest terms, benefit is defined as something that enhances or produces favorable

results. Benefit is often associated with an advantage, an enhancement or an improvement – something that is helpful and progressive, something is acquired or gained that results in positive outcomes. A service learning program, be it domestic or international, is considered successful when it entails some elements of beneficial outcomes. The outcomes are positive and the program has impacted all or most parties involved: it enhances learning experience for the students; it meets the needs of an education institution; and it offers positive reinforcement or improves the quality of life of the local community.

Benefit can be acquired *materially* or *financially*, for example, a payment or a bonus from an employment. Benefit can also be manifested *intellectually*, *spiritually* or *physically* – a gain in knowledge, a positive impact emotionally, or a boost in one’s health, for example, access to vitamins or certain types of food that are good for our physical (and emotional) being. Some benefits are more *visible* and *instantaneous* such as gaining a skill or some financial gains, or acquiring a new language at the end of a course. Some benefits are *latent*, whereby the benefactor acquires the gain later in a course or a program or even later in life. Benefits can be *short-term* or *long-term*. For example, some material gains such as monetary or commodity goods can be *short-term* because benefit may be depleted when the supplies run out. On the other hand, *long-term* benefit is a type of benefit that can prolong an effect on a person or a group of people or a community physically, emotionally or spiritually. Some benefits are *intended* whereas some are not. The *unintended* benefit is something that was not planned during the process of designing or implementation of a program or an activity, yet it ended up having a favorable outcome. Likewise, the intended benefit may not necessarily produce a result as one has envisioned. Different types of benefits are summed up in the following section:

### 2.4.1 Types of Benefits

- *Financial/Material.* When benefits are manifested in some kind of commodity goods that have tangible or monetary values. Directed aids are the most common forms of financial or material benefits. Project-based service learning program often are considered as material benefit.
- *Intellectual.* This involves a gain in one's knowledge or skills. International service learning helps students or community members acquire specific skills such as language or knowledge (computer, farming, etc.). Studies have shown that students develop critical thinking skills to help them evaluate and solve problems (Eyler & Giles, 1999) thus enhancing their intellectual abilities.
- *Cognitive/Spiritual.* A positive impact is realized in one's consciousness to influence the individual to change his or her attitudes, values or behavior towards common or public good.
- *Short term.* Material gains are often considered as short-term benefits because the gains can be short lived.
- *Long term.* Positive change in behavior, attitudes, perspectives or outlook on life can be long lasting and prolonged through a lifetime.
- *Visible.* Benefits are visible when the gains can be detected or noticed easily. Material or financial gains are considered more visible than emotional or spiritual benefits.
- *Latent.* Latent benefits may be manifested later in life, long after a course or a service learning program has finished.

- *Intended.* Benefits are gained due to proper planning and careful implementation. Some service learning programs employ various learning toolkits including critical reflection exercises to instill positive learning outcomes for students.
- *Unintended.* Favorable outcomes are produced but not by design. Note that outcomes can be positive or negative, intended or unintended (Crabtree, 2013). However, due to the positive nature of ‘benefit’, unintended benefit is generally positive.
- *Self.* Benefits are acquired by an individual, either through their own cognitive or physical or material gain.
- *Collective.* Gains are acquired by a group of individuals – a group of students in a class or a course or a group of people in a local community. Benefits can be acquired by an institution or a university. Collective benefits are inclusive to all members of the group.

#### **2.4.2 The Perception of Benefits**

While it is customary to think that all benefits must have a tangible value, monetary or some other value, the benefit may just be *perceived benefit*. The *perception of benefit* is the “assumed benefit,” a notion of benefit being perceived by the other or by the self. The perception of benefits of one individual may be similar or different from what another person perceives it to be, and likewise, the other way around. A person may perceive that he or she has benefited from a program or a service, whereas others might perceive their benefits differently. The perception may be shaped by, constructed of, or subjected to various elements such as our own prejudices stemmed from our cultural background, social upbringing or political environment. Thus, benefits may be perceived differently by different actors depending on the context.

The perception of benefits may be socially and culturally shaped or even politically

motivated, especially in international service learning arena, where the cultural, socio-economic and socio-political dimensions can be vastly different from one country to another, especially from the country of the home-based institution to that of the host country. To determine how benefits are perceived on each side of the dichotomous make-ups: students/community or home-based country /host country can inform us not only on how each side perceives their own benefits from international service learning program, but also reveal how the program was set up to achieve the intended outcomes.

### **2.4.3 Learning Outcomes**

As aforementioned, a number of research projects have shown that international service learning has the potential to benefit parties on both sides of the program. However, student benefits have been more widely studied. Andrew Furco estimated that 85 percent of more than 600 published research reports on - mainly domestic - service learning projects focus on assessing student experience and learning outcomes (Furco in Foreword, Murphy and Tan, 2012). Among many factors that motivate the drive for service learning are positive learning outcomes for students (Eyler, 2000; Chisholm, 2005; Crabtree, 2013), notably academic, civic and personal as being the most popular categories of learning outcomes.

How is learning achieved in service learning? Learning can be achieved in numerous ways. In a traditional academic setting learning is measured often through attainment from classroom lectures, assignments, or examinations. Under the umbrella of applied learning, service learning offers students opportunity to learn and gain experience outside of the classroom, which is what David Kolb refers to as “experiential learning” (Kolb, 1984). Those who practice and study service learning, study abroad or international education often draw on

Mezirow's (1991) conceptual framework of transformative learning (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Kiely, 2004, 2010), the idea that learning occurs through a series of processes including critical reflection, transformative experience, and a focus on rational change.

Steinke and Fitch (2011) evaluate service learning outcomes by developing a theoretical model to measure the learner's intellectual development and cognitive learning by showing the relationship between the two. They argue that because service learning courses encourage the focus of learning to be on the self in the context of the materials learned more than non-service learning courses, student's intellectual development and cognitive learning outcomes are being developed differently. The learner is able to produce different learning outcomes, if not more effective than in regular non-service learning courses, which tends to focus only on the materials learned (Eyler, 2000; Steinke & Buresh, 2002). According to Kiely (2005), learning in international service learning goes beyond an intellectual discourse; students can achieve transformative learning through an array of discourses encompassing emotional, moral, cultural, social, cultural, and cognitive learning processes.

Among those who practice experiential and service learning, reflection has become the adopted pedagogical practice as an overarching goal for teachers to help students achieve learning outcomes (Eyler, 2002; Push & Merrill, 2008). Critical reflection is a process that brings together the quality of thought and action, and the interaction between them. Studies on this topic have shown that reflecting on experiences help students "get more" from the community service work they perform. According to Ash and Clayton (200, 2009), the role of critical reflection is important in service learning because it helps students process their experience. Ash and Clayton assert that reflection is one of the best tools to capture and assess learning because through critical reflection learning will be generated, deepened, and documented (2009). The critical

reflection process has been integrated into nearly all applied learning models and is often included in the assessment of most service learning programs.

The three most popular categories of learning outcomes in international service learning that have been widely researched are: academic learning, civic learning and personal growth (Clayton et al., 2013; Jameson et al., 2013; Howard, 2011). Academic learning deals with the knowledge and skills gained, such as language or information on the country or the local culture that students acquire through ISL to improve their academic performance. A number of research reports indicate a great deal of benefits in this category, such as gaining better critical thinking skills, achieving higher grades, acquiring leadership skills, and enhancing their learning experience (Parker & Dautoff, 2007; Astin et al., 2000).

Civic learning is associated with learning that contributes to students' desire to engage in public service for the better good. International service-learners are given an opportunity to experience first-hand the real-world issues to instill in them the desire of wanting to contribute and to make a difference in the world. Many studies have looked at on how service learning has helped shape students' sense of civic responsibility and community engagement and increased their social responsibility and being more aware and conscientious citizens (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Astin et al., 2000; Eyler et al., 2001; Simons and Cleary, 2006; Warren, 2012). The insights students gained help shape propel them to engage in public service activities after their program has ended. They have higher levels of community engagement and are more likely to volunteer in community services upon returning home, thus, become more productive and responsible citizens.

As students reflect and process their learning through self-awareness, their personal development deepens. Some studies examine personal growth and cultural awareness: how

students learn how to appreciate their better socio-economic circumstances after having worked in disadvantaged communities (Dunlap et al., 2007). Some research presents theoretical models for supporting and preparing relatively economically privileged students for dealing with different cultural socio-economic environments starkly different from their own (Grusky, 2000; Dunlap et al., 2007). In general, international service learners have often expressed renewed gratitude for having relatively more privileged backgrounds, and appreciation for having encountered new cultures (Camacho, 2004; Kiely, 2010). Other dimensions of student benefits that can be considered personal development are of a cultural and political nature. For example, as students are more aware of global issues and concerns, some students may engage in causes or bring about awareness to change or impact communities across the globe (Sternberger, 2005; Crabtree, 2008, 2013; Quigley, 2013).

Intercultural and global competence has been discussed in study abroad and ISL literature (Deardorff, 2004, 2006, 2008; Slimbach, 2010; Fitch, 2004; Miller & Fernández, 2007). Hailed as a pedagogy that has the best potential to prepare college students for “global citizenship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century” international service learning has been considered as one of best educational practices that contribute to student’s international education and global awareness (Bringle et al., 2011). Some studies look at ways in which ISL can prepare students to become global citizens (Miller & Fernández, 2007; Hartman, 2008). It has been argued that through engagement with less privileged communities in foreign countries international service learning participants not only are able to gain experience from being immersed in new cultures and languages, but they also become more aware of pressing global issues, thus they will become more competent global citizens. The integration of structured reflection with the service component in developing countries provides students opportunities to enhance their cross-cultural understanding and

global competency, thus contributing to their overall international education experience.

In the age of globalization, the quest for being globally competent seems to be timely and is at the top of many institutions' agenda for Global Education (Kiely & Hartman, 2004; Hartman, 2010; GESI; DukeEngage). The potential role of international service learning as a core competency for global citizenship echoes with the current drive to promote "internationalization of the curriculum" and global engagement at many universities across the nation.<sup>6</sup> Like study abroad, which has long been perceived as a way for students to gain international experience while becoming immersed in new cultures and languages, Hovey and Weinberg (2009) cautioned against this assumption by suggesting that there may be the "low road" and the "high road" of study abroad experiences. The "low road" is where study abroad students gain little international experience due to their lack of preparation and expectation from their program, and those students hang out together but have no significant interest in cultural immersion or language study. They are not producing a desired international experience as assumed. "High road" study abroad experience is the opposite; students engage in cultural immersion or have demonstrated that they "understand and respect local customs" (p. 13). In other words, if there were no deliberate plan to cultivate an intended international learning, study abroad would not automatically result in international learning. Likewise, if there is no deliberate plan to prepare students in an international service learning program to recognize specific problems in the global community where they are going to work, these service-learners will not gain or learn as much from the international service learning experience. If students do not have an explicit understanding of what it means to be a global citizen, international service learning

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<sup>6</sup> Cornell University had a symposium "What Constitutes a Meaningful International Experience" on February 10, 2014. Overall, the consensus of the symposium indicated that while it is good to immerse students in an overseas experience, they also need mentoring, training and opportunities for critical reflection. Also, it is necessary to have intentional objectives as part of the planning in order to assess and improve programs.

will not necessarily produce global citizenship, and the association between international service learning and global education will largely be a presumption.

#### **2.4.4 Community Outcomes**

Compared to a much larger number of studies on learning outcomes for the students, research on community outcomes remains limited (Reeb & Folger in Clayton et al., 2013). Some early studies have been focused through the lens of learning outcomes with the students being the main benefactors (Parker & Dautoff, 2007; Giles & Cruz, 2000; Worrall, 2007). Some literature looks at benefits to the communities yet often ends up documenting student benefits. For example, some projects examine how the community has responded positively to their service learning program and the presence of the students in their community. These studies tend to focus on the satisfaction of the community towards the students' participation; how the experience has helped the students improve their civic duty. However, this highlights how service learning has benefited the students. Other studies report that service learning has improved the relationship between universities and the local community but this seems to showcase the civic engagement mission of the academic institution (Eyler & Giles 2001).

Because service learning is a student-driven and a higher education institution-motivated process, the learning side or the students' side has often been the side that garners the most attention – in research, planning or designing a service learning program. In recent years, studies on community outcomes have emerged (Stoecker et al., 2009; McMillan & Stanton, 2014; Reynolds, 2014). The term “reciprocity” has often been mentioned when discussing community partnerships between two sides: the students' or the providers' side, while the community would be considered “the recipients” (Porter & Monard, 2001; L'Arch, Sánchez & Feuer, 2009).

Some studies examined how reciprocal exchange may exist. For example, Nelson and Klak's (2012) research followed two faculty-led short-term study abroad programs (one in South Africa and the other in Dominica) to assess benefits to students and the host communities. Their results reveal that service learning experience has impacted the students at both sites. However, the community in Dominica seemed to benefit more than the host community in South Africa. The disconnect in the South Africa program was due to limited engagement opportunities while the longer term relationship and the hands-on nature of the Dominica program enabled its student to have deeper engagement activities with their host community. The authors argued that the time spent to create a deeper connection with the host community was vital: the Dominica program was able to experience reciprocity. Another study looks at how the recipients of the service viewed the service. L'Arch, Sánchez and Feuer (2009) examined a group of community members of an English-Spanish language exchange program in a Latino immigrant neighborhood in Chicago. While this study can be considered as domestic service learning, the nature of the service has a foreign language component. The authors reported that the community's voices were not only powerful, but community members could be assets to the local American university students because they taught them Spanish in return.

Despite literature that points to the positive outcomes associated with international service learning for student benefits and some recent studies looking at community outcomes, few studies if any examine how different actors of both sides of an ISL program perceive their own benefits as well as how benefits are received by the others. This case study aims to fill some of that gap.

## CHAPTER THREE

### IN THE HOST COUNTRY

#### **3.1 Vietnam and the Host City of Danang**

The brochure of the College of Brockport: State University of New York (SUNY) Vietnam program states: “This groundbreaking program encourages unique and intimate interactions between students and their host community, allowing lasting friendships and meaningful relationships to flourish.” SUNY Brockport has been sending students to Danang, Vietnam since the spring of 2000. It was the first program of its kind: a full semester service-focused study abroad program from a U.S. institution of higher education to a country in Southeast Asia.

Vietnam (*Việt Nam*) is located in the Indochina Peninsula. It is bordered with China to the north, Laos to the northwest and Cambodia to the southwest; South China Sea is to the east. Vietnam has a long history with foreign invasion and domination including a long period of Chinese rule that lasted more than 1,000 years. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century it was under French colonization until the decisive battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954 resulted in ending both the French rule and the First Indochina War. The country was then divided into two Vietnams: North (Democratic Republic of Vietnam) and South (Republic of Vietnam) at the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel.

In the 1960s and early 1970s Vietnam dominated much of the headline news due to the United States’ involvement in the Second Indochina War between the American-backed Southern Vietnamese regime against the communist government of North Vietnam. When the war ended in 1975 the country regained unification and took on its current name, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (*Cộng Hoà Xã Hội Chủ Nghĩa Việt Nam*), establishing Hanoi as the country’s capital. Saigon, the former capital of South Vietnam was renamed as Ho Chi Minh

City. That most recent war, often known as the “Vietnam War,” did not end without its significant costs – in human lives as well as in other consequences: more than 58,000 Americans were killed in action; more than 150,000 were wounded. For Vietnamese casualties, the number was much higher although an exact number will never be certain. It has been estimated that between three to five million Vietnamese civilians and military personnel – on both sides, North and South Vietnam, perished.

In 1995, after two decades of trade embargo and political isolation from the U.S. and much of the West, the diplomatic relations between the United States and Vietnam were normalized. Despite the painful history of the recent war and its aftermath, today Vietnam is one of the major allies of the United States. Both countries are interested in having better bilateral relations mainly due to political reasons as well as economic. Vietnam’s close proximity to China and its long South China Sea coastline is strategically important given the fact that there have been many tensions with China and other nations in the region regarding the disputes of the Spratly and Paracel archipelagos in the South China Sea.

In terms of economic interests, although it is still being considered as a developing country, in recent years Vietnam has been directing most of its energy on economic development. It is considered one of the fastest growing of the world’s economies, and can potentially be a good trade partner to the U.S. In fact, the bilateral trade volume has been increasing every year since the normalization and the signing of bilateral trade agreement between the two countries. Vietnam has been named as one of the “Next Eleven”<sup>7</sup> countries in terms of its economic potential with a sizeable population and a large young workforce to match.

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<sup>7</sup> The Next Eleven (N-11) are the eleven countries – Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Turkey, South Korea and Vietnam – that were identified as having a potential of becoming the world’s largest economies in the 21st century, along with the BRICS – Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.

Most of its 91 million people were born after 1975. According to the 2012 demographic profile, only 5.5% of the population or about 5 million people are 65 years or older (compared to 13.5% in the U.S.). However, this figure is likely to change. It is estimated that by 2030 there will be 17 million elder people in Vietnam, or 17% of the population. This is significant because one of the SUNY Brockport service sites is at a nursing home, currently an uncommon concept in this traditional Confucius society. Due to the deep entrenchment of the extended family as a support system in the Vietnamese culture, it would be considered extremely unfilial if adult children sent their elderly parents to a nursing home. Thus, the thought of sending one's parents to a facility to be taken care by others is unthinkable by most people. As Vietnam's population grows, how a sizeable group of elder citizens is being cared for will shed light on how the family structure in contemporary Vietnam is changing, especially at the time when the country is slated to become more economically viable.

### **3.1.1 Danang**

Danang or Da Nang (*Đà Nẵng*) is the largest city in the Central South Coast and one of the most important port cities in Vietnam. With a population of about one million and growing, it is the fifth largest city in Vietnam in area but third by importance. After the capital city of Hanoi in the north and the dynamic commercial center of Ho Chi Minh City in the south, Danang is well situated in the middle – about 600 miles north of Ho Chi Minh City and 500 miles south of Hanoi. These three cities form the top three economic centers of Vietnam.

Being a much smaller city of the other two, Danang enjoys a life with a good standard of living with new and modern infrastructures, relatively low pollution and little traffic congestion. Danang boasts itself as being one of the most 'green' cities in Vietnam as well as being one of

top tourist attractions in the country. Flanked by the mountains to the west and the South China Sea to the east, this port city sits at the mouth of the Han River and is renowned for abundant natural beauty. Danang's long stretches of white sand beaches, including the well-known "China Beach," were the rest and recreation (often known as 'R and R' in the media) getaways for the American troops during the Vietnam War. It is located within several UNESCO World Heritage sites including the Imperial City of Hue, 60 miles to the north; the Champa Temple complex of My Son is 45 miles to the southwest; and the Old Town Hoi An is 20 miles to the south. All of these places are easily accessible by various modes of transportation such as mopeds, buses, taxis or cars. The short drive from Danang to the Hoi An affords tourists the view of many first class hotels and exclusive ocean front resorts dotted along the scenic route.



Figure 3.1 Map of Vietnam showing Danang and other major cities  
*Source:* <http://www.vp-travels.com/Image/bando.jpg>

### **3.1.2 Agent Orange/Dioxin**

During the Vietnam War (1959-1975), Danang airport was a major air base for the U.S. Air Forces. The central region of Vietnam was a “hot spot” for Agent Orange, a weed killing herbicide contaminated with a dioxin compound used during the War to defoliate dense jungle to deprive food and cover for the Northern Vietnamese troops. From 1962-1971, under a project called “Operation Ranch Hand,” the United States air-sprayed about 20 million gallons of

herbicides in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Most of the activities were concentrated in Vietnam, in the outskirt regions of Danang in the central region, and in Bien Hoa, a southern suburb of Saigon in the south. It has been estimated that over 12% of South Vietnam had been sprayed, and depending on the herbicide stock, the level of dioxin contamination in Agent Orange could have been up to 1,000 times higher than the average herbicide for domestic use at the time.<sup>8</sup> By the time the spraying stopped, Agent Orange and other herbicides had defoliated about 5.5 million acres of forest (about the size of New Jersey) and destroyed 500,000 acres (about 7,800 square miles) of cropland (Fuller, 2012).<sup>9</sup>

The dioxin TCDD (2,3,7,8-Tetrachlorodibenzo-*p*-dioxin) is a contaminant present in the herbicide Agent Orange. TCDD is extremely toxic, probably the most toxic chemical known to science. Described as “a human carcinogen” it has been linked to at least 15 classes of cancer as well as several birth defects and other disabilities in numerous and extensive medical studies. People can be affected either by direct exposure to it, by inhaling the vapors of it, or by consuming the contaminated food – plants, fish and land animals. Because the dioxin is not water-soluble nor can it be absorbed by plants, it can be toxic over a long period – for several decades – and can be passed down to many generations. For example, a contaminated soil particle can be carried by water and settle downstream at the bottom of a lake or a waterway. People living in these “hot spots” can be affected from consuming contaminated fish, poultry or plants, or from using the water, or from working on the land. Children born from affected parents often have degrees of birth defects, mental and physical, and many cases are extremely severe. The Vietnam Red Cross estimated that about 4-8 million Vietnamese people were exposed to the dioxin, of which 1 million are disabled or have health problems due to Agent Orange. At least

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<sup>8</sup> Veterans and Agent Orange: Health Effects of Herbicides Used in Vietnam

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/10/world/asia/us-moves-to-address-agent-orange-contamination-in-vietnam.html>

150,000 Vietnamese children were born with birth defects, even decades long after the War ended in 1975. As of 2013, there were about 1,400 children in Danang with disabilities linked to dioxin contamination. According to the UNICEF, there are about 200 children benefiting from UNICEF-supported daycare centers, 60 per cent of who thought to be victims of Agent Orange.<sup>10</sup>

Many U.S. servicemen and women who served during War were also affected by the dioxin. The number of U.S. military personnel who served during the War was estimated to be between 2.6 and 3.8 million. The exact number of servicemen and women who were affected by the dioxin is not known; however, those who were in contact directly with “Operation Ranch Hand” were thought to have a high chance of exposure to the dioxin. The health threats are still lingering with them and their families even today. The Veteran Affairs website has recognized many cancers and diseases associated with exposure to Agent Orange including Hodgkin, Parkinson, multiple myeloma, lymphoma, prostate cancer, respiratory disorders, immune-system disorders, circulatory disorders, diabetes, lipoprotein disorders, gastrointestinal and digestive disease, and adverse effects on thyroid homeostasis among many others.<sup>11</sup>

Besides biological consequences, the spraying of the toxic herbicides (coupled with the bombardment of napalm and bombing strikes) has caused severe damages to ecosystems and affected the livelihoods of millions of people. Vietnam was and is an agrarian country. The loss of agricultural lands has caused many people to give up their agrarian life and move to bigger cities to find jobs, which has increased the slum population in the urban areas. The loss of forest cover and timber has caused heavy flooding and soil erosion. It has increased water contamination and created poorer soil quality, which has caused long-term impact on the

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<sup>10</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/vietnam\\_69407.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/vietnam_69407.html)

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/conditions/>

environment.<sup>12</sup> The destruction of jungle habitats has also threatened the biodiversity of plants and animals; some of the species were already rare thus the dioxin from Agent Orange may have further pushed them to being more endangered or in extinction. The term “ecocide” was introduced to describe the extensive scale of destruction of ecosystems.<sup>13</sup>

Because Danang Airport was a U.S. air base where large volumes of Agent Orange were stored, handled, and spilled during Operation Hand Ranch, this area has been recognized as one of the largest dioxin contaminated hotspots in the country. Many studies were conducted from 1997-2010 to determine the level of dioxin contamination at Danang Airport and its surrounding areas, notably the nearby Sen Lake. As recently as 2010, significant quantities of TCDD were still detected from many samples analyzed (USAID, 2010).

