STUDY ABROAD AND SPIRITUALITY: 
THE JOURNEYS OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN DEVELOPING NATIONS

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the spiritual development of students participating in international study programs. A baseline questionnaire was administered to 64 students traveling to Kenya, Ecuador and Jordan for four to six weeks during the summer of 2010. Fifteen students were then selected to participate in pre-travel and post-travel interviews. Using Fowler’s (1981) theory of faith development, students’ international experiences were analysed for dissonance and new beginnings as an extension of their pre-travel spiritual journeys. Students’ observations and perceptions of their host country’s religion are shown to be filtered through their program curriculum. While the majority of student participants in this study did not adhere to any formal system of beliefs, the narratives of some students suggest that their academic field of study and a related passion to help the world provide a unifying narrative for their ultimate environment.
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Dedication
To my husband John
and to my parents, Joanne and David:
Thank you for competing to be my biggest fan.
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Chapter One

Journeys of Internationalization

Internationalization\(^1\) is changing the face of Canada’s higher education. Students from Canada study abroad, foreign faculty are hired to diversify perspectives, and Canadian-produced programs are offered in a variety of locations and formats. Through each of these interactions, diverse world-views meet, sometimes colliding and sometimes synchronizing. For individuals, this fusion of beliefs can be transformative, changing their perception of life’s significance. Such is the case for many students who participate on international study programs. The experience is acclaimed as life changing. But how or why this change occurs offers substantial opportunities for study. This thesis explores spiritual journeys of Canadian students studying in religiously distinct nations in the developing world: Kenya, Ecuador and Jordan. Students’ narratives are illuminated through phenomenological interviews in order to understand how studying abroad alters students’ spirituality.

Chapter One begins by outlining the continued importance of religion to communities around the world. Next, I highlight the increasing priority given by Canadian universities to study abroad programs as features of an internationalizing university. I then suggest that these programs contribute to the dynamic interplay between nations of varying religiosity and introduce the research questions that guided this study. Finally, I present myself as the lead researcher for this study and explain my professional work as a designer of international programs that provided the motivation for this study.

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\(^1\) This paper uses Knight’s (2004) definition of internationalization as “the process of adding an intercultural, international or global dimension to the purpose, function and delivery of higher education.”
The Continued Significance of Religion

The world is still religious. According to Weber’s theory of secularization, and the work of many early social scientists such as Durkheim, Freud and Marx, this should not be the case (Norris & Inglehart, 2004). One major assumption of social science in the 19th and 20th centuries was that religion and sacred ideologies would gradually fade from public life as the forces of modernization and the industrial age took over. Religion, however, continues to be a dynamic force in political, social and personal life around the world.

A nuanced view of global diversity however, reveals that Weber’s projection of secularization was not entirely wrong. Secularization theory accurately explained the process by which industrialized nations would decrease in religiosity. But the global reality is that not all nations have achieved the levels of social and economic advancement that lead to secularization. Rather the developed nations of the world are a present day minority and religion is still thriving in the developing majority that have less socio-economic security. A relevant study outlining this discrepancy is the World Values Survey, conducted by Norris and Inglehart (2004). Their research contrasts the divide between religious and non-religious nations of the world and is discussed in greater length in Chapter Two. Two key points can be drawn from their research: religion is still a powerful force and religious beliefs are not homogenous around the world.

This variance in belief between developed and developing nations, the secular and religious, does not exist in isolation separated by continental and national borders. Rather, in this globalizing world borders are blurring, people are moving and media spreads messages and ideas between continents. The world-views of both secular and
religious people are continually interacting through processes such as immigration, business transactions, foreign aid, tourism, international sports and student movement. It is the movement of students between developed and developing, secular and sacred nations with which my thesis research is concerned.

The study of higher education has long accepted the secularization of the academy, but recently a new awareness of students’ spirituality has emerged among researchers, leading to a number of studies on the subject. This new concern over students’ interior development has been initiated in the American context by Astin and Astin (2005) at the UCLA’s Higher Education Research Institute (HERI). Their research has both identified that students’ are still spiritual despite a decline in formal religion and linked spirituality to certain behaviours. A visit to a Canadian campus may lead an observer to suggest that spirituality is also present north of the border. Bustling Multi-faith Centres, meditation at the student union and posters advertising debates on existential realities point to the vitality of spiritual or big pictures issues on campus. And yet not all students would identify as spiritual individuals. Indeed, while researchers point to underlying spirituality, many students identify as secular or agnostic. It is important that students’ complex beliefs be identified and explored to determine how study abroad might impact students’ spiritual development.

**Study Abroad: A Key Feature of the Internationalizing University**

In order to remain relevant in an increasingly globalized world, universities across Canada have made strategic plans for internationalization. A key feature of many internationalization strategies is increasing the number of students participating in study abroad programs (AUCC, 2007). Also known as semester abroad or international
exchange, study abroad allows students to engage in academic courses, internships or work outside their home country while still gaining academic credit toward their degree (Lincoln Commission, 2005).

All Canadian universities offer students opportunities for study abroad, whether through a partnership with a foreign institution or a university-run program that takes students overseas. In the 2007, AUCC survey on university internationalization, 93% of respondents working in leadership at Canadian universities indicated high or medium interest in providing students with international experiences. The stated objectives of these experiences from the institution’s perspective are to develop global citizens, increase international understanding and provide global career opportunities (AUCC, 2007). However, beyond these goals study abroad programs have also been shown to impact students’ personal development. Program outcomes have been linked to the development of inter-cultural skills and a new sense of national or individual identity (Carlson, Burn, Useem & Yachimowicz, 1990; Dolby 2004; McKeown, 2009).

At the same time, the agenda of internationalization is causing significant changes in the scope and format of many study abroad programs. No longer are students restricted to study in Europe, a region with historical links to Canada. Rather inter-university agreements allow students to receive credit for travel in every region. A growing number of students are forging out to study in Africa, South America and the Middle East in nations that do not share a common European heritage. As students travel to developing regions they encounter new forms of poverty, governance and social life. Since the majority of study abroad research has focused on students traveling to Europe little is known about how study abroad in developing nations impacts university students.
Another change seen in study abroad programming is the length of time students spend in their study abroad destination, also known as host country. Instead of the traditional semester or year-long programs, week-long or month-long courses are offered, being designed and hosted by the sending university. Questions arise as to what outcomes are produced for students by short-term study abroad in non-traditional locations: do students find this new breed of programs life changing, do they still develop inter-cultural skills, and how might their experience with new social norms in the developing world spark existential questions?

