INTERNATIONAL FIELD SCHOOL FOR FIRST-YEAR ENGINEERING STUDENTS

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Abstract – Engineering graduates increasingly find that they are part of teams that draw a multi-disciplinary membership across a broad range of cultural, socio-economic, and linguistic backgrounds. Although engineering students often have the opportunity to participate in international projects (e.g. co-operative education programs, study abroad), formal international field schools are not typical within engineering curricula, particularly at the first- and second-year level.

To provide an early introduction to intercultural perspectives, first-year engineering students at Vancouver Island University (VIU) participated in a field school at Tra Vinh University (TVU) in Tra Vinh Province, Vietnam over a period of three weeks. This field school consisted of a number of cultural and engineering activities, and involved pairing of students at both TVU and VIU for the duration of the experience.

To measure student response during the field school, participating VIU students completed the on-line Intercultural Effectiveness Scale questionnaire pre- and post-experience. Students at both institutions also completed reflection exercises throughout the three-week period. This feedback suggested each student pairing continuously developed skills necessary to overcome linguistic, cultural, and technical barriers to learning and growing over their time together. Students described an enhanced understanding of self, and an increased likelihood to further participate in intercultural experiences.

Keywords: Internationalization; Global Citizenship; Intercultural Competency; Engineering Design; Engineering First-Year; Field School; Experiential Education

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Motivation for an International Field School

Internationalization has become increasingly identified as a strategic priority at many post-secondary institutions. Although this term often gets conflated with increasing the number of international students on campus (both for resulting tuition revenue and creating diversity within the student body), considerable efforts are also being made to develop students’ intercultural competencies within curricula (both within and outside the classroom). Hofstede [6] provides a useful frame to the concept: the ability to participate in the social life of people who live according to different unwritten rules. According to Parkinson [7], industrial leaders identify global competence, a term used synonymously with intercultural competency, as being highly regarded to essential for a graduate of engineering. A graduate of today should expect that even if their career path does not physically take them outside of their home country’s borders, they most likely will be part of a team which may draw from a multi-disciplinary membership across a broad range of cultural, social-economic and linguistic backgrounds, and will be expected to translate ideas into reality for users who have diverse perspectives on the world. With increased globalization, an engineering graduate presenting global competence in addition to the graduate attributes required by the Canadian Engineering Accreditation Board (CEAB) [8] will see broader career opportunities.

Although post-secondary institutions have increased (as a percentage) the number of international students on their campuses [9], intercultural competence development requires that students go beyond interacting with classroom peers to have collaborative work experiences with people who have been raised, educated, and living [emphasis added] in the host country [1]. And as cultural intelligence is believed to develop over time and in several stages [4], there may be value introducing students to intercultural activities early in their academic careers.

1.2. Background

Vancouver Island University (VIU) in Canada and Tra Vinh University (TVU) in Vietnam have had a longstanding partnership, which began in 2001 when VIU (then known as Malaspina University-College) participated in a Canada-wide consortium to establish the first community college in Tra Vinh Province under the Vietnam-Canada Community College Project (VCCCP). This project was funded by the Government of Canada through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

Both institutions have grown considerably since the inception of their partnership. Tra Vinh Community College was upgraded to a full university in 2006 and now offers diploma, bachelor, masters, and doctoral programs.
to its over 20,000 students. Malaspina University-College transitioned to a full teaching university under the name Vancouver Island University in 2008 and now offers certificate, diploma, bachelor, and masters programs to over 15,000 students. The partnership between the engineering programs at VIU and TVU was established in 2009.

Tra Vinh University has a strong tradition of establishing cooperative relationships with international partners, which number over 90 individuals and groups from 11 countries in specific areas such as joint training, research, organized scientific forums and seminars, lecturers’ and student exchange, and hosting of volunteers.

Vancouver Island University offers off-campus, experiential learning experiences to students in a number of its programs, and maintains and supports multiple opportunities for faculty to internationalize program curricula and develop students as global citizens. For example, its World VIU Days and Global Citizens Week, held in the Fall and Spring terms respectively, offer opportunities to showcase faculty and student-led initiatives on campus, as well as engage the wider campus community with the cultural expressions of its over 2000 international students representing over 80 countries.

Both VIU and TVU are located in semi-rural communities with a relatively low percentage of visible minority population.