In June 2013 Congresswoman Barbara Lee (D-CA) introduced the *Victims of Agent Orange Relief Act of 2013*, which would direct the Departments of Veterans Affairs, State and Health and Human Services to address the challenges faced, by the victims of Agent Orange/dioxin. The legislation also includes provisions to provide medical services and resources to affected communities, including those still living in contaminated environments and the descendants of exposed veterans and Vietnamese Americans. “We need to ensure that individuals affected by Agent Orange have access to medical services relating to their exposure. Our policies addressing Agent Orange do not adequately provide for the children of veterans exposed to Agent Orange, nor for the Vietnamese and Vietnamese Americans who have been exposed to this toxic substance,” said Congresswoman Lee.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.warlegacies.org/environment.htm>

<sup>13</sup> This term was first introduced at the Conference on War and National Responsibility in 1970. Although ecocide is currently not an international crime, it has been recommended to United Nations that it be considered an international crime against peace.

<sup>14</sup> <http://lee.house.gov/newsroom/press-releases/congresswoman-barbara-lee-introduces-victims-of-agent-orange-relief-act>

### **3.2 The SUNY Brockport Vietnam Program**

As mentioned earlier, even though Danang is well situated between the capital city of Hanoi and the economic hub of Ho Chi Minh City, due its much smaller size and population, Danang attracts much fewer visitors. While Danang attracts Vietnamese tourists year around, most foreigners come to the central area to visit the ancient town Hoi An or the imperial city of Hue. Some may come to Danang for a few days before moving on. Not only SUNY Brockport was the first U.S. institution of higher education that established a study abroad program in Danang, it remains the only foreign university that regularly sends college students to this central port city.

The SUNY Brockport Vietnam program operated through the International Education office at the College of Brockport: State University of New York,<sup>15</sup> located in Brockport, Central New York. The faculty member who established the program is Kenneth Herrmann, a professor of Social Works at the College of Brockport. During the Vietnam War, Professor Herrmann was stationed in the Central Coast region, near Danang. In 1999, upon the request of John Perry, a former director of International Education Brockport, this Vietnam War veteran returned to Vietnam to start a study abroad program in Danang. It was to be the first program of its kind in post-war communist Vietnam. According to Prof. Herrmann, prior to the SUNY Brockport program, Danang had entertained more than a dozen foreign institutions of higher education wishing to establish collaboration with Vietnam but none was successful until his program.

The SUNY Brockport Vietnam program is a full semester-term study abroad program. The 13-week semester-term operates three times during the academic year: Fall, Spring and Summer. In 2013 the program began to implement two additional shorter 4-week terms in the summer and in the winter break, in addition to its regular 13-week sessions. The program accepts students from other higher education institutions as well as from their own undergraduate and

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<sup>15</sup> The College of Brockport: State University of New York is also known as SUNY Brockport.

graduate students. The number of students attending each semester has fluctuated from as many as 10 students to as few as two. Over the span of 13 years the program has sent about 160 students to Vietnam.

All SUNY Brockport students reside at a program house, a rented property of SUNY - Brockport. The house has four split-level floors, eight double bedrooms (some rooms can accommodate triple occupants) with ensuite bathrooms. There is a classroom conveniently set up that can accommodate about 15 people on the second floor. There are six staff members employed at the house. The office of local resident program director/administrative manager Linh<sup>16</sup> and the deputy manager Mai is located down the hall. A sundeck is at the top level of the house where the students can relax or hold special events. All of the meals are prepared by the two cooks/housekeepers at the house. To vary their routines the cooks alternate their chores of cooking and cleaning on a weekly basis. To round out the staff, there are two night guards. The house guards alternate their workdays (one works on even days, whereas the other works on odd days; they alternate Sundays). The house guards arrive at the house at 6pm and leave around 6am. The purpose of having house guards is to watch over the house at night for possible incidents with minor thieveries. The guards also mind other security measures such as making sure that all students are back in the house at a reasonable hour (curfew is midnight) or be aware of their whereabouts, given the fact that these students are foreign citizens.

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<sup>16</sup> All names except for Kenneth Herrmann have been changed to preserve their privacy.

### **3.2.1 Coursework and Field Trips**

While in Danang, Brockport students take five courses: Vietnamese history, Vietnamese politics, Vietnamese culture, Vietnamese language, and Community Service. Except for the language class, the other courses meet one time a week for two hours. The language course meets three times for a total of six hours per week. All classes are taught at the program house where the students reside. The instructors are hired privately; some of them also teach at the National Danang University or Duy Tan University, a private college. The Community Service course is led by the local resident director. All instructors come to the house to deliver lectures according to the schedule. The courses are taught in Vietnamese with translation given by either the local resident director or her deputy manager.

On a typical day the students would wake up and have breakfast around 7:15am. At 8 or 9am they either have class or go on a service learning trip. They finish their first class or field service around 10 or 11am. Lunch is at noon. The students also have a few hours to rest before their afternoon activities, either class or a service trip. They are free for dinner, which begins either at 5:30 or 6pm. Twice a week they teach English at 7pm, otherwise they are free in the evening. Local field trips are organized on Saturdays. These include visiting famous tourist sites in Danang and the surrounding areas such as Ba Na Hills, Marble Mountain, Elephant Waterfalls or Hoi An. On Saturday morning a van would come and pick up the students and transport them to the sites. They would be accompanied by either one of the two administrative staff. Should both be unavailable, one of the two house cooks would go in their place. The main purpose of this person is to help the students with the translation. Sunday is a free day.

**Table 3.1 Weekly schedules: Classes and Field services  
SUNY Brockport Weekly Schedule (Spring 2013)**

|                  | Monday                                                | Tuesday                                                  | Wed                                                       | Thursday                                                  | Friday                                          | Saturday      | Sun         |
|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| <b>Breakfast</b> |                                                       |                                                          |                                                           |                                                           |                                                 |               |             |
|                  | 8-10am<br>Politics<br>class                           | 8-10am<br><i>Agent<br/>Orange<br/>Daycare<br/>Center</i> | 8-10am<br>History<br>class                                | 8-10am<br><i>Hoa Vang<br/>District<br/>Home<br/>Visit</i> | 8-10am<br>Culture class                         | Field<br>Trip | Free<br>Day |
|                  |                                                       |                                                          |                                                           |                                                           | 10:30-<br>11:30am<br>Community<br>Service class |               |             |
| <b>Lunch</b>     |                                                       |                                                          |                                                           |                                                           |                                                 |               |             |
|                  | 2-4pm<br><i>Loving<br/>House<br/>Nursing<br/>Home</i> | 2-4pm<br>Lang<br>class                                   | 3:30-5pm<br><i>Danang<br/>City<br/>Welfare<br/>Center</i> | 2-4pm<br>Language<br>class                                | 2-4pm<br>Language<br>class                      |               |             |
| <b>Dinner</b>    |                                                       |                                                          |                                                           |                                                           |                                                 |               |             |
|                  | 7-9pm<br><i>Teaching<br/>English</i>                  |                                                          | 7-9pm<br><i>Teaching<br/>English</i>                      |                                                           |                                                 |               |             |

Services are in italics and bold.

In addition to the local field trips on Saturdays, the students also have two extended weeklong trips. After the midterm they travel by car from Danang to the north, stopping at a few places along the way before reaching Hanoi. While in Hanoi they have a chance to explore the capital city and go see a water puppet show or other historical landmarks. They fly back to Danang from Hanoi. The other trip takes place at the end of the term. This time students head south, again by car, stopping at a few places along the south coast such as the seaside town of NhaTrang and the hill station of DaLat before arriving in Ho Chi Minh City. They fly back to the U.S. from Ho Chi Minh City when the program officially ends. All extended trips are accompanied either by Linh or Mai.

### **3.2.2 The Field Services**

The service learning activities take place throughout the week on a rotational schedule, in a form of the Community Service course. Students are required to attend the weekly Community Service seminar course and work at various community sites for about 12-15 hours a week. The services at those sites are organized by three main stakeholders: SUNY Brockport and its host country partner, Danang Union of Friendship Organizations (DAFO), a government engine that oversees all non-political organizations in Danang, and the Danang/Quang Nam Fund, an NGO established by Professor Hermann in upstate New York. All of them play instrumental roles in these services.

During the semester of my field study I observed five sites of service; four have been in the program for many years. One new site was implemented during the semester that I was there (Spring 2013). The students visit each place once or twice a week, spending about two hours each time. Their activities are varied depending on needs of the communities and funding availability of the Danang/ Quang Nam NGO. The field services are:

1. Loving House Nursing Home
2. Agent Orange Group Home
3. Hoa Vang District Home Visits
4. Danang City Welfare Center
5. Teaching English

#### **3.2.2.1 The Loving House Nursing Home**

The Loving House (*Mái Ấm Tình Thương*) is a nursing home for homeless elderly in Danang. The house was established in 1996 on a property that was donated by a local Catholic Church. The facility is quite big with separate living quarters for the residents, a kitchen and dining area,

a common room and a praying chapel. There are several gardens (for food and flowers) plus an area for raising domestic animals for consumption and for sale.

In 2013 the Loving House housed 35 residents; at its peak there were 45 residents. The majority of the residents are women; most of them are in their 80s or older. The youngest resident is a 58-year old woman who is paralyzed from the waist down and is bound to a wheel chair. When I last visited the home in the spring of 2013, many residents were already advanced in age so the staff and the students in residence carried out the majority of the household duties and gardening work. The residents seemed to be in very good health and were well looked after with meals and medical care. The oldest woman passed away several years earlier at 107.

The executive board is made up of four members: a Catholic nun director and her assistant, a vice director, and a Catholic house manager. There are three main administration units, each is headed by a nun staff member. One person is in charge of gardening and raising domestic animals; one staff member is in charge of looking after the well being of the residents such as sorting out daily medicines for each person; one is in charge of providing meals. Each staff nun has one or two assistants to help her with her duties. In addition, there are several ethnic minority college students who reside at the house free of charge in exchange for duties around the house.

The Loving House is a self-sustaining nursing home. The nuns and the residents (if well enough) take care of everything. They garden, tend to the animals, and they go to market to sell their goods. I was told that the residents used to help out more actively when they were younger. The animals they raise are chickens and rabbits. There are about 60 chickens and 40 rabbits at the property. In 2012 the Vietnamese government stopped allowing private residents to raise pigs but prior to that they used to have as many as 25 pigs. To generate income in its place they

opened a small kiosk with funds donated by Unilever to sell small household items such as detergent, shampoo, rice, sugar, penny candy, etc. There are also some fruit (strawberries and mulberries) wines brewed by the nuns.

A note to add is that nursing homes are very uncommon in Vietnam. It is customary that the children and grandchildren take care of the elder family members. Due to this deep entrenchment of the extended family as a support system in the Vietnamese culture, it would be considered extremely un-filial if children sent their elderly parents to a nursing home. The thought of sending one's parents to a facility to be taken care of by others is unthinkable by most people.

Vietnam is a relatively young country. According to the 2012 demographic profile, only 5.5% of Vietnam's 91 million population or slightly more than five million people who are 65 years or older (compared to 13.5% in the US). However, this figure is likely to change; it is estimated by 2030 there will be 17 million elder people in Vietnam, or 17% of the population.

Even though the concept of nursing home is rather new, Vietnam foresees the shortage of nursing homes for its future aging population that will exacerbate with time. As of January 2010, Ho Chi Minh City, the largest city in Vietnam, with a population of around eight million, had only four public nursing homes. These four facilities can accommodate 1,000 people for a city that is estimated to have 400,000 people older than 60 years old. The shortage of nursing homes will become problematic as a new older – and poor – population increases. The family structure of Vietnam is changing as the country becomes more developed. People are having fewer children and unlike in the past, many do not live with their parents after they get married. With both men and women are actively engaged in the work force than ever before, many elderly folks are left at home to take care of each other or themselves.

As the Vietnamese economy develops the demands for better housing, high-end and luxury apartments and condominiums in Vietnam are increasing. So is the demand for better facilities for the elderly population. As of now there are very few private nursing homes but these centers are expensive and often aim to cater to the better off few who can afford to reside there. Some of the centers are like a resort structure, with onsite medical facilities and round the clock care. They are much better equipped than the public facilities provided by the government; in other words, the majority of the elderly population in Vietnam are not able to afford them.

For the elderly that do not have any family or enough means there are modest public nursing homes that are run by the government. There are homes that are run by charity organizations; most are managed by religious organizations, often by a Catholic church. The Loving House Nursing Home is one of such nursing homes.

### ***Service provided by SUNY students***

According to the service schedule, the SUNY Brockport students visit the Loving House once a week, for 1.5-2 hours each time. The trip takes about 25 minutes by car or taxi. The students usually travel with one administrative person from the SUNY Brockport program, the Vietnamese resident director or her assistant. The role of the resident director or the assistant director is to help with the language interpretation.

The tasks are given to them when they arrive at the center. The students help the residents and the nuns with anything that the nuns and residents deem necessary. Almost every time the female students would do the personal grooming care: they paint and clip the residents' nails or comb their hair. When they are finished they join other students to help out with gardening work: they help watering the plants, picking dead leaves, or attend to any minor household chores around the nursing home. Sometimes they would help feed the elder residents in the

dining room during the meal hours. During the semester of my field study there were three students, one male and two female students. The female students clip and paint the residents' nails and keep them company. The male student would help out with some manual work around the center. Sometimes he would also help the ethnic minority student residents with their English.



Figure 3.2 SUNY students working with the elderly

### 3.2.2.2 The Agent Orange Group Home

The official name of this field site is “Support Center for Agent Orange Victims and Disabled Children of the City of Danang” (*Trung Tâm Bảo Trợ Nạn Nhân Chất Độc Màu Da Cam và Trẻ em Bất hạnh Thành phố Đà Nẵng*). However, this place is often referred to as the “Agent

Orange (AO) Group Home” in the schedule and syllabus, henceforth this will be referred as such. This center was established in 2005 under the umbrella of Vietnam Association of Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin (VAVA) and its Danang chapter. VAVA is a Vietnamese government agency founded by the Ministry of Interior in 2004 to advocate issues on behalf of the victims of Agent Orange. It has offices in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and Danang. Due to the special status, Danang also has a local chapter, The Danang Association For Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin (DAVA). There are three AO Group Homes in Danang. Due to its proximity to Danang city, one particular place has more visitors (especially foreigners) than the other two centers. This main center is one of the service sites for the SUNY Brockport students.

The center is rather large and well cared for. Upon entering the gate, one can see an open courtyard in the center. This place is for the children to play during recess. There is a stage where the children give welcome performances for visitors. There are several rooms on both sides of the courtyard: one classroom with school desks for indoors activities such as crafts and drawing; one room has several sewing machines and embroidery materials for craft projects. Depending on the disabilities, some children/young adults are capable of taking up some vocational training such as sewing or making incense. Other rooms are offices, rooms for children to take naps and a kitchen.

As of 2013, there were about 50 “children,” ranging from 12 to 32 years old. The children are dropped off by their parents at 7:30am and get picked up at the end of the day around 4:30pm. All activities, meals and naps are at the daycare center. The conditions of the children are varied but by and large, most children at this AO group home seem to be able to function quite well - the severe cases would not be able to participate in this program due to special care they require. The center employs a staff of eight to nine members to look after the

disabled children. They are in charge of various tasks, from teaching arts and crafts and singing and dancing, to providing meals and vocational training and various minor healthcare.

***Service provided by SUNY students***

SUNY Brockport students visit the AO Group Home once a week, for 1.5-2 hours each time.

The trip takes about 20-25 minutes by car or taxi. The students travel with the resident director or her assistant. Upon arrival at the center the students are always greeted with cheers by the children. Their service consists of two main activities: arts and crafts making and outdoor games or exercises. The students would often bring supplies or props to play with the children. For example, one week they would make lanterns and another week they would draw or play some kind of games with balls or hula-hoops. The students would go to a local department store to get necessary supplies – papers, crayons, glue, glitter, or whatever was necessary for their projects. When they arrive at the center the following week, the students assist the children with arts projects using these props that they have purchased. After an hour it is time for some outdoor physical activities such as dancing, playing some children games such as ‘hide and seek’, ‘duck, duck goose’, or ‘musical chairs’, etc.



Figure 3.3 SUNY Brockport students and the children at the AO Group Home

### 3.2.2.3 The Hoa Vang District Home Visits

Hoa Vang District (*Huyện Hoà Vang*) is the poorest of eight districts of Danang. With a population around 215,000, it is considered one of the largest districts in Danang. It has 12 subdivisions, including one township of Hoa Vang and 11 communes (*xã*). The names of all communes bear the name with a prefix “*Hoà*”, which means “peace”, such as *Hoà Nhơn* or *Hoà Liên*, *Hoà Pháp* etc. Among 11 communes four are located in the uphill, four on the coast, and three on the delta. Five communes are classified as “poor”; 5,006 families are in the “poor” category. Agriculture makes up 90% of the occupations of the district. The average income per capita per month is around VND 2,000,000 or about \$95 USD. As of 2013, there are 650 disabled children living in district, 98 of them are thought to be victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin.

The families of disabled children are provided health insurance and a subsidized income of VND 250,000 (\$12 USD) to VND 410.00 (\$20) per month.

### ***Home Visits by SUNY students***

Once a week SUNY Brockport makes a trip to the Hoa Vang district. The trip takes about 20-30 minutes each way by car. Each time they would visit two or three families of disabled children. In the course of a semester, the students visit about 25 families. This number fluctuates depending on *Tết* (the Vietnamese Lunar New Year holiday), class and field trip schedules. In an academic year of three semesters, the SUNY Brockport program visits about 50-60 families. All of these families belong to the “poor” category.

Due to the high number of disabled children and poor households in the district, the district office rotates the visitation schedules for SUNY Brockport. Upon arrival at the gate of the district office to check in, a person representing the district office would meet the group and guide the entourage to the houses of the families. One week they would be in one commune; however, the next week they would be in another. The students do not see any one particular family or child again during their semester stay in Danang. Even the administrative staff (Linh or Mai), who accompanies the students at these visits has said that they only get to re-visit the same family every three or four years. The students usually spend about half an hour at each family; they meet and talk with the family and the disabled children. As always, either the resident director or her deputy would accompany them to interpret the conditions of the disabilities or answer any questions the students may have. Before leaving, the visitors leave a gift of food – juice or milk and VND 1,000,000 (\$47 USD) with each family. This donation is not from SUNY Brockport, but from the Danang/Quang Nam Fund.

#### **3.2.2.4 The Danang City Welfare Center**

The Danang City Welfare Center for Homeless and Disabled People (*Trung Tâm Bảo Trợ Xã Hội Đà Nẵng*) is a center established by the Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA). The Center has residents of all ages and genders with a variety of challenges and difficult circumstances. In May 2013, there were 25 children and 132 adults who permanently resided at the Center. The Center is quite large with many separate housing units. One area is for the orphaned children, from a few months old infants to toddler to young adults. Many of them suffer from some forms of mental conditions; some of these conditions are believed to be Agent Orange related. Other living quarters are designated for adults. One area is for the people who suffer with mental illness; there is an area for the invalids; and there is a general area for the homeless elderly. The adult women and men live in separate areas.

Everyone who resides at the Center either is poor or homeless or does not have family to look after them. As a government-run establishment its resources can be limited. The living condition is bare and minimum; the daily food allocation is modest at best. The budget for each resident per meal is about 4,500 VND or about 22 cents, or less than \$1 for all meals per day. The online forum established by the association of university students in Danang describes the lives of the residents at the Welfare Center as follows: “This is a small society, (it’s) a shelter for the unfortunate members of the society. They are trying to have a normal life and in a living condition that is abnormal.”<sup>17</sup>

#### ***Service provided by SUNY students***

The Danang Welfare Center is the newest addition of community service for the SUNY Brockport students. Unlike other field services, the service at this Center is irregular: the

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.hoithienhuu.vn/index.php/hoat-dong-hoi/199-tham-trung-tam-bao-tro-xa-hoi-da-nang>

students only go the Welfare Center about three to five times during a semester. The only thing they seem to do is to help dishing out the food to the residents and walk around the compound. To give the residents a treat, the Danang/Quang Nam Fund NGO would offer special food (such as beef noodle soup or some kind of meat dishes) that the residents would not otherwise obtain at the Center on their daily allowances. The day of the event the two cooks from the program house would arrive at the Center ahead of time to prepare the special dish. The SUNY Brockport students arrive at 4pm with either Linh or Mai, one of the two administrative staff members. Everyone helps dish out the food to individual bowls and place them on the tables of the dining room. The funds for food are provided through the Danang/Quang Nam Fund.

#### **3.2.2.5 Teaching English**

Two evenings per week students are requested to teach English at the Danang Union of Friendship Organizations (DAFO) office complex. DAFO is the governmental partner of the SUNY Brockport Vietnam Program. The DAFO office is located quite close to the program house. The students can walk there in 15-20 minutes but they can also travel by taxi. Other NGOs including the Red Cross-Danang also have their representative offices at this business complex. Besides offices there are several classrooms designated for learning English. Even though these conversational English courses are aimed for adult learners, the majority of the English learners are quite young; some of them are just middle school and high school students but most of them are college students.

English learning is very popular in Vietnam and Danang is no exception. There are many private English schools throughout the city. While the fees for at these English courses are much higher than those at DAFO, the sizes of the classes tend to be smaller. An English class at

DAFO can be as many as 20-40 students. The classes are usually taught by teams of two Brockport students. There are no formal textbooks or homework. A coordinator of these classes (an employee of DAFO) would hand out a photocopy of some lesson on the day of the lesson. Sometimes he would suggest a few topics to the SUNY Brockport students. The topics of the lesson tend to be quite general (“holidays, weather, transportation, food,” etc.). The idea is to give the Vietnamese English learners opportunities to listen to native speakers of English and to practice a few phrases with them – and to have fun. Being young students themselves, many Brockport students have never taught or even stood in front of a classroom before; however, gradually some of them seem to have quite taken by the “job”. Many students would spend quite a bit of time preparing for lessons; they often rehearse with their “co-instructor” on certain activities that they would team-teach that evening.



Figure 3.4 SUNY Brockport students teaching English

### **3.3 The Partnerships**

#### **3.3.1 Danang Union of Friendship Organizations (DAFO)**

Danang Union of Friendship Organizations (DAFO) is a Vietnamese governmental organization that was established to oversee all non-political foreign collaborations in Danang. Its Vietnamese name is *Liên Hiệp Các Tổ Chức Hữu Nghị Thành Phố Đà Nẵng*, which was translated into English as the Union of Friendship Organizations (UFO) of Danang. (The acronym was changed from UFO to DAFO, henceforth DAFO). DAFO was established in 1995 under the leadership of Mr. Nguyen Dinh An, as the Chairman of the organization from 1995 until he retired in 2009. Chairman An also teaches the Vietnamese Politics course for the SUNY Brockport program since the inception of the international service learning program in 2000. He was known and as of 2014 was still called by Prof. Herrmann and all of the students as “Chairman An,” rather “teacher An” or “Professor An”. Currently, there are ten (10) Friendship Organizations in Danang, all of them are under the administrative umbrella of DAFO; one of them is the Vietnam-U.S. Friendship Organization. Any foreign companies, agencies, organizations or education institutions wishing to establish programs or any types of collaboration in Danang will need to have input, guidance and, in many cases, administrative support from DAFO.