This thesis acknowledges the continued religiosity of the majority of societies around the world and the increased ease and frequency with which student are embarking on short-term study in religion-dominant, developing nations. In the following chapters students’ spiritual or faith development, a concept defined in Chapter Three, is examined to explore the relationship between study abroad experiences and students’ spiritual development. This study addressed the following questions:

**Research Question:**

In what ways does study abroad in non-Western nations impact students’ sense of spiritual self?

**Sub-questions:**

1. How do students define and identify their sense of spiritual self before and after they study abroad?

2. How do students perceive their host country’s religion/religiosity before and after they study abroad?
3. In what ways do students interact with the dominant religions of their host countries during short-term study?

Facilitating a Qualitative Study: My Location as Researcher

To answer the above questions, I conducted a qualitative, phenomenological study of students’ personal spirituality and their interactions with the host country’s religion. Students’ experiences and perceptions became tangible through semi-structured interviews conducted both before and after their time abroad. During these interview interactions with student participants I become the research tool, questioning the students for the meaning that they ascribe to their lived experiences. As a qualitative researcher, my role, in line with Merriam’s (1998) work, was not to evaluate or appraise, but to illuminate and contextualize the rich descriptions of life provided my participants.

These interviews were meaningful experiences for both the students and I as we conversed on what it means to travel through, or live within an unfamiliar culture. For some students these interviews were more than just vessels of information for my study. As one of the students who traveled to Kenya observed, “It is really nice that I’m just talking and I’m sharing my experience and you’re also listening and it’s really helping me.” Another student wrote, in an email following her final interview, “Thanks for interviewing me! I really enjoyed it; it made me think about the trip in a completely different way.”

The process of interviewing the students was also rich for me. It sparked many questions and has, perhaps, provided a lifetime of research. I was warmed by the students’ enthusiasm to travel and meet new people. With one or two exceptions, the students were eager and open about their travels and their anticipation was contagious.
I entered this study equipped by my years of professional work, as co-director of a study abroad program in the Fiji Islands and support staff for international graduate programs at Eastern University in Pennsylvania. These experiences have allowed me to hear the joys and struggles of North American students as they cross borders and formed inter-cultural relationships. Specifically, my students’ curiosity and concerns when encountering their host country’s religious practices first planted the seeds for my research interests. The process of writing this thesis has helped me to contextualize my past students’ experiences as I listened to the stories of the student participants for this study and situated them within student development theory.

During my own years as a student, I lived in Ghana, West Africa for eight months while I studied international development and worked with a local NGO. For me, Ghana was the grand adventure. My boyfriend, now husband, joined me there and together we travelled and explored the diverse landscapes that are West Africa. Years later, however, I realize how few Ghanaian friends I made during that year. There were, of course, some evident cultural divides. It was a challenge to connect with women my age in the rural areas as language and domestic roles separated their daily lives from mine. But more important was my lack of training and inadequacy in cross-cultural communication. I knew little, and was given little instruction, of how to connect with local people socially, how to reach across cultures and find some common ground. In light of my personal limitations during international study, my hope for this thesis is that it will provide understanding for study abroad personnel. As students’ stories are described and dissected, many new insights arise as to how study abroad can bridge the cultural divides
that separate the sacred and secular, developed and developing, in a deeply, interconnected world.

**Thesis Outline: An Atlas**

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter Two provides a review of the relevant literature to which this study is connected. The following research topics are summarized: the global significance of religion, international travel and religious belief, emerging students` spirituality studies, and the movement of Western students overseas for short-term study programs. The end goal of this literature review is to provide a comprehensive overview of the relevant and available literature and to frame the contribution of the present study on students’ spiritual identities and study abroad programs in non-Western nations.

The third chapter of this thesis explores the work of James Fowler (1981) and his research on developmental stages of faith which provided the theoretical framework for this study. This chapter also links Fowler’s work to the present research topic and defines key terms, explaining their use both in the data collection and documentation of this study.

The fourth chapter provides an overview of the methodology used in this study. The methodological framework, selection of a research sample, development of research tools and modes of data analysis are explained in this chapter. I conclude with a discussion of this study’s limitations.

The results of this thesis investigation are found in chapters five, six and seven. Chapter Five presents the pre-travel data, providing a picture of who the students are and how they define their spirituality before traveling abroad. Chapter Six looks at the
interaction between the students and their host-country’s religiosity, exploring the experiences of students by their travel destination. The seventh chapter focuses specifically at students’ spiritual journeys while abroad and highlights the narratives of five key participants.

The concluding chapter of this thesis offers suggestions for further research, practical considerations for the design of international study programs and summarizes the thesis findings by reflecting on present day student programs in contrast to historic examples of learner-focused travel.
Chapter Two

Globalization, Spirituality and Student Travel:

A Review of the Literature

In every corner of our lives, communication technologies, financial markets and an increased ability to travel have allowed for unprecedented networks around the world. These forces penetrate deeply into the realm of formal religion and personal spirituality: the secularization of the developed world is being criticized by the vital Christianity in Africa and South America, African Islamic institutions of learning are funded by Middle Eastern foundations, and Buddhist forms of spirituality are embraced by wealthy, Western yuppies. Beliefs do exist in isolation but continually come into contact with new expressions as globalization continues to increase human mobility around the world.

The global movement of individuals is not a new phenomenon. As long as trade routes have existed, people, and subsequently their beliefs, have traveled outside their domestic borders. But globalization has greatly increased the ease and frequency of travel and cross-cultural interactions. Human movement, of course, is not an entirely equal phenomenon. Individuals from Western nations and those with wealth or high social status have more ability to travel. Furthermore, the liberalization of Western social norms has meant that formerly marginalized categories of individuals, such as women, are freely traveling beyond their homes. People travel for business, leisure or tourism, humanitarian causes, immigration, war and education. No matter the reasons, individuals from around the world are traveling and bringing their religious beliefs, or lack of belief, with them.
This chapter provides a review of the literature on the global movement and interaction of individuals, their religious beliefs and personal spirituality. Section one outlines the debate surrounding the civilizational approach to global beliefs and establishes the contemporary relevance of religion to the study of globalization. Section two examines the relationship between international travel and religious belief. Section three outlines the emerging trend on secular research campuses to address students’ spirituality. Finally, section four surveys the research on the movement of Western students overseas for short-term study abroad programs. The end goal of this literature review is to provide a comprehensive overview of the relevant literature on international people movement and spirituality, framing the contribution of the present study on students’ spiritual identities and study abroad in non-Western nations.