1.3. Project Scope

It has been a long-term goal of both VIU and TVU to better establish student-to-student interactions to enhance the international experience of both student groups. In 2017, first-year students within the Engineering Transfer program at VIU and second-year students within the TVU bachelor (Cybernetic and Automatic Engineering and Electrical and Electronic Engineering) and diploma program (College of Electrical and Electronic Engineering) collaborated virtually to successfully design and build an engineering project [5]. It was found that students within the project developed an increased understanding of how best to overcome cultural, social-economic, linguistic, and time-zone difference barriers over the course of the term. The desire to expand this experience to include a face-to-face collaboration was often expressed by the participants; it was a natural expansion to explore the possibility of a field school that enabled VIU and TVU students to directly work together to solve engineering problems.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Pre-Planning and Student Selection

The proposed field school was the first international, experiential education experience offered by the VIU Department of Physics, Engineering, and Astronomy, and is unique within its host Faculty with its focus on first-year student participants. Considerable planning was required prior to the field school start date, although this planning was facilitated greatly by the long-term relationship shared between the engineering departments at TVU and VIU.

Initial discussions between two of the authors (Dick, VIU Project Lead, and Nguyen, TVU Project Lead) for the potential of a field school experience began immediately after the successful conclusion of the collaborative engineering design project undertaken by students at TVU and VIU in 2017. This conversation expanded, and, by the end of Summer-2018, resulted in a preliminary plan for a three-week field school hosted at the TVU main campus. This plan was loosely based on the Bahrom International Program, an intensive, four-week language and culture program offered by Seoul Women’s University (SWU) in South Korea [10], in which one of the authors (Dick) participated during its 2010 offering. This program is primarily intended to help prepare SWU students for a study abroad experience. Students from international partner institutions were invited to take part, and share cultural activities and classroom assignments with their Korean peers. Instructors from the institutional partners were invited to assess work produced by these students, to help develop a framework for learning expectations that the Korean students will likely experience during their study abroad experience. All participating students within this program (both Korean and international invitees) were observed to bond strongly with each other during its duration, and appeared to develop a better cultural understanding of each other. The authors wished to replicate this experience for the VIU and TVU field school participants.

TVU and VIU students would be paired, participating in cultural activities, project work, and completing weekly assignments. These students would also share accommodations for the duration of the field school. One of the authors (Dick) brought the discussion to the VIU Faculty of International Education to determine the logistics of moving forward with a field school offering during the intersession period (May-June) of 2019; a safety plan and procedures for the field school were developed and approved by the appropriate authorities at VIU and TVU, and the opportunity for a field school was broached in October 2018 to the first-year engineering design class at VIU to gauge overall interest. The student response motivated planning to continue.

Funding was successfully obtained through the VIU Global Engagement Program to allow the project leads to have direct planning meetings at Tra Vinh University over one week in December 2018, providing an opportunity to vet the facilities (e.g. accommodations), each of the proposed activities, and finalize the field trip itinerary.

Field school application forms were provided to students, with acceptance based on factors including the
student goals and expectations from the trip. In addition to references (one of which had to be a current or recent instructor from VIU), a minimum GPA was also required as well as successful completion of the first-term, Engineering Design course. Upon feedback from both participating students\(^1\) and the Faculty of International Education, program costs were limited to only in-country expenses (approx. $650); students were to arrange their own travel to and from Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, where transportation was provided to/from Tra Vinh City. This approach provided flexibility to students to extend their stays beyond the field school period, limited the liability to VIU, and reduced the logistical requirements on its staff. The VIU Faculty of International Education provided bursaries of up to $500 per student under their Global Citizens Network and Stipend program.

Successful VIU student applicants were required to provide non-refundable deposits to hold their seats within the program. Upon full payment of the program costs, these students were subsequently auto-enrolled in ENGR 291 (Special Field Studies in Engineering), a three-credit course.

All students were required to attend several orientation sessions prior to departure, including intercultural understanding and personal safety. Students were also asked (but not obligated) to sign a photo waiver form.

**2.2. Student Teams and Support**

Nine students from Vancouver Island University, consisting of five male and four female participants, and nine students from Tra Vinh University enrolled in the field school. The TVU students were chosen to ensure the same gender ratio for both schools.