The SUNY Brockport Vietnam program was the first Collaborative Education program between DAFO with a higher education institution from the United States. In other words, DAFO is the host country partner with SUNY Brockport. Professor Herrmann has remarked that his program is the longest lasting foreign organization in Danang thus far. With this partnership SUNY Brockport was able to set up a program in Danang according to regulations required by DAFO. For example, the hiring of the staff from the resident director to the household staff at the

program house all had to be approved by DAFO. DAFO would vet out the candidates and pass recommendations to Prof. Herrmann. In fact, even though SUNY Brockport ultimately pays the salary for the staff, the payments are distributed through DAFO.

At the beginning of each term, the students would meet with the Chairman of DAFO for a friendship dinner. I was told that in the early years of the program, whenever the students traveled to their service sites they were often accompanied by a DAFO employee. Over the years both sides seem have worked out a comfortable arrangement and have come to a good understanding that this is no longer necessary. However, the presence of the host country partnership is evident. Every week the students go to the DAFO business office complex to teach English. Not only are their topics of the lessons being coordinated by an employee of DAFO, another employee also sits in the classrooms to act as a teacher's assistant. On occasions when there is a guest of the College or anyone coming from U.S. (for example, a researcher such as myself) an employee of DAFO is dispatched to travel to the field sites to accompany these visitors.

### **3.3.2 The Danang/Quang Nam Fund**

The Danang/Quang Nam Fund is a non-governmental organization that was established by Prof. Herrmann to provide direct aid to the poor in Danang and Quang Nam areas. Quang Nam is the province that Danang used to belong to. In 1997 Danang was separated from Danang-Quang Nam to become one of five municipalities (controlled by central government) in Vietnam. The headquarters of Danang/Quang Nam Fund is at Prof. Herrmann's home in upstate New York. The Fund has been registered as a tax exempt non-profit NGO in the State of New York. It is important to note that even though Prof. Herrmann was a faculty member of SUNY Brockport,

the NGO was operating independently of the college.

There are eight members of the executive board besides Prof. Herrmann. All of the members were invited by Prof. Herrmann to serve without pay. In fact, the NGO is operated strictly as a volunteer organization; no one gets paid or reimbursed for any service of any kind. There are no administrative costs so that all donations can go directly towards aid. This aid has often been integrated in the field service of the SUNY Brockport program. For example, when the students visit the poor families with disabled children in the Hoa Vang district, they leave behind some token gifts (food and cash donation) – this funding comes from the NGO. The special food treats for the Danang Welfare Center habitants and the occasional special meals for the Loving House residents are also provided by funds of the NGO. Prof. Herrmann estimated the cost to the NGO to be about USD 40,000 per year to distribute the resources to the needy in the program. The funds are raised from private donors and from organizations, including some former participants of the SUNY Brockport program. Due to the unique relationship that he has with SUNY Brockport and Danang/DAFO, Prof. Herrmann was able to facilitate the use of the funds directly to the poor in Danang. Linh and Mai, the two Vietnamese administrative staff of the SUNY Brockport program, manage a separate account for the NGO. They often communicated with Prof. Herrmann through email and send invoices and the account balances to him, when he was not in Vietnam himself.

Figure 3.5 shows the relationship between Prof. Herrmann, the faculty lead of the SUNY Brockport Vietnam program, who is also the founder of Danang/ Quang Nam NGO. Other key players are the local country partner, DAFO; SUNY students, which include the students of SUNY Brockport, other students from SUNY campuses and other (non-SUNY) students who join the program; and the local communities in Danang, Vietnam. The interaction between the

students and the local serviced communities is connected by a thinner arrow.

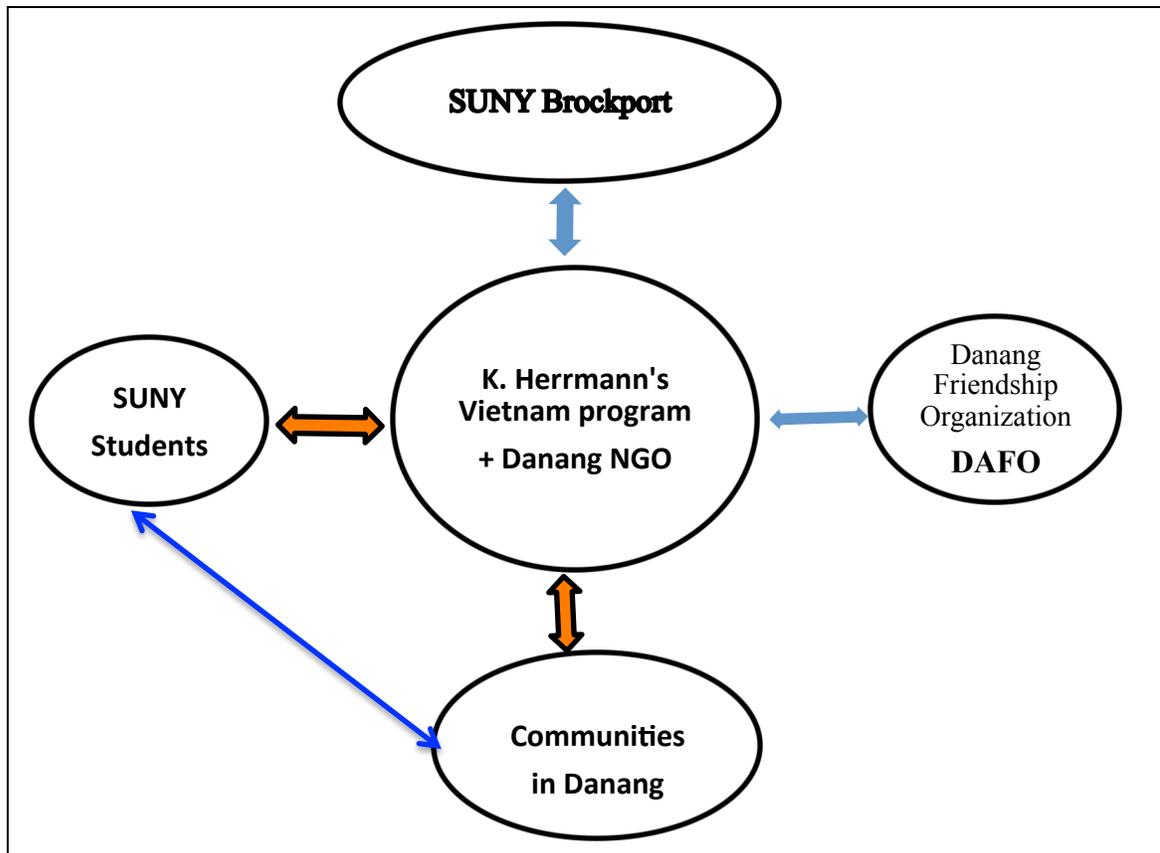


Figure 3.5 SUNY Brockport Vietnam program partnership map

During my field research in Danang, I lived with the students at the program house; I ate with them and accompanied them to their service sites. I also had the opportunity to know the communities where the community service took place. Information regarding the students' community service activities, their insights regarding the service assignments and their lives in Danang will be presented in Chapter Five.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **METHODS**

#### **4.1 Rationale of Methods of the Study**

In general, my approach towards this project and my interpretative framework for data analysis are within social constructivism and pragmatism approaches. According to Creswell (2014), pragmatist researchers do not rely on one fixed system of method of inquiry. Instead of emphasizing on specific methods, they look at the research problems based on how things develop through the course of the study and subscribe to the methods that best meet their goals. In most cases, pragmatist researchers tend use mixed methods for data collection and analysis.

Social constructivism is a philosophical theory that believes that knowledge is constructed by the learners and their social settings. Learning is socially motivated by different schema encompassing culture, race, gender, language, and other environmental factors that contribute to this production of knowledge. Social constructivists believe in active learning where knowledge is achieved through progressive collaboration and social interaction. Due to the experiential learning component in service learning, the dominant discourse of service learning is naturally aligned along the axis of constructivist epistemology. Constructivist researchers believe that each participant of their study has a different background and experience, and by gathering different perspectives from multiple individuals the researchers then interpret, develop, and construct a pattern of meaningful conclusion (Creswell, 2013).

As I outlined in the introduction, the main goal of this doctoral research project is to examine in depth a U.S.-based international service learning program from various perspectives. I am motivated by these different points of views not only from the perspectives of the home

institution but also the perspectives of the host country, how the host communities in Vietnam perceived and interpreted the assumed benefits from the services rendered, and whether these views were similar or different than those of the students and the program administrators of SUNY Brockport. As mentioned in Chapter One, the study was driven by this following question:

*Q: How are benefits manifested in international service learning?*

Specifically, I would like to find out:

- How do students, administrators, and the host communities perceive benefits?
- How are the perceptions of benefits different or similar from various actors of an international service learning program?
- Are perceptions of benefits culturally, historically or socially shaped or constructed?

In addition, the study seeks to learn about the historical and social dimensions of the program, how it was set up and the relationship between the two partners, SUNY Brockport and Danang Union of Friendship Organizations (DAFO), the host country partner of the program.

To address the above issues, this study employed mainly qualitative methods of inquiry. Qualitative research is crucial for this study because I aim to gain an in-depth understanding of how benefits are manifested in an international service learning program. By engaging in participant observation as well as conducting in-depth interviews with participants on both sides of the program, I sought to see how different individuals viewed the impacts and benefits of the program, if any. Personal stories from individuals allowed me to obtain information from various perspectives, how the interviewees reflected on their experiences and how they perceived benefits from the program in the others. Thus, this type of knowledge may be best obtained through a qualitative method because only through applying the same qualitative

research approach to all participants involved can the “*perception of benefits*” be evaluated and successfully identified and developed as a reflexive discourse.

While the qualitative approach was the focus of inquiry, there was one exception, an online survey of the former student participants. With the inclusion of the survey, this study would be considered as using “mixed methods”. The procedures of data collection are best described as “QUAL (quan),” where qualitative was the main method of data inquiry, while the quantitative approach was imbedded within qualitative during the data collection process (Creswell et al., 2003). The reason I employed both qualitative and quantitative methods stemmed from my overall pragmatic approach to data inquiry and the availabilities of data, as discussed in the following data collection section. The combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods allowed me to understand the problem in greater depth, as it provided a more comprehensive picture of the issues.

## **4.2 Data Collection Methods**

### **4.2.1 Qualitative**

The qualitative methods employed include site observation, participant observation, semi-structured interview and document review. Site observation is a method of gathering information whereby the researchers have positioned themselves in a place or culture with a purpose to carefully examine/observe and note behaviors of a group of individuals in their natural settings (Lofland, Snow, Anderson and Lofland, 2006). Participant observation is a method of obtaining data when the researcher immerses herself or himself in a setting, for example, a group of individuals or a community that he or she is studying. The idea of participant observation is to gain as much access as possible to document how people live in their natural environment.

While I was in Vietnam, I wanted to become familiar with the ways the students (my Spring 2013 cohort) lived and worked, so I stayed at the program house with them. I ate with them and accompanied them everywhere, from shopping malls to the corner stores, from local eateries to the beach and local sights – and to service sites. At the service sites, I observed how local community staff interacted with these students and how the recipients of the services related to them, as they were seen as the providers of the service. I also observed the social interactions among the local people at the sites as well the interactions among the staff at the program house. For example, I became more aware of how the staff members at community sites related to one another, and how the local caretakers interacted with the children at the Agent Orange Group Home. The dynamics of these social relations, the subcultures, the subgroups peer groups and the various social hierarchies in the community(ies) are an integral part of society. Having a better understanding how people relate to one another in their own groups and how they relate to foreign visitors is a key component for qualitative researchers to get closer to their research subjects – and objectives of their research goals.

The interview method allows the researcher to elicit stories from the participants as well as providing the interviewees an opportunity to tell their stories through their answers to open-ended research questions. The goal is to elicit from the interviewee rich, detailed materials that can be used in qualitative analysis through “a guided conversation” (Loftland et al., 2006). Through interviews one can attempt to understand the world from the point of view of the subjects as knowledge is being produced socially through the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Interviews allow the interviewer to obtain additional information by observing the participants as they respond to the questions – responses that the interviewer might not be able to elicit through a survey. During my interviews, not only

did I pay attention to what the stories told but also how they were told. I wanted to capture the interviewees' points of views and their true feelings about their experience in all perspectives: the program, the courses, the services, and their overall experience in Vietnam. I believe that such information could only be obtained the direct contact with the participants provided by the interviewing.

In addition to participant observation and interviews, another form of qualitative inquiry that I used was document review. Document review provided me another dimension to the data as I triangulate them for analysis. Reviewing documents such as the students' blogs, essays, and messages on social networks offer glimpses into their thoughts and views. The Spring 2013 group was not asked to keep weekly journals, which I later found to be an anomaly. However, they were assigned midterm papers for their Community Service course, which I had permission to view. Overall, the documents that I used were program papers, reports, and brochures in addition to Facebook pages (and photographs) of former participants and friends. There were also several newspaper articles (in Vietnamese and English) written about the SUNY Brockport Vietnam program. Professor Herrmann also wrote a book about his experience when he returned to Vietnam for the first time after 30 years to set up this program.

#### **4.2.2 Quantitative**

Returning from the field study in Vietnam, I decided to supplement my data inquiry with a survey. The rationale behind having a quantitative piece in the study was due to the fact that the cohort I studied only had three students. In order to have a better understanding of the research problem, I wanted to field a bigger population of former participants. The purpose of a survey is to obtain a numeric description of trends on opinions or attitudes from which a researcher

deducts to make interferences about them (Creswell, 2013). I designed an online survey with an aim to disseminate it to all former students. I wanted to find out how former participants reflected on their experiences after a period since their programs ended. I chose the online design because of its convenience. It can be sent to a bigger group of participants via e-mail and the turn around is fast and cost affective, considering this demographic group of young people who are accustomed to respond to online surveys. The online survey was sent to the members of the “Vietnam Program Ambassadors,” a page on Facebook created by the former participants of the SUNY Brockport Vietnam program. In addition, a Study Abroad counselor at the Office of International Education at SUNY Brockport also sent the survey to the former participants on my behalf.

#### **4.3 Data Collection Phases**

Data collecting process took place in Vietnam and in the United States in several phases in the span of nearly two years. In the summer of 2012, I went to Danang for an exploratory field research trip. Even though I had been to Vietnam many times, I was not familiar with this city. There were no students participating that summer, which was quite unusual. Throughout 13 years and 35 plus semesters of operation, this was the second time that the program had no students enrolled. Although I would have liked to be present while the students were there to observe their routines, I used this opportunity to get familiarized with Danang. Even though no students were around I was able to stay at the program house; I met all of the six members of the program staff. They came to work as usual, although their schedules were remarkably scaled back. I also visited the communities where the services took place to get a sense of these places, to understand how things were managed, how people went about their daily routines. This also

gave me an opportunity to get acquainted with the people in the communities to build a rapport for my next trip. Because there were no students, I was only able to visit three of the five service sites: the Loving House Nursing Home, the Agent Orange Group Home and the English class.

While in Danang I also visited the DAFO office to establish my presence in the city and was received by the current Chairman Huynh Duc Truong. In fact, I did not know until later that our meeting resulted into a news item on the DAFO online webpage. When I returned to Danang the second time, Chairman Truong remarked to “re-welcome” me to his city. This reinforced the importance of establishing relationships with local agencies and/or government officials in a foreign country prior to conducting work or research in their communities. Unlike many countries, Vietnam created a system called the “Friendship Organization”, a government run engine to receive non-political foreign delegations (or individuals) wishing to work or to carry out any (non-political or non-diplomatic) activities in the country. The metropolitan cities like Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh or Danang all have these “friendship organizations,” for example, the Vietnam-Japan Friendship Organization or the Vietnam-Germany or Vietnam-USA Friendship Organization, etc. The DAFO is the office that oversees all of these friendship organizations in Danang, hence it is called the Danang Union of Friendship Organizations. This is a country that operates on different mode of social protocol especially when it comes to dealing with foreigners; hence, it is imperative that any foreign visitor expressing interest in working or visiting any government sponsored activities in Danang to go through certain protocol channels and be acknowledged by DAFO.

In December 2012, I returned to Vietnam to accompany a group of students from the SUNY Brockport program. These three students were the “Spring 2013 cohort” I studied in depth. Except for the courses (which I was not allowed to participate in except of the Community

Service seminar) I accompanied this cohort to practically every function, work as well as social such as weekend trips as well as all service sites. At the service sites, I made observations of their interactions with the community people; on many occasions I also participated in the service and helped the students with the translation. I also observed and interviewed the key staff members and caretakers at the sites. At the end of the first two weeks, I invited all of the students for semi in-depth interviews. I followed up with another extensive post-program interviews after they returned to the U.S.

Beside the students of the Spring 2013 group, while in Vietnam, I also interviewed the two administrative staff: the local resident director who led the community service course and her administrative assistant. The resident director has been with the program from the inception while the assistant joined six years prior. Both women take turns accompanying the students to the service sites as well as traveling with them to the trips to the north and the south. At the Loving House Nursing home I interviewed the Chief nun administrator; at the Agent Orange Group Home I conducted informal conversations with the director Ms. Hanh and the local Vietnamese caretakers. In the Hoa Vang district I was introduced to Ms. Phuong, the deputy director of the Department of Labour-Invalids and Social Affairs. She and I exchanged emails with regarding the statistics in her district. Meanwhile, I had another meeting with Chairman Truong of DAFO and the coordinator of the English class. I met with students from the English classes to talk about their experience of learning English with Brockport students. I also took photographs to document the activities at all the service sites in Vietnam.

After the Spring 2013 group had returned to the U.S. I went to Brockport to meet them and followed up with personal interviews. During this visit, I also conducted an in-depth interview with Prof. Herrmann, the faculty person who established and led the program, to get a

context for the history for the program. I also interviewed two former participants from the previous group. One participated in Spring 2012 and the other one was from the Fall 2010.

During this third stage of data collection (or phase 4 in figure 4.1), the online survey was launched. The survey was sent to former participants via email retrieved from two channels: Facebook and the SUNY Brockport office of International Education. With the help of a former participant who had become a Study Abroad counselor at the International Education office, the survey was sent to several former cohorts of the program. As mentioned previously, a group of former participants had created a page on Facebook as a way for former participants to stay connected with each other. I contacted all but two members listed as “friends” of the page because they were contacted about it through other channels. Out of 38 members from the Vietnam Program Ambassadors page on Facebook and 26 email accounts sent by the office of International Education, I received 19 respondents in addition to the three students from the Spring 2013 cohort. The total number of survey respondents was 22.

Table 4.1 shows a list of SUNY Brockport participants I interviewed, including the three students from the Spring 2013 group (Emily, Scott, and Megan) and other two former students. Prof. Herrmann is also listed in this table. Table 4.2 presents local participants I interviewed while I was in Vietnam.

**Table 4.1 Interviewed participants (SUNY Brockport)**

| <b>Units</b>                                           | <b>Names</b>           |
|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Students from Spring 2013 cohort                       | *Emily, *Scott, *Megan |
| Former students                                        | *Leslie, *Robert       |
| SUNY Brockport Faculty member/<br>Danang/Quang Nam NGO | Prof. Herrmann         |

**Table 4.2 Interviewed participants in Vietnam**

| <b>Units</b>                                    | <b>Names</b>                           |
|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Loving House Nursing Home                       | Chief nun                              |
| Agent Orange Group Home                         | *Director Ms. Hanh and the local staff |
| Hoa Vang district home visits                   | Ms. Phuong                             |
| DAFO                                            | Chairman Truong                        |
| English class coordinator                       | *Tuan                                  |
| English class students (informal conversations) | various                                |
| SUNY Brockport Local Administrative Staff       | *Linh, *Mai                            |
| Local household staff (informal conversations)  | two cooks, two guards                  |

\*These names were changed to protect the identity of the interviewees.

### **4.3.1 Research Process**

The study is organized in five distinct phases. The first and the last are the “preparing for the research” and “analyzing data” phases respectively, while the middle three phases belong to data collection process, in Vietnam and in the United States. I made two trips to Danang, Vietnam to collect data. The data collection of the U.S. portion (Brockport, New York, Upstate NY) was done from the late summer of 2013 until early spring of 2014. In Vietnam it is not customary for people to sign papers unless it deems extremely critical. These documents tend to be official documents from the government. Other researchers have had issues when presenting local people with consent papers unless they have been confirmed (usually by a Vietnamese agent or an authority figure) to assure local people of this customary protocol of field research from all U.S. higher education institutions. Following the IRB protocols, I explained the nature of my research and told my participant interviewees to feel free not to answer any questions if they did not wish to do so. At the same time, I took caution not to frame my questions in any way that might be construed as political, as this might make people feel uneasy or question my intent.

All student participants gave me their consent. Some of the interviews were audio-recorded while others were written in my computer. I transcribed the segments that were relevant to my analysis. My notes of observations were recorded in field notebooks. As I collected my data, I noticed that certain themes were emerging. I went through the notes and listened to the recordings, I then cross-referenced with other data or collect other sources to develop a better understanding of the meanings behind these themes.

Figure 4.1 illustrates five main stages of the process.