The Relevance of Religion

The advent of modern social science and the analysis of social life led to Weber’s classic Secularization Hypothesis. Simply put, Weber’s projection was that societies would become more secular as they developed in economics and industry (Norris & Inglehart, 2004). From the present vantage point, one hundred and fifty years later, Weber’s hypothesis has not been fully realized. Religion is still with us and promises to be a determining force for the present century. Many thinkers have speculated why religions still hold sway while others have forecasted religion’s impact on global politics and position in a globalized world.

Perhaps the most heavily debated analysis of religion’s current location in global politics comes from Huntington’s Clash of Civilization (2001). Huntington’s analysis is based on the assumption that national boundaries are decreasing in importance and that
the future conflicts of the world will occur between civilizations: groupings of countries with common cultures, political ideologies and religions. Huntington’s work was given particular attention after the 2001 terrorist attacks on America, as the ideological differences between the West and Middle East were illuminated and religious extremism was shown to be alive and well.

Huntington’s thesis, though legitimated to some extent by current events, has received significant criticism from those who consider his perspective to be too Euro-centric (Carlson & Owens, 2003; Falk, 2002; Mische & Merkling, 2001; Said, 2001). Said’s (2001) counter, in Clash of Ignorance, warns that Huntington’s work groups large clusters of nations into regions that are, in reality, quite diverse and cannot be considered one civilization. Furthermore, Said points out that increased interactions are happening across cultures through the transfer of technologies, individuals and ideologies. No longer is an opposing religious cultural perspective located across the world, but within the same place of business, neighbourhood or community organization.

Religion, for the above authors, is considered a dynamic force that is influencing the way politics and society are arranged. For Mische & Merkling (2001) it is important to look beyond the potential of religion for conflict and opposition to understand the power of religion for forming identities, addressing the ultimate meaning of life and establishing moral structures to guide communities. Carlson & Owens (2003) also further this perspective by encouraging a critical engagement with religious beliefs rather than criticism of them, in order to add a depth to political actions that examines life’s existential questions. Both research teams outline the global impact of religion as it crosses borders and draws like-minded groups into social justice and equity work.
One particularly useful study that engages with Weber’s secularization theory and analyzes current world-wide religious trends is Norris and Inglehart’s Sacred and Secular (2004). This book uses the findings of the World Values Survey, a multi-year, multi-country study of religious and political beliefs, to describe present-day conflicts between regional ideologies. This study provides a more nuanced approach to Huntington’s thesis, establishing that social, rather than political, divisions are most evident between the West and Middle East.

Norris and Inglehart also propose an alternate theory of secularization. They provide evidence that suggests highly developed, Western nations are indeed secularizing while religion is thriving in developing nations. However, as developed country’s birth rates decline and poorer countries continue to maintain high birthrates there is a reproduction of the world’s religious population and a decline in the secular population. In light of this phenomenon, world-wide variation in religious beliefs is pronounced and may have an impact on global politics as the ideological gap between developed and developing nations grows.

Many of the initial ideas for this current thesis were sparked by the argument put forth in Sacred and Secular. The hypothesis that the Western, developed nations are secularizing while the majority of the world is still religious may have implications for study abroad programs that are sending students to new destinations in the developing world.

Global Travel and Spirituality

Globalization is rapidly increasing human mobility around the world. New technologies, common languages and transportation networks allow for an unparalleled
ease of travel. As humans move around the world, they interact with a variety of beliefs and values. The relationship between international travel and religious belief has been the source of several studies. Perhaps the most obvious present-day example of this relationship is seen in the journeys of religious pilgrims. Several studies have examined the influence of religious beliefs on the tourism industry and the benefits that are received by individuals who participate in pilgrimages (Swatos & Tomasi, 2002; Timothy & Olsen, 2006; Vuconic, 1996). Timothy & Olsen’s (2006) book adds to this literature by examining religious tourism across several faith traditions. The authors aim to increase academic scholarship of the issue through offering a conceptual framework of international travel and religion. The book has contributions from a variety of authors on topics from management of religious sites to the widespread increase in the demand for pilgrimages.

**Student Spirituality**

The above studies confirm the relevance of religion as a subject of analysis in a globalizing world. The conflicts between the major religions, divisions between developed and developing nations as well as the societal fluctuations between religion and secular standpoints, provide the greater context in which institutions of higher education exist. Despite the relevance of religion, for almost half a century the research university has been accepted as a secular institution in Canada and the USA (Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2005; Gidney, 2004). The past two decades, however, have seen literature emerging that rethinks the place religion, faith and personal spirituality on campus (Crisp, 2009; Lee, 2005; Sommerville, 2006).
In 2005, the College Student Beliefs and Values Survey was administered by UCLA’s Higher Education Research Institute (Astin & Astin, 2005 as cited in Chickering, et al. 2005). The findings made it clear that despite the secular nature of the university, students still engage in meaningful conversations about beliefs and have significant interest in spiritual matters. The study concluded that university students are, “actively dealing with existential questions. They are searching for deeper meaning in their lives, looking for ways to cultivate their inner selves, seeking to be compassionate and charitable, and determining what they think and feel about the many issues confronting their society and the global community” (Chickering, et al., 2005, 22). The survey legitimates religion, faith or spirituality as topics of study in higher education research.

In a complementary study, Bryant, Choi and Yasuna (2003) conducted a survey with over three thousand university students in the USA. They concluded that although students practice of formal religion wanes during their university years students are still committed to incorporating spirituality into their everyday lives.

Taking up this perspective, Chickering, et al. (2005) advocate for the combining of objective empiricism with processes by which students can engage in spiritual growth and remain authentic about the beliefs and values that they hold. Chickering states critically that, “… Academia has for far too long encouraged us to lead fragmented and inauthentic lives, in which we act either as if we were not spiritual beings or as if our spiritual side were irrelevant to our vocation or work” (Chickering, et al., 2005, p. 30). The full university experience, according to Chickering, involves developing all aspects of students’ persons, not merely the intellect.
Shahjahn (2009) offers a helpful perspective on the topic of spirituality in his autobiographical article about Muslim youth at secular Canadian universities. He outlines how his spirituality, both his formal beliefs of Islam, as well as the informal, spiritual ways of knowing, is often undervalued by Western education. Shahjahn goes on to link students’ spirituality with differing identities and calls for the university to become a place where students can learn to challenge the exclusionary voices that suppress those identities. Myers (1993) complements this work by appealing to the assumed value within higher education that promotes inclusion. Meyers sees the academy as a place for the exploration and inclusion of diverse perspectives which includes the consideration of religion or personal spirituality.