The VIU students participating in the field school had no Vietnamese language ability. Approximately two-thirds of these students were Canadian-born with limited to no international travel experience. The remaining three were international students from Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Brazil. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 28.

The TVU students were all Vietnamese-born, primarily from Tra Vinh Province, with no international travel experience. These students had varying degrees of English language ability, with at least one-third having strength in speaking/listening.

Each VIU student was paired with a TVU student, and accommodated in the same dormitory room for the duration of the field school. These pairings were generally random, although pairing of the same gender was enforced. All dormitory rooms (including that of the VIU lead instructor) were located on the same floor in one building. The dormitory building was located on the TVU main campus with an enforced curfew and 24 hr security.

The VIU-TVU pairs were grouped into three teams (Figure 1), each supervised by a TVU instructor. Two TVU students (translators) from their English Language program were assigned per team to assist with translation between group members. The student translators helped to facilitate communication between the team members during the project work and assignments, and worked with the same team throughout the field school experience.

All project activities and assignments were collective efforts and based on these team groupings. All teams, through their TVU instructor, were supervised by the TVU and VIU lead instructors (Thai Son and Dick respectively). As the responsible agent representing VIU, the VIU lead instructor also directly monitored and engaged with all VIU students, providing advice and assistance through the field school.

Outside of the direct faculty support for each team, the International Collaboration Office at Tra Vinh University provided general assistance including logistics, transportation to/from off-campus sites, arranging activities, and providing for health and safety needs as required. An optional Facebook page (maintained by one of the TVU instructor leads) was used to share photos and provided information to students. An alternative means of

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\(^1\)TVU students participated in the program at no cost
communication that proved effective for the VIU lead instructor and VIU students was an optional WhatsApp group, as most had obtained a local SIM card.

### 2.3. Activities and Projects

The goal of the field school was not only to focus on engineering learning outcomes, but also cultural experiences designed to develop intercultural competencies. All students, faculty, and student translators received a specially designed shirt, which helped to create a sense of community within the group. All VIU students were provided a TVU-branded motorcycle helmet (to keep as a souvenir) allowing for their TVU partner to easily transport them to locations in the city. Each VIU student was also provided access to a bicycle during their stay to enable exploration of the city on their own if they choose to do so. As a safety precaution, VIU students were required to advise the VIU instructor lead when they left (and the general destination intended) and returned to the main campus.

Although the schedule included many formal activities (Table 1), there was considerable, unallocated time to allow students to work on assignments, reports, projects, and develop social relationships on their own. Indeed, the TVU and VIU students participated in a number of extra-curricular activities including a community running event, multiple karaoke sessions, VIU students visiting their TVU partner’s families in the countryside, celebrations of birthdays, exploring the local markets, and visits to the ubiquitous coffee shops in and around Tra Vinh City. These informal activities provided a deeper and richer opportunity for the VIU and TVU students to share their cultural perspectives and experiences.

The overall project framework required students to respond to a couple of questions provided as an assignment each Friday with a due date the following Monday. The questions were based on the week’s activities, and were completed by students working in their teams. Teams completed two of these assignments over the field school. For the third week, each team produced a final presentation (in which all team members were required to speak) reflecting on their activities and learning over the three week period. As one of the goals of the field school was to help enable TVU participants to become more comfortable conversing in English, these presentations were in that language. Additionally, for that last week, each of the teams produced a creative performance of their own design that was presented at the farewell dinner: All faculty, staff, student translators, and senior administration from Tra Vinh University enjoyed an evening of music, dance, and magic performed by the TVU and VIU students.

**Week 1** – The first week of the field school was focussed on ice breaking activities such as orientation tours of both the city and campus, as well as an introduction to Vietnamese cooking through a friendly competition. This latter event required TVU students to introduce their TVU teammates to the local market with the goal of buying food and creating a lunch menu that would be judged by TVU faculty and staff. The week closed with a day-long excursion to a local cultural site, including a boat river tour.

**Week 2** – In addition to the week’s seminar on the Vietnamese language, as part of their first engineering project each team designed and built playground equipment for a local elementary school using recycled tires as a base material, while following a standard engineering design process. Each team visited the school and talked to the students and teachers to establish stakeholder needs’ statements. Under the constraints provided, each team brainstormed solutions and moved through a decision process to determine a best solution to build. Limited funds were provided to acquire material. Language challenges were mitigated through the TVU student translators attached to each group.