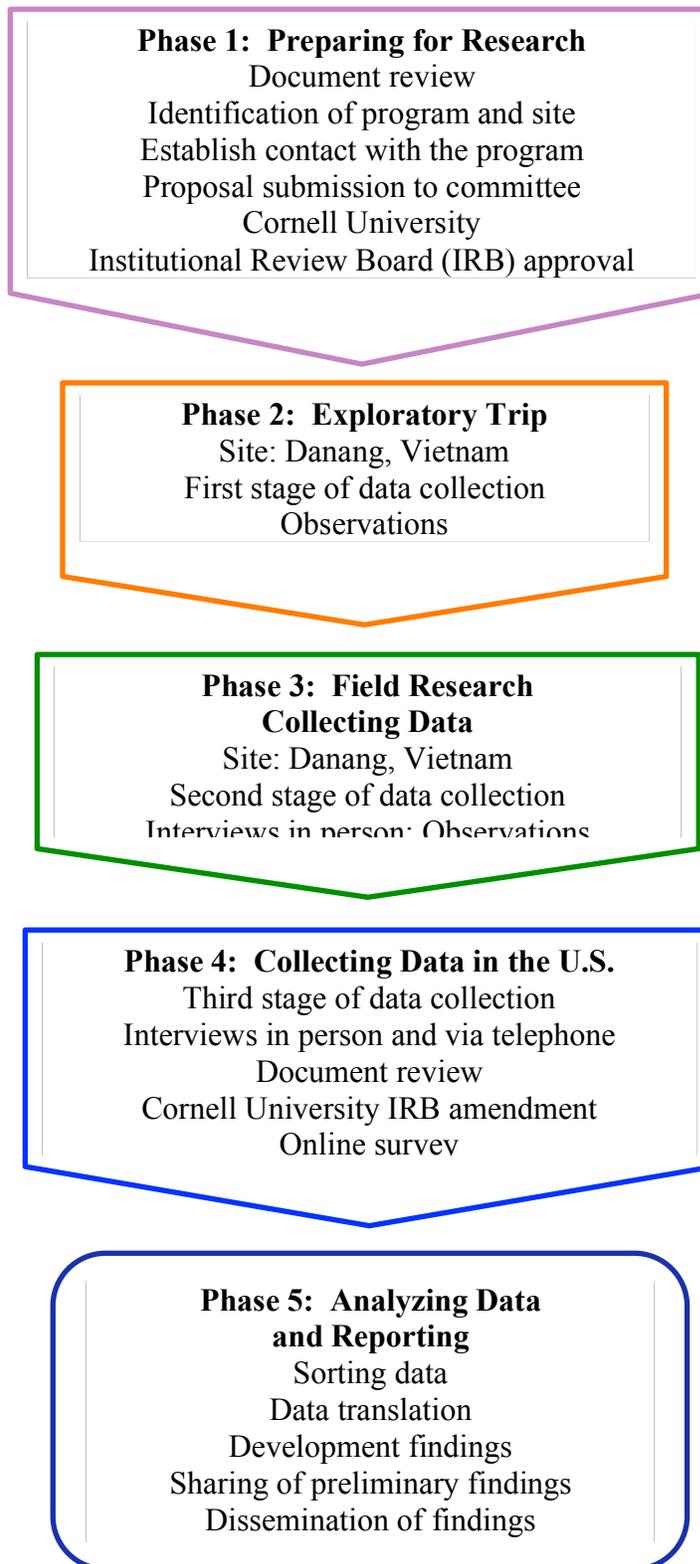


Figure 4.1 Map of the research process

### 4.3.2 Units of Analysis

The units of analysis have been organized into two groups, representing both sides of the program: SUNY Brockport Vietnam program, the providers of the service; and the local communities in Vietnam, the recipients of the service. The two tables following link the units of analysis to methods of data collection. Table 4.3 shows the units of analysis from the Vietnam’s side and Table 4.4 shows the analysis from the university’s side.

**Table 4.3 Units of Analysis from Vietnam**

| <b>Units of Analysis: Communities in Danang, Vietnam</b> | <b>Data collection methods: Qualitative</b>                |
|----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Loving House Nursing Home                                | Interview<br>Notes from observation                        |
| Agent Orange Group Home                                  | Interview<br>Notes from observation                        |
| Hoa Vang Village Visits                                  | Email/informal conversations<br>Notes from observation     |
| English Teaching                                         | Interview/informal conversations<br>Notes from observation |
| DAFO                                                     | Interview<br>Notes from observation                        |
| Local Program staff (administrative and household staff) | Interview/informal conversations<br>Notes from observation |

**Table 4.4 Units of Analysis from SUNY Brockport**

| <b>Units of Analysis:<br/>SUNY Brockport Program</b>               | <b>Data collection methods:<br/>Mixed methods</b>                                    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Students: 22<br>Spring 2013 cohort: 3<br>Other former students: 19 | Survey n=22<br>Extensive interviews n=5<br>Notes from observation<br>Document Review |
| Faculty director: 1<br>Local administrative staff: 2               | Interview<br>Notes from observation<br>Document Review                               |
| Danang/ Quang Nam NGO: 1<br>(Executive Director)                   | Interview<br>Notes from observation<br>Document Review                               |

Note: The total number of students responding to the online survey was 22. Out of these respondents, I interviewed five students in-depth – three from the Spring 2013 cohort and two from other terms. The faculty director, Prof. Herrmann, was also the executive director of the Danang/ Quang Nam NGO. The two local administrative staff members are listed on both sides of the program because while they work for the program, they are Vietnamese nationals and their points of view often reflect their dual roles.

**4.4 Notes from the field: Thoughts on field research and context of data inquiry**

When doing research, the researchers must reflect on who they are, their role in the research process and be aware of their own biases and dispositions. Doing research in the country of my birth has its fair share of dilemmas. I was born in Vietnam but I have been living outside the country for many years since I was a teenager. Even though I have returned to the country many times as an adult and have a good command of the language, I am not considered a citizen of this

country anymore, but a *Việt Kiều*, a term used for overseas Vietnamese. My interaction with Vietnam has been limited to the social circles of my relatives and some colleagues from various disciplines in Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh City.

Because Vietnam places a strong emphasis on one's regional hometown/home village, it is common that people acquire different customs and accents from places just 15-20 miles away. I am not from the Danang area, and having lived in the U.S. for many years, most people in Danang could tell that I was not from the area. However, because I could blend in quite easily and at glance I have been mistaken as someone who could come from another city in Vietnam, notably Ho Chi Minh City, the city where there is a big population of overseas Vietnamese, either visiting the country or taking long term residence. However, all of this would vanish as soon as they engaged in a conversation with me. For instance, they could tell that I was not up to date with some current issues or particular trends, which then I would be greeted with curiosity and politeness. As an overseas Vietnamese, every time I visit the country I am keenly aware of my identity of being an outsider/insider all the time, regardless of the location or situation.

In addition, being a faculty member at a university where I am also a graduate student is a subject of intrigue, if not a confusing issue to many people. In Vietnam, people tend to think of university students as young people in their early twenties; even post-graduate students would be unheard of for anyone who has passed 40. In other words, people would not see me as a graduate student, but rather as a faculty member or an academic researcher. In fact, they were more comfortable seeing me in a role of an educator, which was not unimaginable, as it was a position that I have assumed (and still hold) for more than 15 years. Also, most people in Danang could not tell the difference between the two universities, Cornell University, the one that I am affiliated with, and the State of University of New York-Brockport, the home institution of my

case study. Both institutions are located in the state of New York, which at times has made the matter more (understandingly) confusing. That is, I have often been mistaken as a faculty member of the Brockport students rather a graduate student who was studying them. I am not sure whether or not that worked in my favor in terms of acquiring data.

Overall, it seemed that people took my presence seriously; for example, they would comment on how nice the students were, or pointing out things to me as if I might be able to engage in future collaborations in their communities in my future returns. For instance, when Chairman of DAFO received me in his office, his secretary was present to take notes. The Ministry office for Foreign Affairs in Danang summoned me on my third day of arrival inquiring about my future plans. One of their staff later sent me information about upscale properties in Danang should I have plans to engage in real estate investments in the near future.

Unlike many Western foreigners who often comment on how they would not be able to blend easily in an Asian country like Vietnam, while my Asian looks and my Vietnamese language ability have spared me from those situations, my maturity and presumed position of someone of authority have made me questioned about how people perceived me, or how it would have been different if I were a younger Western-looking graduate student tagging along with the Brockport students. Their perceptions of me might have been different from those of other Westerners/visiting researchers in their country but of an outsider nonetheless. It has shaped my trajectory in how I gathered data while I was in the field. Not only did I need to be aware of what was told to me and by whom but also the contexts of how things were conveyed to me.

#### **4.5 Limitations of the study**

One major limitation of choosing a case study is that the results may not be generalizable to other cases. Every international service learning program is different and one has to take into account the special characteristics of each program, considering every aspect of it: the students, the services, the location of the service, the cultural and historical background of the host country, etc. However, some of the main findings, which I explore in the next chapter, can be applicable to other international service learning programs. Also, the findings will also shed light on the importance of proper planning of such a program prior to arriving to the host country to achieve better outcomes for both service and learning.

The methods I used also have their limitations. While I felt that all my interviewees were comfortable in sharing their views with me, I cannot attest with certainty the validity of their views on the benefits of the program. For example, my interviews at the serviced sites in Vietnam were mostly confined to the staff members and from the SUNY Brockport resident directors, who may have different views on the true needs of the people at these service sites. I was not able to conduct interviews with some community members due to their severe physical or mental conditions. The children and adults who were severely affected by mental and conditions could not adequately have a conversation or convey their needs to me. With regard to the nursing home clients, most of them were quite advanced in age and were not able to withstand a long conversation; some may have experienced some memory deficits, which would make the conversation limited and information obtained inconsistent. This part of data inquiry was supplemented by observations.

Another limitation relates to the number of student participants from the former cohorts. Because I did not have access to the email accounts of all other former participants other than the

group I studied in depth, I was not be able to control how many emails were sent out. The person who sent out the email on my behalf, a Study Abroad advisor at the SUNY's International Educational office, later told me that she had sent out to 26 students, mostly students who participated in the program in the previous two years. These were only email accounts that she had access to. However, she also cautioned that some students might not have read the email because they no longer had access to their school email addresses once they have graduated. Thus, the pool of the online survey was much smaller than I had anticipated. Because the respondents do not represent a selected sample that would meet criteria for representativity, the conclusions of this case study do not constitute a ground for claiming any interference.

Further, the former participants that agreed to let me interview them were all volunteers. One of them is currently on the Board of the Danang/Quang Nam Fund, the NGO that provides direct aids to these serviced communities. These people either have positive experience and likely to be more sympathetic or have strong points of view or perhaps more bias than other participants. Further, some of these interviews are based on the program alumni's recall, in some cases, some years after their participation in the program, which can strain accuracy.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

The findings presented in this Chapter Five are data collected from my field research in Vietnam and the results from the online post-field surveys of the SUNY Brockport Vietnam program, my case study. The results are organized by various types of services provided in the local communities in Danang. The findings are framed in the context of my research question, first from the perspectives of the students –the Spring 2013 cohort, the group of students that I studied, as well as some of the former participants. I then present the findings from the communities. Finally, the interviews with the SUNY Brockport faculty founder of the program, Professor Ken Herrmann are presented. By providing various perspectives – including my own observations – I hope to provide an insight into how different actors of this case study viewed their work, and how they perceived their own benefits as well as those of the others. The data are analyzed in the following Chapter Six to examine how benefits are manifested and constructed, whether the perceived benefits of various actors are different or similar, and what factors contributed to these differences or similarities.

#### **5.2 Services and Benefits: From the Students**

To understand the nature of the services, I asked the students to describe their tasks at each service site and offer their opinions. Having spent time observing at these sites I had a general idea what the tasks entailed, however I wanted to hear how these students talked about their own work, whether they liked it or not, and if there were any challenges, and how they went about

finding solutions to them. I also asked them how they perceived the benefits of their work – for them as well as for the local communities they served. I wanted to know whether they thought the service was useful to the community and if it had any impact on them personally. While the face-to-face interviews and the online survey were comprehensive, these inquiries can be summarized into these questions:

*Q1. What do/did you do at these sites?*

*Q2. Which service work did you like/enjoy the most/the least?*

*Q3. How did you benefit from your work?*

*Q4. Do you think that these communities benefited from your work?*

### **5.2.1 The Loving House Nursing Home**

At the Loving House nursing home the students talked about their tasks of providing personal care such as trimming and painting fingernails and toenails of the elderly women. Some students talked about other work at the house such as watering the plants, sorting peanuts or harvesting mulberries. But the “star service” of this site is the old standby fingernail painting. One student seemed to take an exceptional pride in her manicure skills:

I was able to paint nails well, but there was not much (else to do) for the other guy that I went with... often the ladies did not want him to paint their nails, because they wanted to wait for me. (Summer 2011 participant)

One of the former participants, Robert, talked about how much the ladies seemed to like this personal service:

...But what the elder women there very much enjoyed was having these two men<sup>18</sup> show up and paint their fingernails and toenails. They loved that! (Robert, Spring 2012)

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<sup>18</sup> Only two students attended the semester (Spring 2012) when Robert participated in the program. The other student was Ben, a 20-years old Vietnamese-American. (Both names have been changed.)

Robert was a Vietnam War veteran who first went to Vietnam in 1968 and returned in the spring 2012 to participate in the program as an undergraduate student. He was 65 years old. Knowing that he was much older than many, or perhaps all of the other students that had ever participated in the program, I asked him how he felt about nail painting, a personal service that was often provided by younger females.

It was fine. I had no problem with doing pedis and manis. Because it felt very personal.... it was a personalized service, holding an elderly woman's hand or holding her foot or whatever... It was perfect for me (because) it was a personal connection and a way to give back to a Vietnamese person... Hmm... I would say it couldn't happen in any other way.

To him, providing service at the Loving House nursing home was a way of giving back to the community. He explained:

In a sense community service is a way to give back... say a young man who has done something wrong and he has gone to court and he has been sentenced to where he has to do community service. This has a certain component to that because I went there in 1968 and I participated in something (that was) very destructive to the country of Vietnam so being able to go back and do community service... it didn't matter, it didn't matter what I did. So doing nails I did. But it didn't matter.

He continued:

Being there at the Loving House and being of service to these elderly women, it felt like an honor to me. Also, (there was a) realization that some of these women could have been the women who were carrying ammunition that was used against the Americans... how things in life can change!

Robert went on to say that he kept a blog to record his service learning time in Vietnam. He wrote about the services he provided, what he did and how he felt about them. He wrote:

The women thoroughly enjoy this service and I have to say, so do I. It breaks up the day for these ladies and I am glad to be a source of amusement and entertainment for them. There is something about going to this place and being of service in this way that is humbling and gratifying.

I asked him how he perceived his benefits from being in Vietnam. He thought about it:

This was my opportunity to learn about Viet Nam from the Vietnamese people. It was also an opportunity to give back in a small way for the devastation my country caused in Viet Nam.... My government sent me to in 1968/69 to kill people who disagreed with U.S. plans to dominate that country. In 2012 I had the opportunity to go back to Viet Nam to be of service to the people. To go from making war to being of service is transformational.

Other younger students focused more on the practical aspect of providing physical work at the house such as working in the garden or helping the migrant ethnic minority helpers with English.

Another student and I worked primarily with poor migrants tending to the food supply. We set up makeshift teaching seminars in their lodging facility, which for some reason was adjacent to the farm animals and smelled awful.<sup>19</sup> We taught some of these workers English, and forced them out of their shy shells having them share their hobbies with us. (Fall 2010 participant)

One male student talked about the non-nail painting tasks that he and another student did at the property.

When we did physical work (gardening) I think it was helpful... less work for the nuns and the caretakers. (Scott, Spring 2013)

While another male student noted the less interaction at this place than at others.

We help around the property a lot doing manual work. I enjoy this a lot, and think it does benefit the Loving House, but we interact with the people there a lot less than we do at other places. (Spring 2014 participant)

When I asked them if they thought elderly residents benefited from their service, one of the student from the Spring 2013 cohort replied:

We provided them company. We provided care and gave them a feeling that they were pampered by young adults. I think it definitely made an impact, seeing Americans because it made people feel that other people care about them. (Megan, Spring 2013)

While others reported that there should have been more service:

I feel that at the loving house we could have utilized our time better, painting nails

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<sup>19</sup> In exchange for their lodging at the nursing home, these young ethnic minority helpers worked around the property and took care of the property including gardening and domestic animals. Their living quarters were located in the back of the garden. I am not sure if the students were aware of this arrangement; I had this knowledge because I was offered a tour of the property by the chief nun and asked her about it.

was of little advantage to the nuns. (Emily, Spring 2013)

In terms of benefit, many students thought this service site did not benefit much. The reasons range from not having enough service for the students to feel useful to problems with communication:

I think that the Loving nursing home benefitted the least. Though they looked forward to us coming each week, and got their nails painted, we were not able to communicate well... (Spring 2011 participant)

### **5.2.2 The Agent Orange Group Home**

The service at the Agent Orange (AO) Group Home was quite different from those of the Loving House nursing home. This place offers a different kind of environment and service opportunities to the students. The main goal for the students is to be with the developmentally challenged kids and to entertain them. The students had this to say about their work and the children:

At the AO Group Home we developed an indoor (artistic) and outdoor (physical) activity for the children to participate in each week and the children were very receptive and active in the activities. (Emily, Spring 2013)  
(We) would plan games to play with the kids or arts and crafts to do. The kids loved when we came in general. We did not even have to be playing a game for them to be happy. They liked the human contact and extra attention. (Megan, Spring 2013)

Another student from the Spring 2013 cohort, Scott, echoed the sentiment:

I think they enjoy the attention given by us. I think (having) new attention, new excitement, new stimulation is important for all children. (Scott, Spring 2013)

He was also pragmatic in his responses:

Also, because we can give the staff some kinda break, about an hour or two hours because they're probably understaffed or underfunded... (Scott, Spring 2013)

Emily looked at the benefits from the perspectives of these happy kids:

Yes, they (the children) benefit because they are very simple. They just want to have a good time. (Emily, Spring 2013)

When I later asked the students which service site they thought would benefit the most from their work neither the AO Group Home nor the Loving House got the top votes (see Table 5.1).

However, many students said the AO Group Home was one of their favorite sites because the good feeling that they got from being with these children:

I enjoyed the AO Group Home the most because we were able to gain a more personal connection with these children who enjoyed our presence.  
(Summer 2013 participant)

I enjoyed working with the children the most because no matter how grim their circumstances, they were the happiest people I have ever encountered. It was very rewarding and opened my eyes to how the other side of the world lives day to day. (Summer 2013 participant)

Robert from the Spring 2012 group summed it up:

They are just in the moment. Whatever we did they seemed to be delighted. Whatever we showed up with they seemed to have so much fun. Whatever anyone thinks wrong or defected is just in eye of the beholder. These kids teach you how to be just in the moment.

### **5.2.3 The Hoa Vang District Home Visits**

Although the trip to Hoa Vang District for the home visits was short and quite pleasant, and the scenes of the Danang countryside offered the students an alternative view from daily life in the city, no student from the Spring 2013 cohort seemed to like this site – at first. I later learned through interviews with the faculty and administrative staff of the program that the intention of having this service site was, first and foremost, to deliver direct aid to the families in need. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the direct assistance was in some forms of money or supplies such as food (milk, juices, etc. although the quantities seemed to be symbolic). The subsidies were provided by the Danang/Quang Nam NGO.

The other goal was to give students opportunities to visit some of the most disadvantaged areas in Danang to see how people lived. Hoa Vang district has many families with children born

with severe physical conditions who would require a great deal of time and resources from members of the household to care for them. Each week the program would bring the students to two or three families. The students would interact with the family of the sick child while the local resident director Linh translates for them. Even though the entire group would visit these families at their homes, sit in their living rooms or stand in front of their yards, unlike the interactions at the Loving House nursing home, the home visits were not personal or intimate due to the short time spent there.

The students would normally spend about 20 minutes at each family before the group walked to the next household. Upon leaving, the resident director would take out an envelope and give it to a student to pass it to the family. At first I thought she would give the envelope to whoever happened to be standing near her. However, later on I noticed that she was quite mindful of the students' turns. That is, she would make sure that different students would have their turns of giving the envelope to an adult family member. At first, some students didn't know what was inside the envelope. When they found out it was money, the three students in the Spring 2013 cohort offered these views:

They are given direct assistance so yes, in that sense, they benefit but we don't spend time with them. Hopefully, we can bring more awareness about them. (Megan, Spring 2013)

This place felt a bit like a show and tell where the family knew they would only receive a payment if they told their very personal story. It was very exposing for the families involved. They don't get any benefits by us being there. (Emily, Spring 2013)

Maybe they appreciate the money. There is not a lot of service... I think this (site) is more for us, to learn how people live. (Scott, Spring 2013)

The above comments were made during the first few weeks of the program. At the end of the program, their feelings seemed to be less critical:

I think the hardest cases (the severity of the condition) were the most impactful and I appreciated hearing the stories. I remember meeting family members, parents and neighbors that truly cared and dedicated their all to the children. I think some of the living conditions and health statuses were horrifying and hard to see but the most impactful. (Megan, Spring 2013)

The first time we went into the village I noticed that none of the staff members explained to the students the nature of the service or what their role would be when they got there. I later realized there was not a lot of service to be done. However, the students' tasks were simple enough and gradually they also learned the reason as to why they were there:

... We brought monetary and food gifts to the families and were able to hear the different stories of what the children and families had been through in living in rural communities affected by Agent Orange. As we lived in the city, I felt like this was especially enlightening as it allowed us to see another side to the way of life in Vietnam other than the immediate bustling of city traffic/shops. (Fall 2012 participant)

Home visits gave me the best insight into the issues and complications faced by people contaminated by dioxin. (They) gave me insight into systemic issues caused by Agent Orange and introduced me to impoverished living conditions. (Leslie, Fall 2010)

Even though the students did hardly any service at this site, these home visits have made the biggest impact on many of them. Almost all of the participants I interviewed and surveyed agreed that this site was more for them to appreciate and learn than to provide service. Some students said that they learned a great deal about Agent Orange/dioxin and the effects it has caused. Some students were curious about the day-to-day life of the people born with defects due to the dioxin, or how other members in the family were coping because of having a member suffering from it.

The home visits really nailed home the type of situations many have dealt with, with regards to Agent Orange. It put a face to Agent Orange. (Fall 2010 participant)

By far, the site generated the most thoughtful, touching and poignant comments from these

international service-learners. Many students wrote extensively on the Hoa Vang home visits, and as they described in details about a particular family or the condition of the child that they had met, they also talked about their privileged background. The effects caused by Agent Orange/dioxin have made many families, who were poor to begin with, not be able to break away from the wicked cycle of poverty due to the constant resources and care needed to provide for their ill-fated youngsters born with birth defects. They became more empathetic of their flights and were appreciative for having the opportunity to connect with that realization:

I have learned the most from the family home visits. To simply put, the life environment the Agent Orange family had were really shocking and it got me thinking about a lot of things. A lot of them seem positive despite their life situation and try to live their best with things they have. And watching some family crying for little support that we gave to them was really heartwarming and I have learned to appreciate and be thankful in life. (Spring 2011 participant)

The home visits were very moving. You have no idea going into it the perspective the Vietnamese has towards the effects of Agent Orange on their families, and their testimonials take you by surprise. Unlike what I am used to, they are not angry or blame anyone for what happened to their families, but accept this as fate, and you can't help but feel so much empathy for them. You have a better idea on how family have their lives changed due to this, and see what sacrifices everyone else makes for the members of their family. This was very sad to see, but inspiring in regards to strength and spirituality. (Summer 2011 participant)

The effects caused by Agent Orange/dioxin have made many families, who were poor to begin with, not be able to break away from the wicked cycle of poverty due to the constant resources and care needed to provide for their ill fated youngsters born with birth defects. This student came to realize how the experience has affected him:

This experience was transformative, in the sense that it showed me an entirely different perspective from person centered to community as a whole centered. It showed you the value of human relationships, and how to rely on the people around you to enjoy life. Everyone was so welcoming and enjoyed every second of time spent, that it made you want to reciprocate that practice. It made me more empathetic, more giving, more understanding, and civil. Vietnam showed me how to appreciate whatever is given to you, and then sharing it with others. It showed me how to be a better neighbor, friend, and student. It showed me how to value a

positive attitude, and to find any sort of good in a situation. (Summer 2011 participant)

When I asked them about the community benefits, some students commented on how they thought the people in Hoa Vang benefited from their service.