For some scholars, the inclusion of spirituality on campus is not just a possible option, but a necessary step. Sommerville (2006) expounds on this imperative by re-engaging in the debate about the purpose of the university. He starts with the premise that the university is supposed to ask the big questions of life, and concludes by showing how the university is slowly making itself marginal in society because it has failed to ask those big questions. In the same vein, Rogers and Love (2007) encourage universities to consider spirituality or religion as a key student identity alongside identities such as gender and race. They conclude that faculty have the most influence over whether student explore or grow in their spiritual side while in university.

Religion and spirituality are regaining importance in Western research universities. As faculty and students engage in teaching and learning a call is heard to consider the spiritual growth of students alongside their academic development.
Students’ spirituality is a timely research topic as religion is a dynamic social and political factor.

**Western Students Abroad**

The movement of individuals across borders is seen in all sectors of society and higher education is no exception. Each year approximately two percent of the university students from Canada and the United States participate in study abroad programs (AUCC, 2007; Gore, 2005). The rationale for providing students with these international study opportunities differs between countries, institutions and academic departments. Significant resources are being invested in these programs and the impact of these programs has been the subject of multiple research projects. There are no distinct parameters for research on study abroad. Examples of study abroad research can be found everywhere from discipline-specific journals to procedural documents at international education offices within universities. Traditionally, much of the literature has explored the skill development of students, such as language acquisition, while studying abroad. More recently, however, students’ personal development has become a key feature in study abroad research.

**Linguistics**

The process of language learning provides an empirical test of the impact of study abroad. Students’ skills are easily measured by their ability to effectively communicate in the new language. The classic book by Barbara F. Freed (1995), Second Language Acquisition in a Study Abroad Context, provides tangible evidence that study abroad does indeed assist in language learning in ways that are not available in the home.
country. Freed measures student success through key determinants of language learning such as fluency, grammar development, and reading competence (Freed, 1995).

While the above work provides explicit proof that study abroad facilitates the development of new skills, it does not consider the wider cultural context in which study abroad takes place. Isabelli-Garcia, (2006) provides a more nuanced view of language acquisition concluding that cultural assimilation and social interaction within the host country is determined by the extent to which the students have engaged in language learning. A call for more research that addresses the cultural aspects of language learning is heard from Kinginger (2008) who establishes that the demographic of students studying abroad is changing and the current commitment to language learning is decreasing. Kinginger warns of the possibility that students will study in countries without a focus on language, limiting their understanding of the local culture and their interactions with their hosts. He considers it essential that language acquisition while on study abroad be embedded in the larger cultural and social environment of the host country.

**Student Development**

While linguistic departments have measured students’ skill development while abroad, the work of Carlson, Burn, Useem and Yachimowicz (1990) provides a broader picture of the numerous impacts study abroad has on students. This research, published in the book Study Abroad: The Experience of American Undergraduate Students, compares a group of students traveling abroad with a control group remaining on the home campus. The study found that students who traveled abroad have more understanding of international affairs, more success in their academic field and improve
their perspective of the host country. Their findings also suggest that semester-long programs, with language learning components, that integrate students in their host country and academic subject, have the most success.

The work of Carlson, et al (1990), is perhaps the most comprehensive look at a wide-range of study abroad outcomes. It is, however, becoming less relevant to the current study abroad reality as its policy conclusions have not been heeded. Emerging programs are being developed without a language component and are short-term, cohort-based in format (McKeown, 2009). These programs do not reflect the conclusions put forth by Carlson, et al and point to the evolving nature of study abroad programs in a globalizing world.

McKeown’s (2009) book The First Time Effect: The Impact of Study Abroad on College Student Intellectual Development examines study abroad from a helpful angle. McKeown uses essay analysis before and after students study abroad to evaluate the change in students’ intellectual development as a result of their travels. He concludes that students who are embarking on study abroad as their first international experience are impacted significantly and show more cognitive growth upon their return than their peers. McKeown’s work addresses a variety of formats of study abroad programs, both semester-long and week-long. His work predominantly focuses on Europe-bound programs and he offers a contemporary theory that is applicable to the current delivery modes of many international study programs.

**The State and Study Abroad**

The motivating factors that lead students to study abroad are many (Carlson, et al, 1990). While students are studying abroad for personal reasons – desire to travel or learn
another language – nations are making policies that encourage their students to study abroad in order to create global citizens who are both culturally aware and internationally competitive (Daly & Barker, 2005; Gore, 2005; Lewin, 2009). There are many present day examples of governments making policies to encourage study abroad. Both the Australian and US governments, as well as select Canadian provinces, have made study abroad a policy priority for economic development (Daly and Barker, 2005; Kinginger, 2008; Savage, 2009). A survey from Indiana University’s Kelley School of Business reveals that students who participate in study abroad provide a more internationalized workforce. Over half of their surveyed students who participated in study abroad were actively pursuing jobs with internationally oriented firms upon graduation and 96% said they would work internationally if a position was offered (Orahood, Kruze, & Pearson, 2004, p.9). Study abroad is shown in this, and similar studies, to be an economic policy with significant impact, internationalizing a nation’s labour force (Orahood, et al., 2004; Moherji Norris & Gillespie, 2009).

Despite the desire for students to study abroad, both Gore (2005), and Daly and Barker (2005), outline the gap between government promotion of study abroad and the actual number of students participating. Gore examines the dilemma through an analysis of the discourse surrounding study abroad in American universities. Gore concludes that international study programs have repeatedly been referred to as academically weak vacations for female students. She deconstructs this discourse through a study of Sweet Briar College’s international programs and challenges professors and students to adopt an alternative discourse for study abroad.
Cross-Cultural Sensitivity

A frequent area of study abroad research evaluates the extent to which participants in study abroad programs develop cultural sensitivity (Carlson, et al 1990). Several studies conclude that the majority of students who participate in study abroad do indeed become more culturally sensitive (Anderson et al., 2006; Ingraham & Peterson, 2004; Pizam, 1991). In contrast, several recent studies have stressed that study abroad in itself is no guarantee of cross-cultural sensitivity (Luffman, 2008; Nyaupane, Teye & Paris, 2008; Williams, 2005; Zemach-Bersin, 2007). Nyaupane’s (2008) work provides a challenge to contact theory and cultural distance theory, which suggest that any interactions over time produce positive attitudes. Nyaupane shows that US students traveling to Australia were less positive in their attitudes toward their host country after their trip than before. The work of Zemach-Bersin (2007) furthers this idea and warns of the neo-colonial influences of student travel, and the potential to reproduce elite attitudes. This research is critical in scope and raises important questions about the impact of student travel on cross-cultural understanding.