Given the time constraints, the project outcomes were simple – a Tic-Tac-Toe board with pieces made of old motorcycle tires, a frog made of stacked tires, and a dragon built from half-buried tires – as much of allocated time was spent with stakeholders and team building. Each project was installed at the elementary school site, where the teams observed children using the products. Each team also provided a short presentation to the TVU and VIU faculty on their product’s design process. The VIU and TVU students completed their week’s activities with a visit to a rural elementary school in Cau Ke District (approximately 45 min drive from the TVU campus), where each team was assigned to either a Grade 3, Grade 4, or Grade 5 classroom. Prior to entering the class, the team was to come up with a short lesson on English (typically learning numbers, or animals, or a song). Each student team (with the assistance of the team translators) delivered their lessons to the elementary students. After visiting the school, the TVU and VIU students were brought to a local farm house for lunch (including a karaoke session on site), and travelled to other farms during the afternoon for picking of various tropical fruits.

**Week 3** – The third week’s seminar focused on the culture of the local minority population, the Khmer people. The Khmer people make up approximately 30% of the population in Tra Vinh Province and have a strong influence on the cultural expression of the Tra Vinh community. To experience Khmer dance and music, students visited the School of Southern Khmer Language, Culture and Arts, a unit within Tra Vinh University offering Bachelor and Masters programs.

The second and last engineering project involved an electrical survey of local farmhouses, with the goal to evaluate what electrical upgrades were needed (e.g. wiring,
Table 1. Field School Activity Schedule

| Date    | Morning                         | Afternoon                      | Evening                      |
|---------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Day 1   | Arrival in Ho Chi Minh City – Transportation to TVU | Free Evening                   |                              |
| Day 2   | Formal Introduction/Welcome     | Tra Vinh City Tour             | Welcome Dinner (TVU Sponsored) |
| Day 3   | Seminar #1 – Vietnamese Cooking | Safety Orientation             | Free evening                 |
| Day 4   | Free morning                    | Motorcycle Tour                | Free evening                 |
| Day 5   |                                  | Eco-Tour – Phung Island        |                              |
| Saturday| FREE WEEKEND                     |                                |                              |
| Sunday  | FREE WEEKEND                     |                                |                              |
| Day 8   | Seminar #2 – Vietnamese Lang.   | Project #1 – Stakeholder Input | Free evening                 |
| Day 9   | Project #1 – Design / Build     |                                | Free evening                 |
| Day 10  | Project #1 – Design / Build     |                                | Free evening                 |
| Day 11  | Project #1 – Install / Test     |                                | English Speaking Club        |
| Day 12  | Visit Elementary School / Farming Village in Càu Kè District | Free evening                 |                              |
| Saturday| FREE WEEKEND                     |                                |                              |
| Sunday  | FREE WEEKEND                     |                                |                              |
| Day 15  | Seminar #3 – Khmer Culture      | Project #2 – Needs Assessment  | Thank You Dinner (VIU Sponsored) |
| Day 16  | Project #2 – Planning / Equipment Gathering | Free evening                 |                              |
| Day 17  | Project #2 – Install / Test     |                                | Free evening                 |
| Day 18  | Free morning and afternoon      |                                | English Speaking Club        |
| Day 19  | Formal Presentation             | Free afternoon                 | Farewell Dinner / Performance (TVU Sponsored) |
| Saturday| FREE WEEKEND                     |                                |                              |
| Sunday  | FREE WEEKEND                     |                                |                              |
| Day 22  | Departure from TVU – Arrival in HCMC |                                |                              |
This project fell under the “giving back” activity envelope; TVU has an on-going project to assist poorer neighbours within its catchment area in activities in which its students have expertise.

This project was undertaken in partnership with senior students within the Electrical and Electronics diploma program; these senior students, due to safety concerns, were responsible for any specific electrical installation and testing that was to be completed.

Each team accompanied the senior students to map out the electrical connections and wiring in up to four households. They itemized the needs, which were subsequently acquired by TVU staff within the Faculty of Engineering and Technology, and installed and tested at each household.