I think the families of the home visits that we made benefited the most. We were directly giving them the nutrition and money that they desperately needed. Even though it did not last them forever, it made a difference that we came out there to give them the resources. (Summer 2013 participant)

Many students felt that the service provided in Hoa Vang was minimal and they wanted to do more:

I wished we could have done more during the family visits, like fix up their homes or something like that. (Fall 2010 participant)

Some of them would like to help but were often left feeling helpless:

I never felt I was doing enough... After seeing some of the children's conditions, living situations and stories, I was overwhelmed and at times really disturbed but I wanted that out of my experience. I wanted to do more... (Megan, Spring 2013)

My only issue with the home visits is that I believe they could be better utilized by students. As a non-Vietnamese speaker, I mostly found that my role in these visits accounted to listening and asking questions rather than providing hand-on services. (Leslie, Fall 2010)

Some students felt resigned to their limitations:

I am far more aware of my own limitations to change things, e.g. I thought helping someone in need would be simple, however it requires funding, support etc. (Emily, Spring 2013)

#### **5.2.4 The Danang City Welfare Center**

This service site was added in the Spring 2013 when I conducted my field research. At that time, the service components for this center were not clearly defined. Unlike the weekly services, the Spring 2013 group only went to this Center four times during their semester. The only thing that the students seem to do was to help the staff distribute noodles into bowls and

then pour the soup broth into them. After that, they took the soup bowls to the dining hall for the residents. The task was simple and swift; everything was done in about 15 minutes. After that the students were free to walk around the property to have a look or to engage in whatever activity, or to strike up any conversation with anyone they wished. One male student found a young male resident who wanted to practice English while the female students and I explored various living quarters of the center. Sometimes the resident director would follow along to help out with the translation. And then it was time to go home.

As described in Chapter Three, the Danang Welfare Center is a complicated place. This center has many different types of people of various ages with all kinds of health issues and mental conditions. Many students were overwhelmed by it although some social work students have commented that there were various things to do if they knew where to start. The students in the Spring 2013 cohort told me how frustrated they often felt at the end of each visit. They felt that they were not well prepared, nor were they appropriately briefed about their tasks. One day on the way back from the site, one student was visibly upset:

It's a huge place with different people of different ages and various health issues. I was overwhelmed. My nerves were on edge. I feel that people are happy to see us but it takes initiatives to get the most of it... I think we needed more preparation than what we were provided. I was shocked to see flies on someone. I felt like I was in a zombie compound when someone is bleeding walking up and touching me. I found (this site) very difficult and was surprised at myself how uncomfortable I was. The feeling of uneasiness I experienced here I will never forget. (Emily, Spring 2013)

A Summer 2013 participant was also in agreement with the above comment:

I didn't like the Welfare Center as much because we did not spend enough time there. I feel we barely did anything to help them. It was hard to leave feeling like we did not help them in any way besides providing a meal. (Summer 2013 participant)

However, one student in the Spring 2014 group seemed to have gotten something out of this site.

Either some of the issues that I had observed a year prior had been addressed or this particular student was exceptional in finding ways of making herself useful in such a complicated site. She was realistic about the place nonetheless:

The Welfare Center is one of the places I enjoy going to the most, and I believe it needs the most time and energy spent on. When we go there we try and work with all different people in the community. We interact with the children there. If they are able to, we play sports with them and try and teach them new things. We teach some people English as well, if they are interested. We also spend a lot of time with the disabled and low functioning children. They are not given enough affection during the day due to a lack of staff there, and a lot of them are tied up in chairs, unable to move all day. When we go, we bring them on walks, and are just there for them. We also try to help the staff with cleaning. This is the both the hardest service and the most enjoyable. There is a lot that need to be done there in order to make the lives of the people living there better. (Spring 2014 participant)

Another student was more critical in her observations. About

Danang Welfare Center...in retrospect it seemed like a "poverty tour" for relatively privileged American students. I wanted to engage with the causes of the poverty/need, not merely play spectator, prying into lives with connecting, a detached humanitarianism. I wish there was an intelligent discussion alongside the visits/service in general (a discussion possibly led by our facilitators) about what was happening and why circumstances like this persist (historically, economically, socially etc.) and how things can change. Without this discussion, it lacked some meaning for me. (Summer 2013 participant)

### **5.2.5 Teaching English**

Teaching English is a popular service that is often requested by the host communities. English has become the international language and its place in the business world is unrivaled. Thus, acquiring a good command of English is extremely desirable especially for many people living in countries where English is not their primary or secondary language. SUNY Brockport students were requested to teach English two evenings a week, each time for one and a half hours. Compared to other services, the time the students spent on teaching English is much more than on any other services. The classrooms/the English center is at the Danang Friendship

Organization (DAFO) office complex. Because the location is close to the SUNY program house, the students can walk or bike there. Because I lived at the program house, it was more convenient for the resident director Linh to ask me to accompany the students. She asked me to take them to the DAFO center on the first night and this arrangement sort of fell into place: I had become a *de facto* translator /guide /administrator for the program when there was no administrative person around. During my time in Danang I accompanied the students to every class session and on several occasions, I even co-taught and suggested ideas for lesson plans along with them. After class I also participated in the social hours at various cafés in town with the entire group. In fact, the after-class social outings have become something of a tradition. Semesters after semesters, the English learners would often invite their English teachers out for coffees or bubble teas, regardless who they were.<sup>20</sup> And on weekends, the young Vietnamese English learners would come by the program house to take the American SUNY students to explore the city.

Teaching English is different from any other community services. First of all, the recipients of the service are often not poor or suffering from any physical or mental conditions. Secondly, this service does not need a full time translator. If someone in the classroom did not understand something, there would always be someone else, another student in the class, or a DAFO administration person who would be able to convey the message across. Because both sides can converse in English, the language barrier is not a major issue. Thirdly, the most of the English learners are young (about the same age as SUNY students) and a lively bunch. In fact, sometimes it is the Vietnamese English learners who have become the service providers to the American students. The SUNY students talked about these social interactions:

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<sup>20</sup> Robert told me that these college-age English learners were eager to be with him as much as they wanted to be with the younger student, Ben, whom he went with that year. When Robert's wife visited him in Vietnam, she was also enlisted to teach English and went along with the students to these after class café outings.

The (Vietnamese) students were so welcoming and hospitable. If it were not for them, we would not have made the lifelong friends that we did there. We would go out for food or 'mixed fruit' or tea, after almost every class, and we would play fun games. I was able to learn best from them this way, and vice versa.  
(Summer 2011 participant)

I especially enjoyed teaching English as it allowed us to connect to peers in Vietnam of similar age groups and not only helped facilitate relationships outside of the classroom ... (It) also provided a necessary link to compare and contrast our own experiences in life to theirs and their hopes and dreams.  
(Fall 2012 participant)

Another student thought it was good that young Vietnamese people were aware of diversity in America through her heritage background because she was not blond or Caucasian:

Yes, because they get to meet different kinds of Americans and they can learn about our unique cultures. (Megan, Spring 2013)

While the intention of this service is for the U.S. students to meet young local Vietnamese for friendship and cultural exchange, teaching English is one of the services that truly requires good training to be effective. Many students have never taught English (or any subject for that matter) before so the idea of standing in front of a classroom of 20-40 people can be a frightening experience. The DAFO English class coordinator Tuan and the SUNY program resident director Linh told me that some students were so nervous that they were literally shaking when they stood in front of the classroom at the first teaching sessions. Sometimes the Vietnamese staff would have to step in, either to serve as a teacher assistant or a translator to boost the morale. The staff decided that a good way to ease the apprehension was to ask the students to team-teach. This way they would share the responsibilities with each other and they have someone else to bounce off ideas while standing in front of the classroom.

Further, many if not almost all students were not trained in language pedagogy. Even though the students were only expected to engage in casual conversations with the Vietnamese audience, the idea of thinking up different topics for conversations twice a week for a 15-week

semester term can be a daunting task, especially for young undergraduate students as most of the SUNY participants are. In addition, there were limited instructional resources such as textbooks, audio or visual aids available. I saw very little training, if none, not even a brief orientation on how to lead a class or to create basic lesson plans. Students had to rely on their own creativity to come up with lesson plans with little help. Many students still remembered their frustrations even though it had been years since they participated in the program. Leslie, a student from Fall 2010, talked about her frustrations:

I think preparation for English classes is a must. I would provide more resources for the classroom that teaches English. I didn't know what I was doing. (Leslie, 20 years old at the time.)

Other former students echoed the sentiment:

I think that we need to be given some sort of guidance when teaching English classes, such as lesson plans, resources, or some kind of guide because there are people such as myself who have never taught before. (Summer 2013 participant)

Furthermore, while most of the American students were native speakers of English, not everyone was. In fact, one student commented that English was not his native language. However, like most students, this person ended up liking the experience because of the local Vietnamese people that he met at the English center.

Teaching was extremely difficult as English is not my first language, but I have made a lot of friends from the English center and I have also made a girlfriend from there during my stay in Danang. (Spring 2011 participant)

In sum, teaching English requires both physical stamina and intellectual creativity in addition to the experience cultivated from dealing with the public that some of these young people have not had. The Spring 2013 students:

Teaching 1.5 hours two times a week is exhausting. I was not trained. I was tired and exhausted. I got burned out in the end. In the end I ran out of things to do. I had nothing else to say. (Megan, 20 years old.)

Teaching English is exhausting. I can imagine it would be hard for some people. But we can gain a lot from the experience... we have to think on our feet, we have to solve problems on the spot. (Scott, 31 years old graduate student.)

Many students I surveyed said that they “somehow got through it.” In fact, some students turned out to be quite good at the task and even liked the new skills/job they had acquired; some students returned to Vietnam after they graduated to teach English. Other students saw it as a form of authority, for example, from their responses to the online survey, they freely referred to the English learners as “the students” or “my students.”

I find teaching English difficult and frustrating sometimes, but I know it benefits my students. (Leslie, Fall 2010)

When I asked them about benefits, the majority of the American students did not hesitate to say this was a service local Vietnamese people benefited the most. They quickly added that they thought the benefits were mutual and explained why:

I definitely think the students from teaching English benefited the most as we were able to engage them twice a week and (English skills) also manifested itself in activities and gatherings outside of the classroom. (Fall 2012 participant)

The students in our English class benefited the most - they got a lot out of the class. We also spent the most time with this group. We also got the most out of this group insofar as they introduced us to the city of Danang. (Emily, Spring 2013)

As we further developed relationships with our students when teaching English, we also began interacting with the students outside of class going to coffee shops and karaoke and food excursions. One time in particular, a group of our students, along with my peers and I, went to the beach near Monkey Mountain for an all day excursion where we each made a dish to pass and the students cooked a meal at the location. I had an amazing time with everyone as our time together was reaching its close. We also held a party at the program house and invited all of the people we had befriended along the way including our students and friends from the neighborhood. I was so happy to see so many people show up and I realized just how much of an impact all of them had and continue to have on my life. (Fall 2012 participant)

However, not all students felt this service was their favorite. One student said:

...(Teaching) English is my least favorite form of service. It's not even that I don't get anything out of this, but I do not think the students do either. Sure we make friends and learn about each other, but their it such little organization or guidance for this, that it usually turns out to be hectic.... some of them know very little English, and I do not think I am qualified to be helping them with their English. But this service is a lot less formal... it is more about the interaction with them. (Spring 2014 participant)

### **5.3 Overall Perspectives from the Students**

When I asked the students what their overall perspectives on the program was, whether it has benefited them and how, many did not hesitate to offer their opinions. Many reported that the experience in Danang has helped them become more confident and independent, more aware and understanding. Others wanted to work towards a career where they can advocate for social justice:

After my volunteer experience in Vietnam, I was encouraged to pursue long-time (4+months) international volunteer work with children and families in both Nepal and Guatemala. This introspection has encouraged me to try volunteer in culturally sensitive and truly helpful and meaningful ways.... (I would like my future work to focus on).... creating and promoting social policy to protect the human rights of vulnerable populations. My time in Vietnam is the #1 thing that employers ask me about in job interviews and I find that I have an extensive repository of experience to draw upon from my months spent in Vietnam. (Leslie, Fall 2010)

I learned to appreciate the value of forgiveness even more and appreciate others culture. I admire the Vietnamese people for being so welcoming to Americans. I was overwhelmed with homesickness and culture shock at times but I was immersed in the culture and customs and was able to work through my personal challenges. I think this experience challenged me in so many ways. I have become a more confident and independent person who wants to continue to raise awareness and advocate for social justice and human needs. I plan to return to Vietnam and do the service works again with more of an understanding and less fear. (Megan, Spring 2013)

This overall experience definitely made me more selfless and more accepting of myself and the world around me. It also made me crave adventure and knowledge. It helped me grow as a person because I got to learn so much about my culture that I would never be able to have received without this opportunity. It

also made me want to contribute more services to the world and to people because there are people who truly need help. (Summer 2013 participant)

Echoed another student:

It is important to get out of the "box" that is American thought, the world is so different and the experiences have truly been life changing. (Winter 2013-Spring 2014 participant)

A participant in the Fall 2010 group got to the point:

It's pretty obvious how I feel about the program, I went back to live in Vietnam for a little over a year post-program. Da Nang is my second home. (Fall 2010 participant)

This participant said that after the program he returned to the U.S. to get a certificate to teach English as a foreign Language (TEFL) and then returned to live and work in Danang.

However, some students did not get much out of the program as the others: Scott, the 31-year grad student in the Spring 2013 felt differently due to his prior abroad experience:

It was a great program but I don't think I personally changed that much because I was a bit older than everyone else and I have traveled more than most others. (Scott, Spring 2013)

This Summer 2013 participant was not impressed at her overall experience:

The service was basic, often gave a small monetary donation, milk, plated meals for the elderly and came up with simple English lessons for our "students." People were generally warm/graceful in accepting service. (Summer 2013 participant)

Megan, one of students in the Spring 2013 offered her opinion on how to improve the overall program:

I think there should be more time spent with the village families and assess other things they may need or how they can receive other resources. I also would have liked to have more chores or projects to do at the Loving Home. I also think students should go to the Welfare Center every week even if the food cannot be provided. I also felt I needed more translation and more information. (Megan, Spring 2013).

The following Table 5.1 summarizes the five services provided by SUNY students. They are listed in the order based on what the students deemed the most to the least beneficial to the local communities. The main reasons for the rankings are listed in the boxes next to the services. At the top of the chart is Teaching English: the majority of the young Americans thought the English learning students benefited from their service the most. The students also thought the families they visited in the Hoa Vang district gained something from the direct aid. The service at the A.O. Group Home ranked third because the students and the disabled children always seemed to have a good time together. The Loving House nursing home came forth the Danang Welfare Center was ranked last. While some students liked the company of the elderly women at the nursing home and even reported that they enjoyed giving them personal care service, this site did not rank very highly because the students thought there were not enough service activities. Further, many students thought the elderly women did not benefit much from having their nails painted. As mentioned earlier, the Danang Welfare Center was implemented during the semester that I did my field study; hence, the Spring 2013 cohort was the first group at this site. Being a new site coupled with many logistic factors that had not been in place at the time, the students felt overwhelmed by the massive Center; they did not understand their purpose of being there other than serving food. This site ranked last. These results will be analyzed and discussed in the next chapter.

**Table 5.1 Service Rankings and Perceived Benefits (from the students)**

| <b>Rank</b> | <b>Types of Service</b>       | <b>Main Reasons</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1.          | Teaching English              | A lot of mutual interactions. English learners were able to tell the U.S. students what they wanted to learn. U.S. students could see the improvement from time spent in and out of the classroom.                                               |
| 2.          | Hoa Vang District Home Visits | Received financial, nutrition and money that the families desperately needed even though it did not last ‘forever’.                                                                                                                              |
| 3.          | Agent Orange Group Home       | Students could make the connection with the kids. The kids were thrilled to see the students. Both sides had a great time. The students were able to provide some relief for the caretakers.                                                     |
| 4.          | Loving House Nursing Home     | Did not benefit a lot. The language and interactions were limited. Services were also limited. Students did not feel like they made the most difference.                                                                                         |
| 5.          | Danang City Welfare Center    | Students didn’t know what their needs were. Students were overwhelmed. There were too much going on. Didn’t understand the purpose of being there - felt like a “poverty tour”.<br><br><u>Note:</u> This service was implemented in Spring 2013. |

#### **5.4 From the Communities**

My mission was to find out what the communities thought of the services provided by the American students: how they felt about their presence in their communities and if the service provided was beneficial. Compared to the four questions posed for the students, my inquiry from the host community can be summed up in two questions:

*Q1. What do you think of the presence of these American students in the community?*

*Q2. Do you think the services have been beneficial for the people in your community?*

On some occasions I would ask the staff to describe to me what the students do at their sites, and at other times I did not. The reason I did not formally ask the staff this question was because I sensed that they thought it was not necessary. Having spent a lot of time shadowing the students I was able to observe what went on at all of the service sites. In addition, I spent many hours having informal conversations with the local staff so when it was time for me to have official interviews with them, many local people tended to skip through basic formalities such as describing the services that the students provided at the sites, etc. They would prefer to talk about something else and I thought it would best to listen to what they had to say.

The other question that I asked to the students but I could not ask the communities was how these services were ranked in relation with each other due to the obvious reason: the students were present at all of the sites but members of the communities were not. I found myself tapping in another source: my own observations. Because I was able to speak and understand Vietnamese, I was able to provide insights into what each side thought of the other and offer an account into what went on at these sites.

The data presented in this section are from the interviews with the Chief nun at the Loving House nursing home; Ms. Hanh, the director of the Agent Orange Group Home; Tuan the DAFO English course coordinator; Linh and Mai, the two local administrative staff of the program, in addition to my own observations.

As mentioned in Chapter Four, I was not able to interview any elderly persons at Loving House nursing home due to their advanced age. I had conversations with the Chief nun instead. I asked her what she thought about the presence of the students. She said:

They are so nice. They have been coming here for many years now. They are always eager to help. Whatever we need (them to do) they would never seem to mind. Sometimes they would break into sweats (doing physical work). I just feel for them.

I asked about the odd labor jobs around the house, often requested at the last minute when there seemed to run out of ‘salon clients.’ The nun explained:

It depends. We’ll ask them (the students) to weed grass or pick up dead leaves if there are dead leaves on the ground. We may need them to water the plants... But we don’t ask them to help out in the kitchen because we already have people for that. Basically, it’s about accompanying the elderly, to make them happy.

I wanted to find out about the language barrier, knowing this was a major concern for many students. In fact, some students told me that the service at the Loving House would have been better had the communications been better. Due to the nature of the work, which was mainly personal grooming, the service at this site could be considered to be the most “personal”. While many students recognized the value of providing company to the elderly women, they didn’t think they offered a lot due to the problem of communication:

I don’t know if they benefit or not because of the language barrier. I’m not sure if they are happy. Perhaps only provide some would benefit. Communication is good for assessing their needs and I don’t know what they want. Perhaps they would like a haircut or having their hair washed? Perhaps they would like some other activities? We only paint their nails! (Emily, Spring 2013)

The ability to communicate is crucial not only to understand the people’s plight or to appreciate knowing their personal stories, but it can also enhance the ability to provide service properly. One student told me that she was so afraid to feed the frail women at the Loving House because she was afraid to hurt them.

They are so frail and small... you know, what happened if I hurt them? I wouldn’t know where she was hurt... I wouldn’t know what to do... (Emily, Spring 2013)

When I asked the Chief nun about the language barrier, she replied:

The language barrier is not a problem because one does not need words to understand feelings. One can see it from the facial expressions, from the mannerism, from the anticipation... The faces are different but we are the same, we have the same gestures... we could understand.

I asked if having the students at the house was beneficial for the elderly, she replied:

The students are very attached to the elder ladies, as they are to them. The good-byes are always emotional.

Indeed, I observed that the elderly ladies seemed to genuinely enjoy having the American students come and do their personal care service. Over the years they seemed to have embraced this service as one of their routines, like other routines at the nursing home: the residents know when to take their medicines, when the mealtimes are, when to gather in the chapel for their daily prayers, and when the American students come to do their nails – Monday afternoons. Indeed, sometimes they even have their favorite ‘manicurists’, as this female student described:

I felt like the women look forward to this, as it appeared they were excited every time we came. I was also excited to see this, and had a few 'regulars' that would get their nails and toes painted each time. (Summer 2011 participant)

At the Agent Orange Group Home, the presence of the SUNY students seemed to be appreciated, at least this was how the children saw it. Whoever showed up at the property wanting to spend time playing with them was all fair game. The AO Group Home is not unaccustomed to receiving foreign visitors. In a given week, there would always be a constant influx of volunteer or friendship delegations from many countries around the world. Some of these delegations are led by some very important people, from ambassadors to directors of international development agencies to well-known television personalities or beauty pageant contestants. The AO Group Home director, Ms. Hanh, would be chauffeured between the three locations to receive these diplomatic and friendship delegations: these engagements often resulted in some kind of donations or potential future collaborations. Regardless whoever the visitor was, the children would not be fazed if they had met a famous person. And to some extent so were the young American students. The only thing the children seemed to be concerned with was having fun,

and the Americans were equally eager to please them. I had a conversation with the Ms. Hanh on what she perceived the benefits of having these SUNY students at the AO Group Home. She said:

Oh, these students have been coming here for a while now. The children like them very much. Yes, they (American students) are very sweet. They are so young yet they care. It's good to see that young Americans care.

Regarding the Hoa Vang District home visits, I would like to know how the local people felt about the presence of these young Americans, given that they did not provide any service except for just being there to observe. I wanted to ask the families if the financial support had been useful: I always got a polite and appreciative nod. In my work at other communities in Vietnam, this was usually the case. I was told later that it is not easy to get people to talk about money, fearing that they would appear to be well off, and thus would no longer need assistance. Also, they did not want to appear ungrateful for the assistance. I decided to relate my inquiries to Ms. Phuong, the deputy director of the Department of Labour-Invalids and Social Affairs of the Hoa Vang District, my contact person on the statistics of the district, and Linh, the local director of SUNY Brockport program.

Through the email exchanges with Ms. Phuong, I learned that the assistance was appreciated (of course) and some families used the money for household items such as food, household supplies or minor repairs of their homes. She suggests that future aids may be directed towards "sustainable projects" such as building playgrounds for the sick children, or for repairing homes particularly for the poorest of the poor families, in addition to building lavatory facilities as there were too few currently.

Besides many informal conversations when we both accompanied the students at the service field site, Linh and I also had a formal interview. I asked the local resident director about

the presence of the American students at these service sites.

Linh: The presence of the American students makes a great impact in our society because it shows that Vietnam has not been forgotten.

I asked her why she did not give the money envelope to the family directly, but gave it to an American student to pass it along instead. These students were not even aware of what was inside the envelope, or where the money came from. The resident director explained:

It's not the same if we (Vietnamese) gave them (the family) the envelope... It would mean a lot more if they got it from a foreigner, especially from an American. I mean an American, not a French person, not any other Westerner. It makes them feel that they are not forgotten, that we have not been forgotten (by the Americans).

I asked her about the purpose of the home visits in the Hoa Vang district, as I did not see any explicit discussions before or after the trips.

Linh: It's up to the students (to learn)... It also depends on the students. Some of them were quite taken by it, and did something.

Me: For example?