Identity Formation

While students travel to foreign countries with the intention to learn about other cultures, they frequently finish their study abroad having learned more about themselves. As students see their own culture through the eyes of foreigners, it is not uncommon for students to development new identities and question old ones. In contrast to the notion of citizenship, cultural identity addresses what it means to be Canadian, for example, rather than how one can be an effective contributor to Canadian society (Dolby, 2004; Souders, 2009; Zemach-Bersin, 2007). In a comparative study of Australian students studying in
the US, and US students studying in Australia, Dolby (2004) shows that the process of re-thinking one’s identity differs for students from each country. Dolby’s study reveals that student development is significantly impacted by identity negotiation, although the effects differ according to nation of origin.

Further research on identity formation during study abroad is found in Sanderson’s (2002) thesis on gay men studying abroad. Sanderson provides insight into the complexities of sexual identity when living in a new culture. He calls for the broadening of support systems for student during their travels.

**Religion**

Little research is available on the religious beliefs or spirituality of students traveling abroad. One study that does address this area is Cohen’s (2003) examination of Jewish students traveling to Israel for short-term study. Cohen outlines the importance that religious belief play in students’ choice of academic institution, perspectives on the host country and future plans for further study. A divide between secular and orthodox Jews is presented and religion is shown to be a determining factor in how students navigate the study abroad experience. Cohen’s study, while relevant, focuses exclusively on the specific religion adhered to by the traveling students and does not address the broader context of students’ spirituality. Further research is needed to determine how a variety of students from Western institutions develop spiritually during travel abroad.

**Conclusion: A Contribution to the Field**

The majority of literature on the global movement and interaction of diverse individuals suggests that religion or personal spirituality may play an influencing role in cross-cultural travel and study. In the field of higher education, student spirituality is
rising in importance on American campuses and should be extended to Canada as well. This master’s thesis adds to the research on the global movement of students and their spiritual development by examining the spirituality of Western students traveling to non-Western nations for short-term study. I focus on the spiritual development of students by conducting pre-travel and post-travel interviews to identify change. The following chapter presents the theoretical framework that guided this study.
Chapter Three

Defining Spirituality and Spiritual Development:

A Theoretical Framework

“Faith is a person’s or group’s way of moving into the force field of life. It is our way of finding coherence in and giving meaning to the multiple forces and relations that make up our lives. Faith is a person’s way of seeing him – or herself in relation to others against a background of shared meaning and purpose.” (Fowler, 1981, p.4)

The study of religion and spirituality has long been part of academic traditions. Theologians and philosophers have spoken and written on spiritual meaning-making for centuries. In the 1950’s the rise of Centres of Religious Studies at secular universities led to a research-orientation that approached these concepts from a social science, rather than an exclusively theological perspective (Gidney, 2004). At the core of the research emerging from these Centres is the struggle to clearly define concepts such as religion or spirituality, and establish how one is religious or spiritual. A clear definition of these concepts is necessary to answer the driving question in my thesis research surrounding students’ spirituality and its alterations during international study. For this I turn to the work of James Fowler (1981; 1986) and his stages of faith.

In Chapter Two, I synthesized the current academic literature related to this study including the global relevance of religion, students’ spirituality and international study. I concluded by locating the research questions that drove this thesis. In this present chapter, I outline the theoretical framework with which I approached the research questions. In the first section, I introduce the work of James Fowler and his structural-
developmental approach. Next, I outline Fowler’s (1981) conceptualization of the term faith and present its relevance to this particular study. It is important to note that although I embrace his concept, I frequently label it under the term spirituality when documenting my study. Finally, I conclude by presenting Fowler’s developmental stages of faith and how they are used in this current research assessing students’ spiritual change during study abroad. This chapter sets the stage for the introduction of my research approach and methods in Chapter Four.

**Fowler and Social-Psychology**

The research area of spirituality is a growing field in the American literature on college student experience, as the previous chapter outlined. However, many of the current studies are reductionist attempts to link student’s religious or spiritual beliefs to certain behaviours. These studies are helpful in understanding students’ motivations and actions, but offer little understanding of the complex process through which students’ spirituality develops. Furthermore, while these studies ascribe to certain definitions of spirituality few have, as a key priority, the formulation of a comprehensive definition of spirituality. Filling this gap is the work of James Fowler’s (1981) who provides a theoretical framework in which to ground my thesis study.

Fowler’s contribution to the field of social-psychology builds on the work of Piaget, Erikson and Kohlberg, and their respective theories on human development. Each of these social scientists furthered an understanding of how individuals, both children and adults, make meaning of their lived experiences and develop in their ways of knowing. Fowler’s contribution, working from his location as a minister and academic, constructed
a framework for understanding how individuals develop in their relationships to life’s foundational questions of meaning and existence.

**Faith**

The way in which an individual constructs life’s meanings, and understands one’s greater purpose, was termed by Fowler as faith. Fowler’s (1981) comprehensive exploration and discussion of faith resulted in the following definition:

The process of constitutive knowing
Underlying a person’s composition and maintenance of a comprehensive frame (or frames) of meaning
Generated from the person’s attachments of commitments to centers of supraordinate value which have power to unify his or her experiences of the world
Thereby endowing the relationship, contexts and patterns of everyday life, past and future, with significance. (p.26)

More simply put,

Faith is a person’s or group’s way of moving into the force field of life. It is our way of finding coherence in and giving meaning to the multiple forces and relations that make up our lives. Faith is a person’s way of seeing him – or herself in relation to others against a background of shared meaning and purpose. (Fowler, 1981, p.4)

In developing the former definition, Fowler stressed three, definitive features of the concept of faith: faith is relational, constitutive and universal. First, faith as relational. One of the key ways that Fowler conceptualizes faith is as a triangle in which the individual and others are connected to, what Fowler terms, *Centres of Supraordinate Value* (CSV). For Fowler, all of life is comprised of various relationships in which individuals ascribe to some locus of a higher value and are joined together with others in
their faith in this value. Fowler provides the example of the Declaration of
Independence, a national value with which individuals have, most often, an implicit
relationship that orders their understanding of their nation and relates them to others
(Fowler, 1986).