The remaining portion of the week was not formally scheduled with project activities to allow time for students to prepare their final presentations as well as a performance to take place at the farewell dinner.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

All participating students were asked to complete reflection exercises prior, during, and post field school experience. Qualitative questions were asked of both the TVU and VIU students, while quantitative responses were obtained by VIU students only before and after the field school using the on-line Intercultural Effectiveness Scale (IES) developed by the Kozai Group [11]. The IES tool was not available in Vietnamese, thereby limiting its usefulness to evaluate TVU students. A more fulsome quantitative evaluation for all students will be undertaken in subsequent offerings of the field school.

The VIU students were further asked to submit an essay reflecting on their experience for students who may be considering taking part in an upcoming international field school.

3.1 Pre- and Post-Departure Qualitative Questionnaire

The pre-departure questions (based on work by Deardorff [3]) tended to be anticipatory, and goal-setting e.g. “Here are the three specific goals on which I intentionally plan to work in regards to my own intercultural competency over the three-week field school”, “I will work in these specific ways to achieve the above goals”, and “I anticipate the following challenges in achieving these goals; here are the ways I hope to overcome these challenges”.

Most of the goals identified related to effective communication with their VIU or TVU peer, the ability to try new things with an open mind, improving confidence in unfamiliar social circumstances and environments, and improving cultural understanding. In some cases, the students provided specific deliverables e.g. Learn three important characteristics of the Vietnamese culture.

The post-field school questions asked the student to reflect on their original goals e.g. “Consider your original three goals for this field school. Re-state them here, and assess whether you believe you have achieved those goals or not and why. Did you add additional goals after arriving in Vietnam? If so, what were they and were you successful in achieving them?”. The students were also asked to identify how their experience compared to what they originally expected prior to the field school e.g. “In what way(s) did your experience during the field school differ from what you believed before your arrival in Vietnam? Be descriptive in your response, and provide examples.” Further questions asked the student for feedback on the field school logistics and activities.

Goal Attainment – In most cases, the students felt that they realized their goals: For example, many stated that improving their confidence within unfamiliar settings was fairly easy to obtain due to the friendliness of the people that they met. Most did not feel that their verbal communication skills improved greatly; however many found that they were able to effectively interact with their roommates using hand gestures, pictures, and Google Translate.

The students expressed a different experience than what they expected prior to the start of the field school. Most identified an expectation of being “trapped in a classroom” or having “lots of solo free time”. In practice, these students indicated that their learning took place primarily outdoors or during field trips, and that when there was defined free time in the schedule, the TVU and VIU students often connected for group activities, playing games, or completing assignments/projects. Some did suggest that optional activities be planned within these free periods, particularly over the weekend periods.

Cultural vs Technical Experience – Many of the VIU students initially felt that the technical aspects of the program could have been enhanced; however, over the duration of the field school and on reflection at its close, these students ranked higher value to the stronger cultural mix experienced. The level of the participating students (first-year) and language barrier limited the depth of the engineering projects undertaken. The students felt that their human centred skills (communication, continuous improvement, patience etc…) improved, including deeper respect for the practice within their peer’s cultural setting.

Living Arrangements – The VIU students expressed an initial apprehension upon first learning that they would be sharing a living space with a student they had not yet met, particularly one with whom they did not share a common
language. This apprehension dissipated quickly upon meeting their peers, and, ultimately, they felt that the arrangement provided for stronger connection with, and understanding of, the TVU students. The TVU students did not express this apprehension strongly, as sharing spaces was more typical of their experience.

On sharing a room with his Vietnamese peer, one VIU student wrote: One of the challenges I had at the beginning was the communication barrier, but that barrier became extinct over time. I thought it [sharing a dorm] was a good way to strengthen and create a new bond with the Vietnamese students. From this living arrangement, I learned how to say some more Vietnamese words…It was nice to have two Vietnamese students in my room because they would talk Vietnamese to each other and I would often imitate or copy them, and they would help me understand it and laugh/correct my punctuation.

A TVU student wrote: “I was very pleased with the structure [living arrangement] because my roommate was very friendly, socialable [sic] [and] especially “crazy” like me, we went out to eat together and we had a lot of fun together”.

Team Structure – The team structure was well received by all students, and the students showed considerable bonding over the three week program duration. A few of the students expressed a desire to interact more broadly with those TVU and VIU students not in their team. In future iterations of the field school, non-project activities would likely have random groupings to ensure wider interactions occurs.