Linh: They wrote to friends and family; they wrote on their blogs; they collected money and send it to the (Danang/Quang Nam Fund) NGO.<sup>21</sup>

I asked her if the students could stay in the village to get to know the families and help out:

Linh: One time there was one student who wanted to stay in the village after the program ended. So she asked Tuyet<sup>22</sup> to stay with her. They lived in the village for about several weeks... I don't remember. Tuyet happened to be available to be with her. But what could they (the students) really do? And who would translate for them?

Not only Linh and Mai served as the administrative staff for the program, they were also translators for the students. While all students must take a Vietnamese course twice a week, their

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<sup>21</sup> A former student wrote about her experience on her blog. This blog has been posted on the SUNY Brockport Vietnam website for new students to read and have a sense of the program. <http://sarah-vietnam.tumblr.com/>.

<sup>22</sup> Tuyet is a local Vietnamese person. She got to know the program through one of the English classes at DAFO. Since then, every semester, she would come by the house and hang out with the students. She would offer to take them to places on weekends. Linh and Mai often ask her to accompany the students when they are busy or to help out with the translation. Many female students have told me that Tuyet had become a good friend; some students have returned to Danang to visit her and even stayed at her house or traveled with her.

language skills were not good enough without the help of a Vietnamese person. In general, most students felt that the language barrier was quite significant at some sites, especially at the Loving House nursing home as aforementioned. One student summed up her feeling towards her language skills as to how that might have affected the ability to provide service:

The program can't be 100% improved with the language skills we have because all services require the understanding of the people's flight. (Emily, Spring 2013)

I asked Linh about at the Danang Welfare Center, observing that there was not a lot of service going at this site either. As mentioned earlier, the only thing that the students seemed to do there was to help the staff dishing food. However, within 15 minutes they were free to explore on their own. I commented how complex the place was and wondered why the site was a part of the program in the first place. The resident director explained:

This is a new service. We are not sure what kind of service we will do yet. People here have many problems and the students are not trained. So by giving food for the residents... *(paused)* to them, this is luxurious meal... so this is the only thing we can do for now.

I asked her if she saw the changes in the students, if any:

Linh: Of course, I can see the changes in them, especially before they return home. In the reports that they write at the end of the term I could see that their views on life have changed. In America, they take things for granted and now (at the end of the semester) they express that their perspectives of Vietnam have changed. I think it (service work) has made a lot of impact; sometimes they reflect and feel, 'Hey, I am useful, my life is more meaningful now'...

I was curious to know her own perspectives on community benefits:

Linh: I think Vietnam also benefits a lot. The students bring fun and joy to the children (at the AO Group Home); they bring youthfulness to the elderly so that they feel happier and have more willingness to live. At the home visits (in Hoa Vang), the students bring the message to the families that they have not been abandoned, that 'America has not abandoned you.'

I asked her how she saw her role, being the local program resident director since the program's inception in 2000. Again, Linh:

I saw this being an opportunity to share information about Vietnam so that they understand our country and like our country more.

I also interviewed Mai, the assistant resident director. Mai joined the program as an assistant resident director/deputy manager in 2008. Both women share all of the administrative duties including accompanying the students to all field service sites, and travel with them to two weeklong trips. If one woman were on a maternal leave, the other person would cover the job duties for her. This has happened several times. During the spring 2013 Mai was on maternal leave so the field tasks were left to Linh. Because Mai was not at house very much, in order to interview her, I met her at her home. We talked a great deal about the nature of her work, the services and the program. On the topics of benefits, like Linh, Mai also focused on how the students have transformed during their time in Vietnam:

Mai: They change a lot. I can see the difference from week to week. Some of them may have a cultural shock... This usually happens during the third or fourth week... but then they would overcome it.

I asked her how the students have changed.

Mai: Their feeling, their thinking, their emotions, their knowledge... They are more aware of the Vietnamese culture and even geography. They are more confident, more outgoing. They learn how to care about people.

As stated earlier, the SUNY students and I spent a lot more time at the DAFO Center teaching English than at any field service site. As someone who has taught a language as a second language for many years, I took a special interest in this service. My contact person at the center was Tuan, a 23 years old DAFO English class coordinator. Tuan and I had many conversations about English teaching. I asked him what he thought about the teaching service provided by the American students. He replied:

It's more about having fun. The Vietnamese students love to meet foreigners. Some of them (SUNY students) are good teachers but some...well, not so much (good). You know, sometimes the (Vietnamese) students would spot the

misspelled words on the blackboard. (*Changed the subject*) I think the Americans are not very good spellers! I think we know the (English) grammar better they do.

Tuan himself did not have any language pedagogy background. In fact, he enrolled in one these classes a few years ago and then got a part time job at the DAFO. I was curious to know how having an inexperienced, untrained young person teach a subject week after week would be beneficial to the learners. We had this exchange:

Tuan: They are still native speakers! We just want to hear their accent and their pronunciation. We were taught by Vietnamese teachers in school and you know how that was like... We can't speak it!

Me: Do you think they (SUNY students) are doing a good job?

Tuan: Some students are better than others. We just want to hear them and practice speaking English with the native speakers. It doesn't matter who they are, it doesn't matter if they can't spell or don't know the grammar (laughed).

Me: What about benefits? Who benefits from this service?

Tuan: Both sides, of course. We show them around. They practice some Vietnamese with us and we speak English with them. The Vietnamese students like meeting the American friends. The SUNY students also like us. Everyone is happy. They go out together, they have parties for each other. When our (SUNY) friends leave, some of them (English students) would go to the airport to see them off. Lots of tears ...

## **5.5 From the Program Founder**

The SUNY Brockport Vietnam was established in 2000 when the concept of international service learning was not as prevalent as it is today. Today, the online website of the SUNY Brockport Vietnam program presents the academic side as well as the service components:

The Brockport Vietnam Program in Danang provides participants an international adventure in an exciting, safe, friendly, and historically rich community with a political system and social traditions that are fascinating. Participants will take classes in language, culture, politics, and history from professors that also teach at Danang University (the state university), Duy Tan University (a private university), and The School of Politics (a state political education institute). Each institution will expose students to different philosophies and teaching approaches

in Vietnam. Students also perform community service at a variety of locations including a group home for disabled children, nursing home, teaching English to local students, etc.

The paragraph below explains what students should expect to gain from the program.

**Your experience in Vietnam will:**

- Provide the opportunity to experience the satisfaction of helping local Vietnamese through community service sponsored by US charitable fund.
- Foster development of a deeper understanding of yourself and Vietnam.
- Change your view of the world.
- Change *the world*.

To understand more about this program, I interviewed the program founder Professor Kenneth Herrmann in his home near Brockport, central New York. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the SUNY Brockport Vietnam program was established by Prof. Herrmann, a faculty member in the Department of Social Work at the College of Brockport. Prof. Herrmann was a Vietnam War veteran who had stationed near Danang during the Vietnam conflicts. He returned to Vietnam in 1998 and the first semester of SUNY Brockport Vietnam program was inaugurated in the Spring 2000 semester.

Prof. Herrmann revealed that when the SUNY Brockport program was first set up, there were a lot of negotiations on both sides. The relationship was not always smooth between the American Vietnam War veteran and Chairman An of DAFO, a former Northern Vietnamese officer and the Vietnamese counterpart to Prof. Herrmann. The former Chairman, who also teaches the Vietnamese Politics course for the program, asked the American veteran how he wanted the program to set up, and the American said it was up to the Vietnamese to decide. This became the theme of the relationship between the two sides, according to Prof. Herrmann. He went on to explain that he wanted the Vietnamese to decide everything: the types of courses they

wanted for the curriculum, who they wanted to teach these courses, and what types of services that they deemed useful for the SUNY students to serve.

I just let them tell me what they wanted it to be done. They asked me what I wanted the students to do, I told them I want them to be there to do community service.

Prof. Herrmann said that in the early years he was constantly followed by the secret police. He would tell how there would always be someone camping in front of his house in Danang during the night and the next day the American would make sure that his Vietnamese counterpart knew that he knew about it. Like a spy thriller with two hot-tempered protagonists working on opposite sides, the post-war game of cat and mouse with Chairman An and the American professor went on for several years. He revealed:

At one time they were threatening to close us down. They would not renew our permit, you see... And a few years later I threatened them that I would leave... But it's all in the past now.... It was very funny.

Then added: But now they want us. It's good for the publicity, for their image.  
*(laughed)*

Indeed, over the years Chairman An had become a good friend of Herrmann's and the partnership between both sides has become "comfortable," as the American put it. In fact, Chairman An still teaches the Vietnamese Politics course for the program even though he retired in 2009.

The following excerpt below came from a brochure at the office of the Danang Friendship Organizations (DAFO).

The SUNY Brockport Vietnam program is a Collaborative Education program between DAFO and SUNY Brockport, NY, USA. After more than 10 years of its inception, the program has sent nearly 120 American students to Danang city to study, research on Vietnamese politics, history, culture and language. They also participate in community service to provide aid to the victims of Agent Orange, the disabled, the lonely elderly, and other peoples in the city. While the enrollment per semester is not very high, the program has been highly effective in

providing information and bringing proper awareness to the American people about issues regarding democracy, human rights, religion, ethnicity of Vietnam to enhance their understanding and for having a clear picture of the American government's responsibilities towards the consequences of war, especially the issues of Agent Orange.<sup>23</sup>

When asked Prof. Herrmann if he was aware of it, he said, "Sure, I've seen it." I then asked to him about the services of the program, how each one was chosen and implemented and what his overall vision was, Prof. Herrmann replied that he let Chairman An/DAFO decide on everything: which location sites the program was allowed to visit, which services deemed necessary for the SUNY students to provide. As a professor of social work, Prof. Herrmann saw the service components was a way for his students to gain community service experience; it was like an extension of his social work course or a practicum. A good number of the program participants were recruited from his classes or the social work department, for instance, 40% of the respondents of my survey indicated that social work was their major.

Perhaps the most unique feature of this serviced-based study abroad program is the establishment of the Danang/Quang Nam Fund NGO. As mentioned in Chapter Three, Herrmann established this NGO to provide direct aid such as food, money or staple products to the poor families in various areas of Danang. And the students help delivering them.

For example, the food and money given to the families during the home visits in the Hoa Vang district or the meals that the students help serve at the Danang Welfare Center all came from the funds of the NGO. Because Linh and Mai, the two Vietnamese administrative staff of the SUNY program, also manage the NGO funds, the process of getting the goods and passing them onto the students to deliver to the families in need was done very efficiently. The NGO website

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<sup>23</sup> I came across this pamphlet in 2012. This brochure was probably written a few years prior. The program was established in 2000 hence, at that time it had been 10 years. The total number of students who participated in the program is now estimated to be around 175. Since implementing shorter 4-week terms in the summer of 2013 the enrollment has increased slightly.

describes what it does:

We assist families of children with disabilities by helping them start businesses, purchase livestock, or by providing medical care and financial aid. We donate food and supplies to scavengers who sift through toxic waste and live in the Danang City garbage dump. We build homes for the homeless, feed the hungry, provide medication and consultation for children suffering from debilitating ailments, assist lepers, and do so with *your* donations... The majority of our work is done by American students and volunteers. Working alongside our Vietnamese staff in Danang, students act as ambassadors of goodwill, repairing relationships and learning about a nation both villainized and victimized by the American government and media.<sup>24</sup>

A few years ago, a Brockport student wrote a term paper on the Danang/Quang Nam NGO, describing how the NGO and the SUNY Brockport Vietnam program operate in tandem and the role of the students in this interplay:

The students play an important role, they are volunteers, giving out aid to the most needy in Danang but upon their return to the United States they act as advocates for the people of Danang and share their experiences with others. This kind of marketing/slash public relations is priceless.<sup>25</sup>

The professor told me how his NGO provided all of the direct assistance to most of the services of the SUNY Brockport program. For example, the Danang/Quang Nam NGO bought rice for the Loving House nursing home, spending about \$1,500 a year for rice. When I asked him about the AO Group Home, he said the NGO paid the Group Home \$1,500 every quarter, or \$6,000 a year. He explained:

When the students go offer service at the Loving House or when they play games and sing songs for the kids at the AO Group Home, it's nice and all that but it disrupts the routines for the staff. We have to pay them because it's a courtesy ...

I suggested that the students seemed to enjoy interacting with the children and the children also liked the American students. So, then, why couldn't the students just go there and offer their service to reconcile the fees. He quipped:

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.danangquangnamfund.org/>

<sup>25</sup> I would like to thank Apostolos Hatzigiannidis for sharing his paper with me.

So we have these poor Vietnamese kids and these well-meaning Western students making paper airplanes for them? Oh, c'mon! These places have staff that gets paid to do what they do. They have their routines... So it's the question of just recognizing the fact they (the staff) are contributing to the students' education... so they (the staff at these places) gain a sense that they are providing something of value to the students that we sent.

He was very adamant of these 'courtesy fees':

Wherever we provide service and we provide money. When we go there (the service site) we disrupt their routines so we must pay them. It's a courtesy.

On my first trip to Danang in the summer 2012, I expressed my wish to visit the Loving House nursing home. There were no students enrolled that summer so I went there with Linh. Prior to leaving, Linh asked me to prepare a donation for the nursing home, which I was glad to do. I was advised to put a certain amount of money in an envelope to be handed to the Chief nun at our meeting. Linh said, "We cannot go there empty-handed."

Prof. Herrmann's work has been written up in newspapers and international media and documented in a documentary film, "Making Peace with Viet Nam."<sup>26</sup> He has been recognized by the government of Vietnam and always receives a warm welcome when he goes to Danang.

In the video, he talked about his service philosophy:

That's a part of the difficulty in involving people in the kind of work that we do, in direct aid and part of the difficulty in generating support for what we do. We don't build hospitals, and we don't build schools, and we don't build buildings on which people can place their names. We build lives.

I asked him what he perceived the benefits for the students. He replied:

Some of that they can see when they are there. But some of that takes time, like any life experience, it takes time... to make sense.

The final question I asked the professor was if the funds were no longer available, would the program still have the service components. He simply replied, "No."

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<sup>26</sup> Making Peace with Viet Nam, Chapter 5. <http://vimeo.com/14031223>.

## 5.6. Benefits as Perceived from the Program Staff

The following Table 5.2 offers various perspectives on service philosophy as articulated by the two program administrative staff, Linh and Mai and the program founder, Kenneth Herrmann.

These are ranked in the order from the most to the least service (in terms of hours spent and varieties of activities) provided. Discussion is followed in Chapter Six.

**Table 5.2 Perceived Benefits – From the Program Staff**  
(Linh, Mai, Ken)

| <b>Types of Services</b>                | <b>Benefits to Students</b>                                                                                                                                            | <b>Benefits to Community</b>                                                                                            |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Teaching English                     | Both sides interact with each other. Opportunity for Americans to meet friends                                                                                         | Vietnamese students can interact with native speakers to learn English and American culture.                            |
| 2. Agent Orange Group Home for Children | Students have fun and feel useful.<br>Feel good to be of service                                                                                                       | Bring joy to the kids<br>Give the kids lot of attention<br>Foreigners are aware of them                                 |
| 3. Loving House Nursing Home            | Students feel useful to be able to provide assistance & happiness to older people                                                                                      | Students bring happiness to the elderly; the elderly are happy to interact with young people.<br>They are not forgotten |
| 4. Hoa Vang Home Visits                 | Learn about the less fortunate in the community.<br>Students learn about Agent Orange, Vietnamese history.<br>Gain a sense of purpose.<br>Change personal perspectives | Direct aid.<br>Families feel that they are not being abandoned and forgotten                                            |
| 5. Danang City Welfare Center           | Learn about the less fortunate in the community                                                                                                                        | Food & Direct aid.<br>People feel that they are not being abandoned and forgotten                                       |

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter analyzes the findings presented in Chapter Five. My doctoral research was driven by this following question: How are benefits manifested in international service learning? In order to understand how benefits are perceived by various actors from my case study, the SUNY Brockport Vietnam program, this chapter discusses several themes that emerged from the findings. The data presented in Chapter Five focused on the perceived benefits by the students as well as those of the program staff and the local communities in Danang, Vietnam where the services were provided. As mentioned in Chapter Two, there are many types of benefits associated with international service learning. In juxtaposing views from both sides of the program, this chapter examines how various types of benefits are perceived, and what elements inform whether something is considered beneficial or not. It examines not only whether these perspectives are similar or different, but also what factors account for these differences and similarities. Elements such as personal history, cultural and political background, or socio-economic upbringing that may play a role in defining one's perception of benefits are examined. The chapter concludes by looking at the language barrier, an issue that may affect the perceived outcomes intended for the program.

#### **6.2 The Visibility of Measurable Benefits**

Table 5.1 in Chapter Five presents the five service sites in this order: DAFO English Center, Agent Orange Group Home, Hoa Vang District home visits, Loving House nursing home, and

Danang Welfare Center. They are listed in the order based on what the SUNY students deemed the most to the least beneficial to the people in the communities where services were rendered. The results showed that for the young American students, benefits are most evident when they or the people they provide service to gain something tangible such as monetary or material goods or time spent. When a service is received or exchanged, if it can be measured by some kind of units, be it resources, or time, it can be constituted as a benefit if it is well spent or something “good” came from it. For example, most students were very happy at the AO Group Home because they were able to offer some service (arts and crafts making, game playing) as well as spending time with the children.

The Loving House ranked low (besides the Danang Welfare Center, a new service) because the students thought their time was not well spent, and there was not a lot of value in painting nails for the elderly women. Some students seemed to be happier when they were able to do some physical work around the garden or to change someone’s behavior as in the case of one student talking about how much time he spent with the ethnic minority workers and “forced them out of their shy shells.” Other studies have shown that service learning participants like opportunities to interact with local people, and being active constitutes benefits to them (Nelson and Klak, 2012). Many short term project-based ‘study break’ programs often talk about how much the student enjoy the opportunity to do something of tangible value, for example, work on a project such as building a garden or a meeting house or latrines for the host communities (Niehaus, 2013; Reynolds, 2014). Students keep blogs, make videos, or take photos to show what they did in the host community: the visibility of these “end products” gives them reasons to feel good, as it is indicative of what they have accomplished and how they have made a difference in someone’s life.

When benefit is manifested in forms of direct assistance, it is visible, regardless how much or where the aid came from. Due to its measurability, *financial/material benefits* are the most visible of all benefits. The results from this study suggest that for many SUNY students, to be able to participate in delivering the supplies to help relieve the communities in need was enough to make them feel useful, regardless how much or how little the work was or where the supplies came from (the supplies came from the funds of the Danang/Quang Nam NGO, not from the college or the students) or if the assistance may be temporary, as one student pointed out. While the students rendered very little service, if any, in the Hoa Vang district, they were aware of the direct assistance that the families they visited were getting and thought that these families gained something of value.

The Brockport Vietnam program founder Kenneth Herrmann also saw direct aid as the main form of benefit. The sole purpose of his Danang/Quang Nam Fund NGO is to provide direct aid to the disadvantaged communities in Vietnam that is delivered by the students. In fact, all of the service sites except for English language teaching receive some forms of “courtesy fees” from his NGO: the Loving House gets rice or staple goods and the AO Group Home gets \$6,000 per year. The service at the other two sites, the Hoa Vang district and the Danang Welfare Center, was also centered on delivering money, food or supplies. Professor Herrmann was unequivocally outspoken about his service philosophy and considered the work that his NGO/ SUNY program does was much better than other charity organizations in Danang: they may build schools and hospitals, but his NGO/SUNY program “builds lives.”

While the Vietnamese community people also seemed to appreciate the material benefits from the direct assistance, some of them did not openly acknowledge it. The Chief nun at the Loving House and Ms. Hanh, the AO Group Home director, did not volunteer the “courtesy

fees” information during our conversations (I did not have that knowledge until I interviewed Prof. Herrmann after I returned to the U.S.). Instead, they commented how nice the students were, and focused on the *emotional or relational benefit*, for example, how it was good for young Americans to be aware of the Agent Orange issues and the people’s situations. Ms. Phuong, on the other hand, told me that the aid given to the families in the Hoa Vang district was useful, but went on to suggest that her district might be better served with help on building “sustainable” projects like community playgrounds or latrines.

### **6.3 The Cognitive Realization of Benefits**

The findings of this case study, for the most part, are consistent with previous study abroad and international service learning literature on benefits and learning outcomes for students (Chisholm, 2005; Erickson, 2009; Kiely, 2005; Kraft, 2002; Miller & Fernandez, 2007; Parker & Dautoff, 2007; Ogden, 2007). In general, almost every student gained something from the program. Even though teaching English was challenging, in the end many students reported that they gained a wide range of skills from organizing lesson plans and coordinating activities in the classroom to teaching and public speaking. At other sites, students learned about issues that could not be taught in the classroom, from the severity to Agent Orange/dioxin (“put a face to Agent Orange”) to illnesses and poverty struck by the people suffering from it. One student talked about how her experience in Vietnam was her number one leverage in interviews and how she had an “extensive repository of experience to draw upon.” This type of benefit can be considered *intellectual benefit* because the students gained skills or knowledge; they have achieved academic learning, one of the types of learning outcomes often associated with service learning (Jameson, Clayton, Ash, 2013; Howard, 1998).

The findings also reveal that SUNY students appeared to acquire positive outcomes in civic learning as well as personal growth, and show signs of achieving some degree of intercultural competence. As these SUNY students reflected on their experiences, they expressed their challenges and frustrations as well as the heartwarming and poignant realization of what they have gained from their journey. Ash and Clayton (2004) argued that through critical reflection student learning is generated and documented. Many of the students wrote how they have changed their attitude, behavior and worldview to become more aware and more sensitive to other cultures (Deardorff and Edwards, 2013). They saw themselves being less materialistic, more selfless and humbled, and more giving towards people around them. Student commented how they have learned how to appreciate the simplicity of life in simple people like the disabled children at the AO Group Home (“they taught you to be in the moment”), or the elderly women at the Loving House nursing home. The students also talked about the joy of new friendships with their local English students. As they internalized their personal growth, they also talked about their personal outlook on life and their future goals. For example, some students reported how the experience in Vietnam has changed their trajectory towards international travel – less fear, more confidence in dealing with other people.

After having undergone through the “personal transformation” and having acquired civic knowledge (Battistoni, 2013), service learners take on the next step to act or to call for action. As told by Linh, some students wrote home or on blogs and social media websites to bring awareness about Agent Orange while others raised money to send to the Danang/Quang Nam NGO. Some students volunteered in other developing countries to promote social change and democracy after the program ended. The development of civic duty and the desire to be of service to others is consistent with a number of ISL studies examining civic engagement

(Littlepage & Gazley, 2013; Reeb & Folger, 2013).

The findings also show that students were able to overcome initial (cultural) shock to achieve transformative learning outcome (Kiely, 2005, Grusky, 200). This occurrence was most evident at the field site of the Hoa Vang district. Many students wrote how the home visits were “really shocking” but it got them to reflect and learn how to appreciate their own situations and be empathetic with the people in dire situations. Kiely’s work (2002, 2004, 2010) looks at different types of dissonance and how high dissonance can lead to transformational forms of learning, which seems to be even more magnified in this case study. It was not only because of the harsh reality of poverty alone that caused the young Western service-learners to be more reflective of their better off situations, but the rude awakening from the effects caused by Agent Orange/dioxin that made them questioning and wanting to engage with the cause rather than “playing spectator.” The intensity of dissonance, Kiely asserts, seems to be correlated with the duration of dissonance. Some of the most heartfelt comments were from the summer 2011 participants, in other words, about three years after the program had ended when they responded to my survey in 2014.