![Figure 1: Fowler’s Faith Triangle](image)

While many relational faith triangles exist for individuals throughout life, the
most important, according to Fowler, is that which gives meaning to their ultimate
environment, or the “largest theatre of action in which we act out our lives.” (Fowler,
1985, pg 29). For some people this is an explicit understanding of a higher power that
gives meaning to their lives and influences their subsequent relationship-networks. But
for others, and particularly those connected with this research, their understandings of
their ultimate environment are largely unarticulated. A key element of this study is
exploring how individuals who identify themselves as agnostic or secular, conceptualize
their ultimate environment and how that changes through international study.

In Fowler’s faith triangle, the term other may be substituted for the people to
whom the greater value connects an individual. Although one’s life may involve smaller
faith triangles involving work and social communities, in conceptualizing the ultimate
environment, the term other involves all others with whom we are connected. In this
globalizing world, for students participating in study abroad, I suggest that other includes
all humanity, our way of making meaning of our place on earth and the forces that we consider to be of ultimate value.

A second key feature of Fowler’s conception of faith is its constitutive power. Faith, one’s method of relating to life’s bigger picture, is not just a way of knowing the world but of knowing and conceptualizing oneself (Fowler, 1986). With this idea, Fowler is again drawing from the structural-developmental perspective that in relationships, knowing an outside object/person/concept, allows for a knowing and constructing of the self. Fowler, however, extends this idea by providing a holistic view of the way individuals know and make meaning. It is one’s relationship to their supra-ordinate value that gives unity and logic to the ways in which individuals know and establishes who they, themselves, are.

Finally, the universality of faith. Fowler saw his work on faith as exploring a concept that was common to the human experience. In terms of this thesis, the claim that faith is a universal concept must be confirmed given the predominantly secular or agnostic student population with which this research project was conducted (See Chapter Five). To what extent are all individuals involved in relational faith-triangles that give meaning to and order their ultimate environment? Fowler’s (1986) response indicates that for some individuals there is no relationship with a higher value or unifying force in the meaning they give the world. He describes this situation in the following way:

We recognize, of course, many moments – some of which may last the remainder of a lifetime – in which persons do not feel themselves related to any value or power adequate to unify and order their experience. For some persons, the images they form to express a unity and order in the ultimate environment are at best neutral toward their lives and human events generally, or at
worst they are hostile and destructive. Nonetheless, even as negativity or as void, a person’s unconscious assumptions or conscious convictions regarding power and value in the ultimate environment have important implications for the character and quality of the relational commitments in the range of his or her other triangular relationships. (p.18)

In light of Fowler’s contention that faith is universal, it seems appropriate to study, not just those who are formally religious, but those for whom beliefs are not definitively articulated. Both Chapters Five and Seven illuminate the specific faith characteristics, or spirituality that defines the participants of this study. Ultimately, Fowler’s theoretical framework, by establishing the universality of faith, contributes the imperative in this thesis to explore the way in which a diverse set of Canadian university students construct their ultimate environment and make meaning of their study abroad experiences in developing countries around the world.

**Faith and Religion**

Since Fowler established that the concept of faith is universal, it must not be synonymous with formal religion, since religious practice cannot be said to be universal. Indeed, Fowler grapples with the two terms, identifying the distinction between faith and religion, and at the same time highlighting a relationship between them. He draws on the work of Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1963), showing that although the two concepts are distinct they relate to one another and, in some contexts, cause each other to grow. Fowler (1981) summarizes it in the following way:

Faith, at once deeper and more personal than religion, is the person’s or group’s way of responding to transcendent value and power as perceived and grasped through the forms of the cumulative tradition. Faith and religion, in their view are
reciprocal. Each is dynamic; each grows or is renewed through its interaction with the other. (p.10)

Both Fowler and Smith see religion and faith as deeply intertwined. And while Fowler is aware that many people in the present time do not find meaning in formal religion, he seems to suggest that faith is best nurtured in a religious context. This, of course, is problematic when approaching the current thesis topic. Throughout my research formal religion was a controversial concept, with many students having moved away from their religious upbringing or having no religious upbringing whatsoever. Thus, the question arises, if faith is best nurtured within religion, is it worth studying the spirituality of non-religious students in a non-religious context? To answer this question, I turn to the work of Chickering, Dalton and Stamm (2005) and the student spirituality literature, which makes a practice of studying non-religious populations through a spiritual lens. While I find Chickering et al.’s (2005) definition of spirituality less than satisfying, they do provide clarification on the relationships between faith, or what they term spirituality, and religion:

Being spiritual suggests a personal commitment to a process of inner development that engages us in our totality. Religion of course is one way many people are spiritual. Often, when authentic faith embodies an individual’s spirituality the religious and the spiritual will coincide. (p.7)

These authors go on to explain that religion is not a pre-requisite for spiritual development. Their own research work affirms the reality that people are spiritual in a variety of ways. This articulation of the relationship between spirituality and religion is helpful and complements, rather than undermines Fowler’s work. For this study it is important to understand both the universal nature of the concept at hand and the potential
of spirituality to exist apart from formal religion. Fowler may identify a closer link between religion and faith than I found useful, but his construction of faith as a universal, human experience is still the most comprehensive understanding of the concept and will be used for this study.

**Stages of Faith**

After defining the term faith, and its parameters, Fowler (1981) then identifies the six developmental stages of faith through which an individual may progress through life. Although Fowler builds on the work of developmental psychologists, he is not strict in linking these faith stages with specific ages. Rather, Fowler suggests that individuals may plateau at a certain stage or may regress back to a previous stage. In developing tools for this research project I reflected on Fowler’s description of stage four: Individuative-Reflective Faith that may be associated with the move from adolescence into adulthood:

> The late adolescent or adult must begin to take seriously the burden of responsibility for his or her own commitments, lifestyle, beliefs and attitudes. Where genuine movement toward stage 4 is underway the person must face certain unavoidable tensions: individuality versus being defined by a group or group membership; subjectivity and the power of one’s strongly felt but unexamined feelings versus objectivity and the requirement of critical reflection; self-fulfillment or self-actualization as a primary concern versus service to and being for other; the question of being committed to the relative versus struggle with the possibility of an absolute. (Fowler as quoted in Wolski Conn, 1986, p. 226)
Although there is no guarantee that the students in my study were transitioning around this stage, Fowler’s research provides a basis from which to approach the study. Throughout the study features of the above stage were apparent, such as: the tensions of individuality, service for others and the struggle with relativity. Both the questionnaire and interview guide were designed with Fowler’s stage development as a guide, illuminating possible ways that students make meaning.