Student Translators – All field school participants identified the TVU student translators as essential to bridge the communication barrier beyond what could be readily interpreted using Google Translate. Faculty and staff had concerns that the volunteers would be used as a ‘crutch’, allowing participants to side-step the need to improve either their English or Vietnamese speaking abilities. Although this impact was observed, the effect was mitigated by the role the translators played in assisting learning of language within the teams, as well as allowed for more challenging projects to be undertaken.

All students provided in-depth and thoughtful responses for the prospective student. Each was positive about the impact that the field school had on their personal growth. In many cases, the field school to Vietnam provided the first opportunity to go abroad. One student wrote: Honestly, had the circumstances been any different, I would not have gone [on the field school]. I would have remained on the fence and let it pass by like any number of other opportunities that might come your way. That would have been a mistake though…

Another student spoke to his concerns over being able to socially connect during the field school, but at the close of his essay wrote: The ending ceremony saw many tears and heartfelt goodbyes. The kindest words I have ever heard in my life were said during that ceremony.

All of the VIU students described creating deep friendships with their TVU teammates, and a broader appreciation for and understanding of the culture in that region of the world. More specifically on further developing their intercultural competencies, all participating students indicated an increased willingness to participate in further field school, study abroad and/or intercultural experiences.

The VIU students expressed particular appreciation for the support and friendship provided by Tra Vinh University faculty, staff, and students in supporting their stay during the three week field school duration.

3.3 Intercultural Effectiveness Scale (IES)

Both qualitative and quantitative tools are generally believed to be necessary to assess intercultural competence [2]. For the VIU students only, the Kozai Group’s Intercultural Effectiveness Scale online tool was used both prior to their departure to Vietnam, and at the end of the field school experience. This tool focusses on three dimensions of intercultural effectiveness: continuous learning (the desire to continuously seek to understand and learn about activities, behaviour, and events), interpersonal engagement (the desire to form relationships with people from other cultures), and hardiness (the ability to effectively manage thoughts and emotions within intercultural situations).

![Intercultural Effectiveness Scale Results](image)

Figure 2. Intercultural Effectiveness Scale Results

3.2 Student Reflection Exercises

As part of the post-field school questionnaire, VIU students were required to complete a 250 word essay intended to inform prospective students who are considering taking part in a field school to Tra Vinh, but are uncertain about whether they have any interest, or otherwise have hesitation. Students were asked to be reflective and stay true to their personal experience; the goal was not to sell the program, but to ensure that the prospective student makes the correct decision for him or herself.

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Although individual results varied, the average IES response showed a general improvement in the three dimensions measured, with the highest improvement seen in the ability to manage thoughts and emotions. These results should be interpreted as suggestive rather than predictive given the small sample size.

One metric, which was not able to be considered as part of the data set but is believed to warrant consideration, relates to the travel patterns of the student participants prior to the start of the field school. Formally, arrangements were to provide a pick-up and drop-off in Ho Chi Minh City, before and after which the student was free to plan their own travel. Hence, over two-thirds of the students arrived in-country a few days to a week prior to the start of the field school. Only a few of the students arrived on the day of the pick-up, and were immediately brought to Tra Vinh with the students who arrived in-country earlier.

The impact of this differing travel pattern was not explicitly measured—anecdotally, however, it was observed that those students who arrived earlier in-country adapted more quickly to the field school; essentially, they had time to partially adapt to the culture, language, temperature, and time-difference compared to those students who arrived immediately before being brought to Tra Vinh. For future field schools, we will suggest that students take the opportunity to arrive a few days prior to the field school so that they are able to start acclimatizing.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This first-time offering of an international field school for first-year students at Tra Vinh University and Vancouver Island University provided an early opportunity for students at both institutions to begin developing intercultural competencies. Over the field school duration, students appeared to indicate an enhanced desire to pursue diverse cultural experiences over their academic and professional careers, and an increase in their ability to effectively manage emotions and thoughts in intercultural settings.

Students identified several strengths of the program including the partnering between individual TVU and VIU students and the general team structure employed, TVU/VIU partners sharing accommodation for the field school duration, and space within the activity calendar for deeper social connections. Areas of improvement included more deliberate intermixing of students outside of their teams, and planning for optional activities during the students’ free time.

Going forward, we hope to continue our research with these students throughout their academic and during early stages of their professional careers to evaluate if participation in the field school had longer term impact on their future engagement in intercultural activities.

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