A couple of striking features emerged from the data. While the student did hardly any service in Hoa Vang, it seems that this site generated the most visible transformation in terms of attitude and behavior change in students. This indicates that the benefit is *unintended*. Not only did the students learn how to think, reflect and be thankful for their privileged background, the home visits instilled in them positive learning outcomes, in other words, this site proved to be beneficial despite neither service rendered nor discussion held alongside the visits.

More interestingly, there seems to be a paradigm shift in the way in which student benefits are perceived. One student wrote how they learned how to appreciate “human

relationship,” and began to see things from “person centered to community as a whole centered,” thus, shifting the notion of “*self benefit*” to “*collective benefit*”. Regardless of what types of learning outcomes – be they academic, civic or personal growth – student learning outcomes have always been centered on the notion of the self, any gain has been aimed for the individual, for example, how service learning is poised to enhance students leadership skills, how it cultivates good citizenship or instills civic duty in them, etc. (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Farber, 2011). The positive outcomes, thus far, have been focused on the individual, which is not surprising given that the majority of the home-based institutions are individualist societies.

The socio-economic aspects of the country, or how a society is constructed can influence how things are perceived including the perceived benefits. An economically developed nation like U.S. is rooted in the notion of individualism whereas a developing country like Vietnam places a greater value in the community (Hofstede, 1983). America is a country that places great value on the freedom of the individual; this is a country where the idea of individuality and one’s private space is greatly revered and respected. We are taught to think of “the self” first. (It should be noted that individualism does not equate with selfishness. One can be a part of a community and can still act selfishly or one can be in a peripheral situation and be selfless in one’s action.) As a collectivist society, Vietnam, on the other hand, is engrained in the belief of collectivism encompassing family, clans, communities, and the society at large, which can hinder one's freedom to think or act outside of what is considered as the norm for that community. For example, the director Linh, when asking how she perceived benefit from her work, replied how she saw the SUNY program as “an opportunity to *share* information so that the students like *our* country more.” While she enjoyed a good salary from working with a foreign company, because the ‘we’ mentality had been ingrained in her consciousness, Linh never talked about her personal

gains during our interviews.

Because much of service learning practice is implicitly linked to democracy and social justice (Butin, 2005; 2010) and the prevalent service learning literature advocates benefits for the individual, a question comes to mind: is it still possible for collective benefits to take place for both (individualistic) service learning students and the collectivist community? This dimension of country-to-country outcomes/benefits should be examined with more studies.

#### **6.4 The Possibility of Mutual Benefits**

Even though Teaching English was not easy for many SUNY students, the majority felt that this service provided the biggest impact. The Americans also said that they gained something in exchange. The students clearly thought that the Vietnamese English learners gained a lot from learning and practicing English with them, however the students also gained from making friends with the local Vietnamese. In fact, this is the only service that benefits were perceived as “*mutual.*”

There are many reasons why this service was different than the other services. First of all, the ability to communicate with each and making friends with people their own age has made this service different from the others. Besides the twice-a-week classroom contacts, the Americans also spent time interacting with the Vietnamese youths outside of the classroom where friendship could be forged; many SUNY students reported that they made “lifelong friends” with this group. Second, this service does not involve monetary or material assistance. In fact, these young Vietnamese appear to be on par economically with their American counterparts. Many young urban English learners tend to come from a better socio-economic background than other Vietnamese especially those who live in the countryside. Many of them

have smart phones or other electronic devices such as iPhone or iPad, etc. Almost all have Facebook accounts and are as well versed in the language of social media as the young Americans. On evenings and weekends the young Vietnamese would come by the SUNY program house on their mopeds/scooters to fetch their American friends to the beach, or to trendy cafés, juice bars, Western fast food places or Karaoke houses. And they paid for their own tabs, or even treat the American students on several occasions.<sup>27</sup>

Not only both sides were able to communicate with each other, they were able to relate to each other due to their similarity in age and in socio-economic background. They were able to share, as one student pointed out, “our hopes and dreams.” Robert was the only participant who thought that the English learners benefited the least even though he (and his wife) enjoyed their company. At 65 years old, he was much older than the average Brockport Vietnam participants (the majority respondents indicated that they participated in the program in the junior year in college and were around 20-21 years old). While he reported that he liked being with them and how they were very respectful to him, he did not share the same experience with the younger students.

The findings indicate that benefits can be perceived to be “mutual” when there is little or no difference in the gap of value gained or displaced from both sides. While benefits may not be equal, both sides can still mutually benefit from being with each other when there is perceived fairness in time/resources/service/learning exchanged, as well as having little or no difference in age or socio-economic background between the two sides.

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<sup>27</sup> When the group is out and about, the young Viets always sort out the bills for everyone (simply because they can speak the language). Also, it’s customary for the Vietnamese to treat the guest as a sign of being hospitable. So the Vietnamese would not ask the American students straight out to pay for his or her share or simply dismiss it if the American asked for the bill. On several occasions I had to remind the students to pay at least for their own share otherwise they may be construed as “cheap” or “gauche” in these social etiquettes.

## **6.5 The Reconnection of Relational Benefits: The Personal Construct of “Giving Back”**

For the Vietnamese, what is constituted as benefits is not always clear, especially when there were several different types of services and communities involved. Furthermore, some of the recipients of these services such as the children at the AO Group Home or the elderly women at the Loving House or the poor families in Hoa Vang did not or were not able to voice their opinions directly. As mentioned earlier, I was not able to interview the Loving House nursing home residents or the children at the AO Group home. The former was due to the elderly women’s advanced age; the latter was due to the physical and mental conditions of the children. While I was able to talk to the families in Hoa Vang district, our conversations were always focused on the medical condition of the child, the type (or lack of) care he or she needed, or the lack of resources that enabled the family to provide for the child properly, etc. Even though each family had a different story to tell, by and large the situations were rather grim. In addition, we only spent about 30 minutes with each family, and with the entire neighborhood present, it was not easy to have any personal conversations with any one individual. Instead, their voices were often spoken through a representative: the Chief nun for the residents at the nursing home; the director Ms. Hanh and the caretakers for the children of the A.O Group Home; Linh and Phuong for families in the Hoa Vang district.

When I asked them how local people perceived benefits, these “spokespersons” seemed to have a similar answer. While no one seemed to be ungrateful for the financial assistance, all seemed to focus on the relational aspect of having a partnership with an American program. From the Chief nun at the Loving House and Ms. Hanh at the AO Group Home to both Linh and Mai, they all praised the young Americans for being “young and energetic,” “nice and always eager to help,” and they appreciated the students’ presence in the communities (rather the actual

service they performed): how “young Americans care.” The striking feature among all of these perspectives is that their emphasis seemed to be on the relationship aspect, and essentially ignored the tangible/measurable service aspect. This suggests that first and foremost, this was an American program and its aim was to benefit its students and their learning; second, the service did not seem to be very beneficial to their communities; and third, the community would sustain without or without their service. This echoed Prof. Herrmann’s comment about how he felt the need to pay at each site to acknowledge the local staff not only for having disrupted their routines, but also for “contributing to the students’ education.”

Another common theme that emerged during in the findings was how Vietnamese people placed a great deal of interest in the recent conflict with the United States. The recent history between the two countries seemed to play a significant role in how the members of communities perceived the Americans. They all seemed to focus on the memory of the US-Vietnam War, and cared if they were not forgotten by the Americans. (Many young Americans nowadays are not aware of the conflict, unless an older member of their family has served in the war.) Why would someone like the resident director Linh, a sophisticated young urbanite, who has been working with this SUNY program since its inception, and has been to the U.S., care that an American student handled over the gift to the family instead of herself of even this Vietnamese-American researcher? Born in 1975, the year that the two Vietnams were unified, Linh never grew up during the wartime. However, she grew up during the two decades of U.S. trade embargo of Vietnam. This long period of isolation has been seen by many southern Vietnamese as the American’s abandonment of the former ally. This may explain the reason why Linh thought it would make a difference to her compatriots how the service was rendered by an American, not by another Western foreigner, or a Vietnamese-American or a fellow Vietnamese person.

Hence, the act of passing on the envelope to the family suffering due to Agent Orange was much more than just was a mere gesture of convenience. The Danang Friendship Organization (DAFO) shared the view with Linh insofar as it also focused on the collaboration with SUNY program as a way of renewing the relationship with a former friend/enemy to mend a tragic past. However, as a government propaganda engine, DAFO also saw the program as a way of passing messages of “proper awareness” to the American people to remind their government to face up to the “responsibilities towards the issues of Agent Orange.”

After being in Vietnam for some time, students began to understand some of these issues. For example, during their visits in Hoa Vang district, they talked about how the families were “not angry or blame anyone for what happened to their families, but accept this as fate.” One young student mentioned how some of these excursions felt like “poverty tours” and wished there had been an “intelligent discussion” on what happened to contextualize these visits. Her remark echoes the importance of having relevant preparation as well as the need to provide the students the historical, economic, and social contexts to help them be aware of the past and current socio-political situation between the two countries to have deeper appreciation for the communities where they are going to work.

The findings also show that our perceptions are not only socially shaped but also influenced by personal experiences. Unlike the younger students, the Vietnam War veteran Robert focused on the personal aspect of his experience. Robert’s age and generational difference coupled with previous experience in Vietnam have shaped his views greatly. To him, this program is a way to reconcile with his personal history with Vietnam. Because of his previous experience, Robert already knew what he wanted to do this time – he had spoken to Prof. Herrmann in great detail about the program before departing to Vietnam. The experience

was personal because he saw the program as an opportunity for him to “give back,” the notion that many Vietnam War veterans also share. Robert equated his doing “community service” as an act of redemption, not as an act of providing charity or help. It did not matter to him what service he provided, or how much or how little, it was not enough to repent for all the tragedies inflicted on the people of the country to where he was sent years ago. Robert’s personal history lends a perspective that is different from those of his younger peers. The younger students did not – and could not – share the same sentiment with Robert. For example, many students did not like being at the Loving House nursing home; it was not active enough, there was not a lot to do with the elderly, etc. While the younger students would prefer being busy with other physical labor tasks, Robert, on the other hand, was perfectly content painting the ladies’ nails as “a personal connection” and a way to give back to a Vietnamese person.

Whereas previous international service learning research identifies various transformative learning processes such as contextual border crossing, dissonance, personalizing, processing or connecting as important dimensions or journeys that help foster students learning (Kiely 2002, 2005), Robert’s “transformative” experience was sharply different from that of the younger students. Further, other research looks at how various types (and intensity) of dissonance that ISL participants encountered as one of the critical element for students, especially those who may have experienced ISL for the first time, to gain transformative learning (Kiely, 2005, 2011), Robert’s dissonance processes already happened during his first trip to Vietnam – in 1968 and after he returned to the U.S. from his military deployment. Robert’s perceived benefits were his ability to connect with the past, which enabled him to develop his own brand of transformative learning outcome.

The only other person who had a similar background to Robert was Kenneth Herrmann,

the faculty person who established the SUNY Brockport Vietnam program, also a Vietnam War veteran. While both men are very different people, Prof. Herrmann's perspectives were similar to those of Robert's in the sense that they were shaped by personal experiences. Similar to Robert, the opportunity to return to Vietnam was also Prof. Herrmann's way of "giving back". However, his idea of "giving back" was more complicated.

Prof. Herrmann's philosophy of service was strongly rooted in providing direct aid. According to him, the main purpose of his Danang/Quang Nam NGO was to provide direct assistance to the underserved communities, especially to families that have been affected by the dioxin of Agent Orange in Danang, the area where he was station during the Vietnam War. Fully aware that the Agent Orange victims need special care beyond what his "song singing" and "paper plane making" students could provide, the program has become a platform for young American students to deliver aid on the behalf of the NGO he established. The establishment of the SUNY-Vietnam program and the creation of the Danang/Quang Nam NGO was a way that Vietnam War veteran Herrmann reconciled with his past. Prof. Herrmann appeared to share the same sentiment about "community service" with Robert when he gave Chairman An of DAFO a *carte blanche* when they were setting up the program. Like Robert, it didn't matter what kind of the community service it was, because all Prof. Herrmann cared was: "I want them there to do community service." The SUNY Brockport Vietnam program was set up to provide students, especially social work students a place to do their practicum; the students also helped carry out the personal mission for Prof. Herrmann via the NGO he set up.

## **6.6 The Challenges of the Language Barrier**

The findings also reveal some challenges that may have hindered the beneficial outcomes for both sides of the program. Personal challenges such as homesickness or cultural shock or physical discomforts from being in a foreign country such as weather, food or allergies, etc. are not uncommon and by no means unimportant but they are not the foci of this study. The challenge that emerged during my data collecting is the language barrier.

In general, most students felt that the language barrier was pretty significant at some service sites. For example, many students commented that the service at the Loving House would have been better had the communications been better. Due to the nature of the work, which was mainly personal grooming, the service at this site can be considered to be the most “personal.” While not having adequate language skills does not deter anyone from painting someone’s nails or receiving the service, the nature of this service often requires personal interaction. Many students recognized the value in providing company to the elderly women; however, they didn’t think they offered a lot because they were not able to communicate with the residents. Furthermore, many students indicated that they would like to know more about women’s personal stories, recognizing that they could learn from their life experiences, yet they were not able to do so due to the language barrier. Further, due to their frail health and medical conditions, when working with more vulnerable populations such as the elderly or the disabilities or the developmentally challenged people, knowing the language to understand their health conditions or their medical needs is an absolute necessity.

The ability to communicate is crucial not only to enhance the ability to provide proper service but also to help the service learners understand the people’s plight. As reported in Chapter Five, most students felt helpless when they visited the families in Hoa Vang. Some

students asked if they could spend more time in the district but quickly realized their inability to provide service or to communicate with anyone in the village without the language skills, an issue that was noted by the resident director Linh. While someone from the program (mostly Linh because Mai was on maternal leave that semester) was always at the field site, translation was not always available or consistent. Moreover, the translator could only work with one person or a small group of people at a time, leaving things not translated most of the time.

The results also show that having good communications can be perceived as having the ability to gain benefits. The majority of the students felt that the English learners benefit the most because both sides could communicate with each other: the English learning students (with sufficient English skills) were able to tell the SUNY students what they would like to learn or where they needed help. Also, the ability to communicate with each other enables both sides to forge meaningful interactions with one another to form lifelong friendships.

In general, the language problem can be acute, which may affect the outcomes of the program. The lack of communication may have hindered the students from carrying out the service to the best of their ability to benefit the local community as well as to gain the learning experience for themselves. It is not coincidental as to why many ISL programs are currently in countries such as South Africa, Ghana, Tanzania or India<sup>28</sup> etc., where English is the official language or widely spoken or understood. There are many (U.S.-based) ISL programs in Latin America. However, Spanish is a commonly taught language in the U.S., with a sizeable and growing Spanish-speaking population, and many participants either already speak Spanish, or have a proficient command of it, or have an easier time learning it, compared to languages like Chinese, Cambodian/Khmer or Vietnamese, to name a few. The problem of communication in

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<sup>28</sup> Efforts have been made to provide students with basic language skills in the local languages. Students participating in the Cornell University's GSL Tanzania are given some Kiswahili lessons.

the Latin America sites has not been reported as severe as in this case study. All said, the issue of the language barrier should be noted. As institutions of higher education are looking to expand their international service learning programs to other developing countries, language training must be a part of the program pre-departure preparation.

## **6.7 Conclusion**

The findings indicate that international service learning can be beneficial to both the students and the host communities, as this case study has shown. However, the perceptions of benefits vary greatly depending on many factors. Both sides shared similar as well as different perspectives on what is deemed beneficial. Their views seem to be influenced by historical, socio-economic, cultural, as well as personal backgrounds. Some students were overwhelmed by the severity of the problem of Agent Orange while others felt frustrated because they did not have the language skills or the service knowledge to carry out the service properly. The benefits the students gained were intellectual, cognitive and personal. While some gains may be short term, by and large, all students seemed to get something out of the program. The findings show that students, in general, are eager to volunteer and offer service to the communities. To them, when the time or effort spent to gain something of a visible or measurable nature, it can be constituted as benefits. The Vietnamese communities also gained, however, their benefits were mostly constituted in some forms of money or food supplies. This type of benefit is visible and measurable and easy recognized by the students. The community's perceived benefits, on the hand, deemed to lie beyond the interests of direct aid. The recent history between the U.S. and Vietnam seemed to play an important role in the way in which this Asian host nation perceived benefits, which was along the line of relational than financial.

The findings also show that benefits may be perceived as mutual when two sides perceive fairness in the exchange, as in the case between the American students and the Vietnamese English learning students. While it is possible to achieve mutuality in benefits, overall this case study is indicative of divergent interests in international service learning programs. For the program founder and War veteran Professor Herrmann (and Robert), the interest lies in a personal reconciliation of a tragic past; for the local Vietnamese communities, a reconnection with an old ally to renew a long forgotten friendship; and for the students, a journey of adventure, learning and self-discovery. Each actor seems to have taken off on their own perceived trajectory: their benefits will not be mutual until everyone has a clear understanding of the perceived and expected benefits for one another.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSION

#### 7.1 Summary

As mentioned in Chapter Two, the idea of “service learning” is the bringing of the two concepts “service” *and* “learning” together to create an innovative way of experiential learning for the students while providing meaningful service to the community in need. The community can be local, national or global. This concept has been well-received by many institutions of higher education given a large number of international (or global) service learning programs that have been launched in the United States as well as in other countries around the globe in recent years.

As an uncharted and complicated field, international service learning has many components that need to be considered when designing and planning such a course. It requires a curriculum with clear learning objectives for the students, coupled with service activities that address the needs of the community. In addition, there are numerous logistical factors associated with organizing a study program in a foreign country. It also involves many stakeholders, from the higher education institution and its faculty and students on one side, to the local community of the host country on the other. Despite it all, because international service learning has the potential of being one of the most effective instructional and learning tools in higher education, the reason for organizing such a program can be summed up in one word: benefit.

The purpose of this doctoral research is to understand how benefits are manifested in international service learning. In this dissertation I have employed a case study of a U.S.-based international service learning program to determine how benefits are perceived and conceptualized from various perspectives. In examining the question of benefit, I have asked

various actors on both sides of the program – the providers as well as the recipients of the service – how they perceived their own benefit and what they thought of how the program has impacted the others.

Chapter Two provides the definition of “service learning” to give the meaning to international service learning. I also looked at previous literature on outcomes that inform my study on benefits. In Chapter Three I presented the background information of the host country, Vietnam, to give the local context to the case study of the SUNY Brockport Vietnam program. I also provided an overview of different types of services carried out by the participants of the program. As this is a very comprehensive service-focused program, the descriptions of these service components provided much needed background information for the findings and discussion chapters.

Chapter Four looks at the research methods. In this chapter I explored various methods used for data collecting, focusing mainly on qualitative methods of inquiry. I also presented the research process, the participants and the units of analysis that informed my inquiry.

Chapter Five unpacks the corpus of data gathered from various sources, encompassing participant observations, extensive and semi-structured interviews, online surveys, and document reviews. Chapter Six analyzes and discusses the data to offers an in-depth analysis of how benefits are manifested and constructed in this case study. It finishes with a particular issue that should be addressed for improvement.

Overall, the findings from this case study suggest that international service learning has a potential to benefit all parties involved. However, the perceptions of benefits can vary greatly depending on whose perspectives are being studied. This is where the concept of *perception of benefits* becomes a significant issue in the findings. The perception of benefits may be shaped

by various factors including the socio-economic, cultural differences, historical legacies and personal backgrounds, which can significantly shape the ways in which different actors perceive their own benefits and those of others. Ultimately, I offer that in order to examine benefits in international service learning it is imperative to take into consideration of all perspectives – whose perspectives as well as who is providing service to whom.

Although this was a case study, the findings indicate that benefits can be manifested in different forms. For example, when these students were in an environment where there was a large gap of economic disparity from that of their own, the experience seemed to have impacted their social and civic consciousness greatly. The experience has instilled in them not only a greater awareness of global issues but also a desire to work for social change after they returned home. This type of benefit seemed to be less visible at first, but turned out to be long lasting. This type of benefit appeared to be *unintended*. However, when the students engaged in a situation where there was little difference in socio-economic inequality, their benefits and those of the members of the host community were perceived to be *mutual*. Overall, the findings of this case study concur with previous studies on learning outcomes: students do benefit, regardless of types of service they provide or the conditions they are in.

The host community, on the other hand, seemed to have different views on their perceived benefits. In general, they were more along the line of relational whereas the students and the program often viewed the community benefits being more visible and tangible through forms of material goods. Examining the viewpoints of the community is important not only to understand how the other side views of its own benefits but it also offers an insight into how the program perceives its service philosophy. Because international service learning programs are institutionally driven, most of ISL programs have been mainly focused on the side of the

providers or the students, or have been focused on the idea that “the learning” must be the primary objective of the program. Being on the receiving end of the service/assistance/aid, the community by nature is more “passive” or has little to say in how much service or how much aid they receive or what kind of activities they would like to have done. Further, when ISL is working in challenging contexts such as the elderly or the disabilities or the developmentally challenged persons, the voices of these direct recipients of the service are often unheard. Rather than placing most of the focus on the side of the provider or the learner’s side, more emphasis is needed on the service, or the side of the community. In order to have a meaningful ISL program, both “service” and “learning” need to exist equally in the framework of “service learning”, and the goals of learning and service should reflect each other. This emphasis should be conscious in the design, planning, and implementation processes so that student learning outcomes and community outcomes are not mutually exclusive.

The findings also suggest that the broader relationship between the two countries, the country of the home institution and the host country, can play a pivotal role in how each side views their benefits and those of the others. Besides the normative of the cultural differences or the language barrier, other factors such as history, the socio-political relationship between the two countries, and their current or future socio-economic interests can play a role that inform these views. More research on country-to-country dynamics may provide insights into ways in which different countries interpret benefits, which may, in turn, inform how a community views outcomes. The results of this case study also suggest that having common interests or shared knowledge between the two sides may lead to mutual benefits, as demonstrated by the interactions between the American students and their Vietnamese counterparts from the English class.

Overall, this doctoral research shows that not all perceived benefits in international service learning are inherent or inherently similar. When it comes to the perceived benefits, there seems to be some similarities as well as discrepancies depending on whose perspectives are viewed. What is constituted as beneficial and how benefits are perceived depends on the actors, and these are shaped by a number of factors that inform their perceptions. In assessing benefits in international service learning it is important to distinguish these perspectives, not just for whom the benefits are intended, but also whose perspectives we have to consider.

## **7.2 Recommendations**

International service learning provides students opportunities to serve, reflect, learn and internalize their experience to be empathetic with the realities outside of their own comfort domain. Through service learning students are given opportunities to engage in the world community to become aware of the global issues. However, they will need to have adequate preparation to help them better engage in their field services. The findings of this case study suggest that basic preparations such as language training and coursework are essential to provide students the background knowledge to enhance the experience for them. Students need to have proper training for the types of service they are going to carry out and know what is expected of them. If possible, they should be provided with resources to facilitate their work while in the host country. For example, a selection process may be necessary to match the service with the interests and the skillsets of the students. In spite of some shortcomings, most participants of this case study were positive and appreciative of the opportunity. They all have gained something from the experience, as the findings reveal.