Applying Fowler’s Theories

The theoretical framework developed by James Fowler is referenced in the classic student development text Student Development in College, as a framework with which to identify students’ spiritual development. Several researchers of post-secondary education have indeed used or cited Fowler’s work, often in relation to student services procedures. Student’s spirituality is linked to their ability to manage stress, think critically and navigate racial identities. (Brookfield, 1987; Love & Talbot, 1999; Stewart, 2002). Fowler’s work has also been used widely by ministers of religious denominations in establishing how individuals are most effectively nurtured and educated in their faith development through supportive communities (Dykstra & Parks, 1986).

Transitioning Through Stages

Fowler’s conceptualization of the concept of faith and description of faith-stages were particularly useful in guiding this study. Most important to the research questions, however, was his identification of stage transitions. Since the questions driving this research involve identifying alterations in students’ spirituality, the features of the change process needed to be identified. Fowler describes faith-transition as beginning when one’s current ways of making meaning are not adequate for their lived experiences. The
dissonance that occurs in this circumstance may lead to the three phases of stage
transition: *endings, neutral zone* and *new beginnings* (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patten &
Renn, 2009). Endings are evident when the disillusionment in one’s past ways of
ordering their world are considered flawed and rejected. This may be an immediate,
outrageous struggle or a gradual tacit process. After moving away from one way of making
meaning, individuals often enter a neutral zone where they explore and question new
ordering narratives. Some individuals remain in this neutral zone and Fowler emphasizes
the important role that communities of faith and reflection in providing a safe space in
which to explore new options. After transitioning through the neutral zone, some
individuals enter into new beginnings, adopting new centres of supra-ordinate value or
altering in their relationship to their past one. Fowler points out that not all individuals
move on to more mature stages of faith. Rather, some remain in a neutral zone and other
may regress in their understanding of life’s meaning.

These signs of transition are particularly valuable for this thesis research as they
allow me to identify changes in students’ spirituality/faith after their travels. It was not
the focus of this study to determine exactly what stage the students were at, rather my
investigation used Fowler’s indicators of transition to highlight changes in students’
current ways of making meaning. Essentially, this study is concerned primarily with
transition rather than development. The specific features of student experience will be
described in more detail in Chapter Four and Five.

**Adopting Fowler’s Definitions**

The use of the word faith, to describe the concept outlined above, was problematic
for the secular, university context in which my research took place. Although each
feature of Fowler’s definition was relevant, and I felt certain I was exploring the concept he termed faith, the term itself seemed detached from the student participants’ experiences. I chose, instead, when interviewing students to use the term spirituality. This term was understood by students as evidenced by their willingness to talk openly when spirituality was mentioned.

In documenting this research I use the terms faith and spirituality interchangeably as this study contributes to the growing body of research on college student spirituality. It is important to stress that I adopt the concept developed by Fowler - a relational, constitutive process - but occasionally label it under the term spirituality for relevance. I am not original or alone in my connection of Fowler’s work to the student development literature on spirituality. In Evans, et al. (2009), Student Development in College, Fowler is identified as one of two key contributors to understanding the spiritual development of college students as well as providing one of the few frameworks and methodologies with which to study spiritual change. In light of this it seems possible to adopt Fowler’s meaning for the concept he terms faith and link it to the term spirituality.

One obvious limitation exists in my choice to use Fowler’s concept synonymously with spirituality. In the current literature on college student development, spirituality is often defined loosely as the interior development of students (Astin & Astin, 2006; Chickering, et al., 2005). In comparison to Fowler’s rich conceptualization summarized above, such a definition falls short. Specifically, the definitions ascribed to the term spirituality lack the relational aspect illuminated by Fowler. In much of the college student literature, spirituality is a highly individual, interior concept and is frequently connected, reductionist-style, to the behavioural choices of individuals. In spite of this,
however, it seemed important for the documenting of this research to use the term spirituality to link this study to the greater body of knowledge on student spirituality found in the field of post-secondary education research.

Although I chose to use the terms faith and spirituality interchangeably, I only did so for my final written analysis, this thesis document. During the research project with the students I used the tri-term spirituality/faith/religion in questions such as: “How would you describe your spirituality/faith/religion?” (See Appendix E: Pre-travel Questionnaire) This reflected my constructivist style and awareness that students conceptualize their beliefs in diverse ways. In the information documents, questionnaire and interviews I strove to be as open as possible, allowing the students to describe and label their own beliefs. The use of the tri-term also proved essential to creating a space where all students felt the study related to them.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has presented the theoretical framework that guides this research project. Fowler’s presentation of the term faith as a relational, constitutive and universal phenomenon provides a working concept with which to approach the research questions. The above conceptualization also identifies the stages of faith, and transition indicators, that allowed me to tangibly determine whether study abroad contributes to students’ spiritual development. In the next chapter I outline the development of my specific research approach and tools used in this study, grounding them in the above theory.
Chapter Four

Developing, Testing and Using Research Tools:

My Methodology

“Faith is an extremely complex phenomenon to try to operationalize for empirical investigation. It has more dimensions than any one perspective can contain.”

(Fowler, 1986, p. 16)

In the previous chapter, I presented the work of Fowler and the faith development stages that provided the theoretical framework for this study. I grappled with the relationship between faith and formal religion, and connected Fowler’s work to the student spirituality literature. In this chapter, I present the methodological framework, tools and analytic process that allowed me to investigate the research questions driving this thesis. I begin by outlining the phenomenological nature of my thesis study and its focus on students’ unique experiences. Next, I detail the process by which I recruited, surveyed and interviewed student participants for this study. I then outline the process of analysis and conclude by stating the limitations of this study. Though this chapter may read like a dull list of official procedures, the actual process was anything but dull. I hope that between the lines of the following section one can see the lively meetings, dynamic pilot study and final interviews that grew into this research.

Methodological Framework

Phenomenology and social-constructivism.