Another important consideration is the alignment of the learning and service objectives.

The goals of service should be as important as those of learning; they should be emphasized and considered equally to produce positive, desired, intended outcomes. They should be clearly defined in every aspect of the planning process; for example, each activity/service component should be linked with both student outcomes and community outcomes. In order for the project to be mutually beneficial it is imperative that ISL makes it a top priority to include the participation of the members of the host community or the target population of the project in every step of the project. While the intention to help a community is often mentioned in many ISL programs, how these programs go about addressing community benefits has not always been evident. As a result, the outcomes rest with the side of the learning, or the students, who seem to be the default benefactors, while the community benefits remain a sidebar.

### **7.3 Future Directions for Research**

The potential for future research in international service learning is tremendous. Among some of the issues arose from this dissertation are topics of international service programs operating in the challenging contexts. More studies on vulnerable populations such as the elderly or the people with disabilities or have been afflicted by war including the displaced people or people/communities in post-conflict areas should be further explored. More research is needed to examine how international service learning experiences have truly impacted the international service learners' social consciousness, given considerable differences in cultural backgrounds and the large economic disparity in some of these developing nations where the field services take place.

While there is some literature examining elder care in domestic service learning setting (Gent & Gurecka 2001), more research is needed in the international context. As mentioned in

Chapter Three, nursing homes are rare in many traditional Asian societies like Vietnam. However, as the aging population grows and the family structure is changing, Vietnam will experience a shortage of nursing homes. Examining how nursing homes are emerging and how the elderly in these homes are being cared for – and how ISL fits into that discourse – is another topic that needs to be examined in more details.

Another important question that should be addressed in future research is the idea of situating the role of international service learning in a broader context of international development. Given the unique discourse of ISL, where international education intersects with service and civic missions of global engagement, ISL should be linked with the development frameworks. Currently, there is a dearth of literature published linking international service learning to development studies, given that the majority of the field components of these international service learning programs take place in developing countries (Crabtree, 2008).

Because international service learning has not been linked with any development conceptual frameworks, thus far, development theories have not been associated with international service learning. While the discourse of international service learning is different from that of international development, its practice and philosophy are implicitly aligned with the tenets of development. The basis of development is examining how a community or a nation or the world is being conceptualized through progressive change. Thus, international service learning can be seen as a vehicle for social change and a tool for international community development, where *service* and *learning* are agents of change. In future ISL programs it may be useful to think about the ways in which elements of development initiatives can be deliberately articulated and incorporated, whereby service components are linked with learning outcomes and sustainable community development objectives. Community needs must be identified at all

stages, and the goals and objectives need to be understood by both sides to create a sustainable program of mutual interests.

Another direction for future research stemming from this study is the topic of communication between the provider and the service recipient, encompassing the language barrier and language teaching, especially teaching English. The findings of this study show that the language barrier was thought of as a hindrance to providing proper service, as perceived by the American students. On the other hand, the findings also indicate that having the ability to communicate can lead to having mutual benefits. Having proper language skills is vital in creating an environment where cross-cultural learning can take place and reciprocity to flourish.

Along that line, teaching English in international service learning is a topic that needs to be explored further. It is broadly agreed that English has become a lingua franca of the world. Acquiring this skill has been deemed crucial because not only the ability to communicate with the rest of the world is desirable for personal enjoyment, but acquiring English is also seen as an essential tool for economic advancement in the increasingly globalized world. Although many (U.S.) international service-learners are not trained to teach English, they are often requested to “teach” it because they are from the U.S. However, teaching English requires training and skills, and it is not easy for some students to do. Furthermore, the idea of some untrained and inexperienced young person teaching English in a developing country without having a serious discussion of the host country’s historical background, for example a colonial past and its current place in the world could lead to a situation whereby the issues of power and privilege may become a dominant discourse.

As previously mentioned, one of the limitations of this dissertation is that this is a case study that does not claim to be representative of the various ISL programs. Some of the issues

discussed throughout the dissertation uniquely pertain to this program. However, the results of the study on the perceived benefits can be applicable to other international service learning programs. The recommendations mentioned aim to generate ideas for discussions as well as promote future practice and research of this emerging field.

**APPENDIX 1: Consent Form for “International Service Learning in Higher Education: SUNY Brockport Case Study”**

You are being asked to take part in a research study about how benefits are being perceived in an international service learning (ISL) program. Using the SUNY Brockport Vietnam program as a specific case study for my PhD dissertation. I would like to examine the meaning of benefits and effects of ISL from the both sides of the program, the students as well as their host country, Vietnam, where services are being implemented. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

**What the study is about:** The purpose of this study is to assess benefits and the impacts of an international service learning program.

**What we will ask you to do:** If you agree to be in this study, I will observe the activities/services done in the community. I may also conduct an informal and semi-structured interview with you about the services you provide in the local communities. The interview will take about 30-40 minutes.

**Risks and benefits:** There is no risk in answering the questions. We hope the results will benefit the community in developing better education resources.

**Your answers will be confidential.** The records of this study will be kept private. Any use of these materials will be approved by you.

**Taking part is voluntary:** Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

**If you have questions:** The researchers conducting this study are Thuy Tranviet. You will be my contact information should you have any concerns or questions.

**Statement of Consent:** I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Your Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of person obtaining consent \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX 2: Guided interview questions for the Spring 2013 student participants  
(while in Vietnam)**

**Name of Student (code):**

**Date:**

1. What have you learned from being in Vietnam so far?
2. What kind of services and activities that you provide when you visit the sites?
3. What do you like the most about being at the sites? And the least?
- 4A. Were you adequately prepared or trained for all these services?      Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_
- 4B: Do you think the training would be necessary?
5. Were you given enough training when you get to VN?      Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_
- 6A. How do you manage to communicate with the local staff and the residents at these centers?
- 6B. Do you think it would help if you knew Vietnamese? How so?
7. What courses do you enjoy the most from the SUNY Vietnam program? (Coursework, community services, fieldtrips, others?)
8. Are you planning to take courses related to the country or the region when you return to the US? (History, Asian Studies, social work, social justice, environment, language, etc.?)
9. What do you enjoy the most about being here?
10. Do you think that these centers/Vietnamese people benefit from your work? How so?
11. Do you benefit from your work? Please elaborate as much as you can.
12. Do you have any advice on how to improve the program?

**APPENDIX 3: Questionnaires for the Spring 2013 students - Post-program**

***Part A: Overall Impression:***

1. What is your overall impression of the services that you provided during your semester in Danang?

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2. Have the services and activities changed during your time there? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_  
If yes, please elaborate on the changes.

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3: What about you? How have you personally changed? Have your work/services developed/changed during your time in Vietnam? How so?

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***Part B: Impact and Benefits:***

4. What do you like the most about being at these service sites? And the least? What do you find most rewarding in doing what you do?

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5. How do you think that the experience has impacted/benefited you?

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6. Do you think that these sites/the communities benefit from your work? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_  
If yes, how so?

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7. Which service(s) that you think benefit the community (Vietnamese people) the most? Please elaborate on each of these sites that you provided services (in terms of what you think they have benefited from your work/ the program):

a. Loving House Nursing Home

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b. A/O Group Home

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c. Hoa Vang District Home Visits

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d. English Teaching

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e. Danang Welfare Center

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8. What would you do differently (for example, add/take away any elements of the program) to improve the services that you help provide to the Vietnamese communities?

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***Part C: Skills, Training, Communication and the Language Barrier:***

9. Did the communication get easier throughout the semester? (Did your Vietnamese language improve during the semester to make a difference for your services? How so?)

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9b. Do you think that the language barrier being a hinder in providing services to these communities? How so?

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10. Do you need special training to do what you do? Would it have been helpful if you had training/special background (for example in social work, global health, teaching pedagogy, etc.)

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**Part D: Learning/Reflections:**

11. Did you have any opportunity to do any reflection exercises while you were in Vietnam?  
**Please indicate Yes or No. If YES, please elaborate.** Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

If yes, how was it done? Was it done informally or formally? In the Community Service course? Who conducted these reflection exercises? (with the Resident Director; with community members; with your fellow peers/members of the program)?

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11b. After returning to Brockport, NY Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_  
If yes, how was it done: Was there an questionnaire or a survey sent to you? Please comment on the survey or questionnaires.

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12. If you answered “No” to one or all, do you think if it would have been helpful if you had an opportunity to discuss and reflect on your experiences throughout this process? Please comment.

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13. Overall, what have you learned from this entire experience? What would you suggest to improve the program and or the services?

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14. How do you think this experience will shape your future down the road?

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**Part E: Overall impression:**

15. What did you enjoy the most/the least about program AND about being in Vietnam?  
Please comments.

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**APPENDIX 4:** Guided interview questions for the program administrative staff

**Name of Interviewee (code):**

**Date:**

1. How long have you been working for the SUNY Brockport program?
2. Please describe the nature of your work.
3. How often do you interact with the students?
4. Do you accompany students to the service sites, fieldtrips, etc.?
5. Do you think they enjoy going to the service sites?                      Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_  
If yes, how so?
6. How do you think this program has benefited them?
7. Has this program been helpful to the local communities?                      Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_  
If yes, how so?
8. Do you notice the difference in students from the time when they first arrived in Vietnam to when they leave? If yes, how so?
9. What are the students' favorite activities in Danang when they are not in class or working?
10. What do you like the best/the worst about your work?

**APPENDIX 5: Online survey questions for student participants**

**SUNY Brockport Vietnam Program International Service learning Online Survey**

Thank you very much for providing your thoughts on the SUNY Brockport Vietnam Program. The feedback you provide will be part of my doctoral dissertation. My dissertation looks at impact and benefits of an International Service Learning program such as the case of the SUNY Brockport Vietnam program. I would appreciate if you could provide all comments regarding your experience truthfully and honestly.

This survey is set up to be confidential and your responses will be seen only by me. If you have questions, please contact me, Thuy Tranviet at tdt5@cornell.edu.

At the end of the survey you will have an opportunity to accept a \$10 gift card from Amazon or donate it to the Danang/Quang Nam Fund.

**Date of Survey:**

**Part 1: General Information**

1. Name of the interviewee (optional)

2. Gender                      Male                      Female

3. Your ethnicity (please choose the best choice)

- White/Caucasian
- African American
- Hispanic
- Vietnamese, Vietnamese-American
- Other Asian, Asian-American

4. When did you participate in the SUNY Brockport Program? (For example, Spring 2009)

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5. SUNY Brockport Student?                                              Yes      No

6. If no, please provide the institution you attended (at that time): \_\_\_\_\_

7. Class level at the time of attending the SUNY Brockport VN program. Please select one.

- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Graduate: MA/MS or PhD
- Other (staff, not a student)

8. Major/Field: \_\_\_\_\_

**Part 2: Pre-trip and Orientation**

9. What was the main reason that you attended the Vietnam program? (check all that apply):

- Interested in traveling, studying abroad and this seemed to be a good and interesting opportunity
- Interested in Vietnam from classes and courses taken at your institution
- Interested in service learning from courses, readings (social work major)
- Have heard good things about the program
- Other reasons

10. Other comments? (Reason that you participated in the program)

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11. Have you ever been to Vietnam or another country in Asia before this trip? If you have experience traveling/ living/studying abroad please feel to indicate so.

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12. Did you take any courses/seminar *before* going to Vietnam

- No, I didn't take any courses - no social work, no service learning or any courses about the country
- Yes, I took some courses (social work, health care, global health, international development, etc.)
- Yes, I took some courses on language/history/politics of Asia/Vietnam/Southeast Asia

13. If you answered "yes". Which course (s) did you take? How many?

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**Orientation**

14. This question is related to the orientation at the beginning of your program. Please choose one:

- Some information (a brochure, handouts) about the program were given and a formal orientation was held at SUNY Brockport so we knew to what to be expected.
- We were given some information about the program but no formal orientation was set up in the U.S.
- We didn't have any orientation session in the US but we had one upon arriving in Danang, Vietnam.
- We had an orientation at SUNY Brockport and in Danang, Vietnam.
- Other/None of the above

15. Please comment on the orientation before departure and after you have arrived in Danang. Was the orientation helpful, and how so? What kind of format and what type of information was given to you? Do you think you were well-prepared for the program? If there was no orientation, please indicate it as well.

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**Part 3: Community Services in Vietnam**

16. Did you work/provide community service at these places?

|                                                       |     |    |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-----|----|
| Loving House Nursing Home                             | Yes | No |
| Agent Orange Group Home (A/O Children Daycare Center) | Yes | No |
| Agent Orange Countryside Family Visits                | Yes | No |
| Teaching English                                      | Yes | No |
| Danang Welfare Center                                 | Yes | No |
| Other (please write in what they are)                 | Yes | No |

**Question 16 extended:**

Was the service provided appropriate to the needs of the community?

- Yes, I think we contributed the right amount of service
- No, but not sure what they needed
- No, they needed more than what we could provide

**Question 16 as seen online:**

| Service Sites                 | Did you work/provide community service at these places? |                       | Was the service provided appropriate to the needs of the community? |                                   |                                                 |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
|                               | Yes                                                     | No                    | Yes, we contributed the right amount of service                     | No, but not sure what they needed | No, they needed more than what we could provide |
| Loving House Nursing Home     | <input type="radio"/>                                   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>                                               | <input type="radio"/>             | <input type="radio"/>                           |
| Agent Orange Group Home       | <input type="radio"/>                                   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>                                               | <input type="radio"/>             | <input type="radio"/>                           |
| Hoa Vang District Home Visits | <input type="radio"/>                                   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>                                               | <input type="radio"/>             | <input type="radio"/>                           |
| Teaching English              | <input type="radio"/>                                   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>                                               | <input type="radio"/>             | <input type="radio"/>                           |
| Danang Welfare Center         | <input type="radio"/>                                   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>                                               | <input type="radio"/>             | <input type="radio"/>                           |
| Other (please mention in Q18) | <input type="radio"/>                                   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>                                               | <input type="radio"/>             | <input type="radio"/>                           |

17. Was the **time spent** at the sites appropriate? Please check one.

|                                       |     |            |          |
|---------------------------------------|-----|------------|----------|
| Loving House Nursing Home             | Yes | Not enough | Too Much |
| Agent Orange Group Home               | Yes | Not Enough | Too Much |
| Agent Orange Village Visits           | Yes | Not enough | Too Much |
| Teaching English                      | Yes | Not enough | Too Much |
| Danang Welfare Center                 | Yes | Not enough | Too Much |
| Other (please write in what they are) |     |            |          |

**Question 17 as seen online:**

| Service Sites                 | How often were you at the sites? |                       |                              |                       | Was the amount of time adequate? |                       |                       |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
|                               | 2-3 times a week                 | once a week           | 5-8 times (for the semester) | a few times           | Yes                              | No, too much time     | No, not enough time   |
| Loving House Nursing Home     | <input type="radio"/>            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Agent Orange Group Home       | <input type="radio"/>            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Hoa Vang District Home Visits | <input type="radio"/>            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Teaching English              | <input type="radio"/>            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Danang Welfare Center         | <input type="radio"/>            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Other                         | <input type="radio"/>            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

18. Please comment on the type of the service you provided and reaction you received from your work. Which site(s) or work *did you enjoy the most?* How so?

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19. Which service(s) did you *not* enjoy/appreciate/did not get much out of it? Why not? Please comment.

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**Part 4: Impact and Benefits**

20. Do you think that **the community benefited from the program or service?**

Please rank according a scale 1-5. The scale will be interpreted as follows:

1 = The community did not benefit at all!

2 = They enjoyed having us there. Not sure if they benefited.

3 = The community benefited somewhat from our assistance but short termed. We made some difference.

4 = Our work made a good amount of difference in their lives, short and long termed.

5 = They definitely benefited greatly. Our service made a big difference in their lives

**Question 20 as seem online:**

|                               | 1<br>not at all       | 2<br>not sure         | 3<br>some             | 4<br>good<br>amount   | 5<br>benefit<br>greatly |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Loving House Nursing Home     | <input type="radio"/>   |
| Agent Orange Group Home       | <input type="radio"/>   |
| Hoa Vang District Home Visits | <input type="radio"/>   |
| Teaching English              | <input type="radio"/>   |
| Danang Welfare Center         | <input type="radio"/>   |
| Other                         | <input type="radio"/>   |

21. Which group do you think benefited the most (and the least) from the service you helped provide? Please comment.

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22. Please rank the following groups that you thought **benefited the most** from the community service of the SUNY VN program. Please use the mouse to move the choices up or down -- the most at the top. Choices given:

- Loving House Nursing Home
- Agent Orange Group Home (A/O Children Daycare Center)
- Agent Orange Countryside Family Visits
- Teaching English
- Danang Welfare Center

23. If you could change something about how service, what would it be? (time, skills, resources? eliminate some service, etc.)

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24. What would it make it more enjoyable experience for you?  
 1 = strongly disagree 7= strongly agree

|                                                                                                               | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     | 6                     | 7                     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Having more background information about Vietnam. (culture, history, US relationship)                         | <input type="radio"/> |
| Knowing the language to communicate more effectively.                                                         | <input type="radio"/> |
| Having a thorough and well informed background of people/community at the site where you provided service.    | <input type="radio"/> |
| Acquired adequate skills to provide service (teaching pedagogy, knowledge about healthcare, social work etc.) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Having discussion throughout the semester with the local program coordinator or administrative staff          | <input type="radio"/> |
| Having discussion throughout the semester during the community service seminar.                               | <input type="radio"/> |
| Having understanding peers                                                                                    | <input type="radio"/> |

25. How do you think the overall experience has benefited you, changed or transformed you? We would appreciate anything you would like to share.

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**Part 5: Community Service /Departing from Vietnam**

26. How would you rank these statements about the *Community Service (CS) seminar course*?  
 1 = strongly disagree 7= strongly agree.

|                                                                                                                                                                              | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     | 6                     | 7                     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| The community service seminar integrated the community service work very well.                                                                                               | <input type="radio"/> |
| The CS seminar was useful because this was when we were given a lot of background information about the services and the communities where we worked.                        | <input type="radio"/> |
| The CS seminar was useful because this is when we could talk and reflect about our work and problems we encountered during the week. This has helped enhance our experience. | <input type="radio"/> |
| The instructor of the CS seminar was well trained and knowledgeable in community service.                                                                                    | <input type="radio"/> |
| The homework/tasks assigned in the CS seminar was interesting and appropriate.                                                                                               | <input type="radio"/> |
| The community service seminar was not useful at all. It was a waste of time.                                                                                                 | <input type="radio"/> |

27. Please comment on all elements pertinent to the weekly community service course at the house. The types of exercises, discussions, lectures, information, reflection, sharing - IF ANY- that took place.

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28. How would you rank these statements about *the coursework, administrative staff at the program house*? 1 = strongly disagree 7= strongly agree.

|                                                                                                       | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     | 6                     | 7                     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| The classes and coursework at the program house were interesting and beneficial.                      | <input type="radio"/> |
| The weekend excursions and the long-distance trips were interesting and beneficial.                   | <input type="radio"/> |
| The resident director was attentive, knowledgeable and helpful.                                       | <input type="radio"/> |
| The local staff in Vietnam (cooks, guards, drivers) was attentive and helpful.                        | <input type="radio"/> |
| The administrative staff/faculty members at SUNY Brockport were helpful when I needed their guidance. | <input type="radio"/> |
| The program house was comfortable, the service and amenities were excellent.                          | <input type="radio"/> |

29. How would you rank these statements about *the SUNY Brockport VN program*? 1 = strongly disagree 7= strongly agree.

|                                                                                                            | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     | 6                     | 7                     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| The program gave me an opportunity to travel abroad, meet local people in another country.                 | <input type="radio"/> |
| The program gave me an opportunity to learn about another culture and how people live.                     | <input type="radio"/> |
| The program gave me an opportunity to provide community service to less privileged people.                 | <input type="radio"/> |
| The program gave me an opportunity to learn about social justice and international development in general. | <input type="radio"/> |

30. How would you rank these statements about *your overall experience in general*?  
 1 = strongly disagree 7= strongly agree.

|                                                                                                        | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     | 6                     | 7                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| The community service work we provided was rewarding.                                                  | <input type="radio"/> |
| My language skills have improved tremendously.                                                         | <input type="radio"/> |
| I gained a lot of leadership skills                                                                    | <input type="radio"/> |
| I learned a lot about myself (you can elaborate in Q31).                                               | <input type="radio"/> |
| I learned lot about community service (you can elaborate in Q 31).                                     | <input type="radio"/> |
| I feel more confident about traveling overseas and interacting with other people in foreign countries. | <input type="radio"/> |
| Overall, I had a great experience with the service learning program.                                   | <input type="radio"/> |

31. Can you share some of *your most memorable experiences*? This could be something from the service, the coursework, people/friends you encountered, field trips/excursions, an incident, etc. The experience can be favorable or unfavorable.

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**Part 6: Post Program**

32. This question is related to the re-entry/post-trip meeting at the end of program. Check all that apply.

- There was a departing session in Vietnam prior to our departure.
- We had a reunion/meeting at SUNY Brockport with faculty members to discuss our experience upon returning to the U.S.
- We were given some evaluation survey but no formal re-entry session was set up when we returned.
- There was nothing formally set up. Some of us met on our own after we returned.
- Other/None of the above

33. Please comment about your post-program activity (re-entry meeting, workshop, surveys) IF ANY. If yes, how helpful was it? If no, do you think this step would have been helpful for you to upon returning to the US/school/home life?

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34. Did you have an opportunity to talk about your trip with anyone -- friends, peers, previous participants, family, Staff at the International Education office, etc.? We would appreciate to know if you had a chance to share your experience.

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32. Do you still keep in touch with some of the people that you met in Vietnam?

- Yes
- No
- Kept in touch in the beginning but not no

36. If yes, who? Please check all that apply.

- English language students mostly
- Staff, administrators at the community service sites
- Administrative staff at the house/DAFO
- Random local Vietnamese people you met
- Random foreigners/expats/students you met

37. How are you planning to keep in touch ? Please check all that apply

- Email
- Social media (Facebook)
- Phone
- Skype
- Other

38. Future plans: Please comment on these statements 1= not likely at all 7= very likely

|                                                                                                       | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     | 6                     | 7                     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| If you had a chance, would you like to return Danang/Vietnam (either to visit or to do service work)? | <input type="radio"/> |
| How likely will you do volunteer work in your community.                                              | <input type="radio"/> |
| The resident director was attentive, knowledgeable and helpful.                                       | <input type="radio"/> |
| If you had an opportunity, would you do community service in another country?                         | <input type="radio"/> |
| Would you recommend the SUNY Vietnam program to other students?                                       | <input type="radio"/> |
| Would you recommend service-focused study abroad programs to other students?                          | <input type="radio"/> |

39. Have you been back to Vietnam or travel to other countries in the region due to this experience? Yes/No? When? How many times? Please comment.

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40. Do you have any comments you would like to comment?

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Thank you for participating in the survey. Please indicate your choice on receiving the Amazon gift card.

- I do not need to receive the gift card
- Please donate it to the Danang/Quang Nam Fund hone
- Please send the \$10 gift card to my email address below

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