Since the late 20th Century there has been an increased focus on studying “the student experience” in post-secondary education (Entwistle & Entwistle, 1991) Beginning in the USA and quickly coming to Canada, surveys of student engagement and
student-focused research have become accepted in the higher education field. My thesis research follows these traditions by examining students’ perceptions and experiences of studying in religiously diverse nations. However, in contrast to many wide-scale surveys exploring student experience, I approach my research as a qualitative, phenomenological study, seeking to understand from the inside how study abroad participants perceive and engage with their host countries’ religions (Creswell, 2009).

This study is suited to a phenomenological approach since only the student participants themselves have insight into their altered spirituality and cross-cultural perceptions. A statistical methodology that approached this topic from a reductionist lens would overlook the complexity that is evident as students ascribe unique meanings to their experiences. Each program examined in this study had no more than 22 students enrolled and a quantitative, statistical approach would not have had a significant sample. Rather, the nature of my study, the complexity of the participants’ experiences and the size of the sample were well-suited to a phenomenological approach.

Beyond merely being suited to the study, a phenomenological approach became necessary as my worldview became increasingly social-constructivist throughout my research planning. It quickly became evident as I reviewed the literature on study abroad that the subjective meanings attributed to study abroad encounters were historically and culturally negotiated. Understanding the historical and cultural context of participants’ meaning-making is essential for any study that examines the dynamic interplay between cultural groups. Furthermore, social-constructivism emphasizes complexity, not reductionism (Creswell, 2009). The complexity of student experiences that I had
observed in my professional work led me to embrace a qualitative, social-constructivist perspective for my current research.

Finally, the choice to conduct a qualitative, phenomenological study follows the work of Fowler who, as outlined in the previous chapter, based his theory of faith development on hundreds of qualitative, phenomenological interviews. As I have adopted Fowler’s conceptualization of faith, it seemed fitting to follow his methodological tradition of exploring individual spiritual journeys through in depth, semi-structured interviews (Fowler, 2004).

**Developmental mixed methods.**

Although the phenomenology of this study is evident, it should be noted that the starting point for my data collection was based in a developmental mixed methods approach, with both qualitative and quantitative research tools. In line with Greene’s (1989) notion of developmental mixed methods, the quantitative data gained by the initial questionnaire was used to inform both the student recruitment for the interview phases and the design of the interview questions. A larger portion of the study was devoted to qualitative methods, but it is important to acknowledge the foundational data collected on the questionnaire.

**Data Collection**

**The pilot**

In February 2010, I received ethics approval from the Ethics Review Board at the university I attend to recruit students and conduct this study on their campus (See Appendix A: Ethics Approval Letter). Having leapt this hurdle I then tested the research tools, including a mixed-survey and interview questions, with a group of seven, fourth
year undergraduate students and one staff member at the participating university’s suburban campus. The participants for this pilot focus group were chosen and invited by two administrators for international student programs. The pilot was 1.5 hours long and took part in three phases. During the first phase, the students were asked to complete the questionnaire at face value without a critical lens. I timed the students’ completion of the questionnaire and was available to answer their initial questions during this phase. The students took an average of 12 minutes to complete the survey and three had questions about the use of the words *ethnicity* and *religion*.

During the second phase of the pilot research, the students were asked to revisit the questionnaire, again individually, this time to critically evaluate and edit the questions they had just completed. Several students again made notes about the use of the word *religion*. Students were also invited to add in questions they thought were missing and suggested I add a question determining where students stayed while traveling in other countries in order to differentiate between previous travel for tourism or education. The students also indicated that more detail should be required in the demographic section of the survey. To accommodate this, I added questions requiring information about academic programs, age of arrival in Canada as well as separating out nationality and race/ethnic background, (See Appendix E: Study Abroad Questionnaire)

The final phase of the pilot study was an open focus group during which students were asked to share and discuss their comments with myself and the group. The group discussion of terminology was influential in my decision to use the tri-term *religion/faith/spirituality* in the final questionnaire. The pilot study students were unable to agree upon which of those terms to include but seemed to want them all represented.
As I discussed in the last chapter the use of the tri-term proved invaluable and allowed me to capture a wide range of beliefs. The pilot study students also suggested that the identity circles be kept in the questionnaire, but moved to final page in order to be less cumbersome (See Appendix E: Study Abroad Questionnaire). This suggestion proved to be important during my administration of the survey as students who were more engaged in the survey would complete the identity circles while those who were not, had the option of leaving them blank, but still completed the core components of the survey.

The responses of the students who participated in the pilot research were not included in the data analysis as they were not students involved in the three programs that I evaluated. The pilot students were, however, compensated for their time with the provision of lunch and homemade cookies.

**Participants: Three programs in three regions**

In order to investigate the research questions, data was collected from students participating in a study abroad program administered by a large college at one of Canada’s urban universities. The college offers month long, summer, study opportunities in thirteen nations. Student traveling to three of the college program destinations were invited to participate in the study:

**Kenya.**

Length of study: 5 weeks  
Program of study: Peace and Conflict 
Location(s): Nairobi, Masailand, Mombasa

**Ecuador.**

Length of study: 4 weeks
Program of study: Environmental Science
Location(s): Quito, Biodiversity Centre, Galapagos Islands
Details:

**Jordan.**

Length of study: 6 weeks
Program of study: Archaeology
Location(s): Tel Madaba Dig

These three programs were chosen because they represent the new model of short-term, program-based study abroad programs that are increasing in number at North American universities. Furthermore each of these programs took students to a developing nation in a different region of the world providing a convenient and relevant sample with which to address this study’s research questions.

**Recruitment**

Permission to recruit students from the above programs was granted by the program director at the organizing college (See Appendix C: Participating College Consent Form). The administrative coordinator for each program then sent students an invitation letter on my behalf informing them of the questionnaire and interview segments of the research (See Appendix D: Student Recruitment Email). All students participating in the three programs during summer 2010 were sent an email invitation to participate. One student who received the invitation email was already out of country for the summer and requested an e-copy of the questionnaire, which I provided. She then completed the survey in MS Word format and returned it via email. Several students from the Kenya and Jordan program responded directly to me after receiving the
invitation email and requested to be part of the interview section. I did not, however, invite specific students to participate in interviews until after I had received their questionnaires as it was important for the interviewees to be representative of the beliefs of the greater group.

**Data Collection**

The data collection had three phases. During the first phase, students completed questionnaires at the pre-departure orientation. The second phase involved pre-departure, semi-structured interviews with a select group of students from each program. The final phase was a follow-up interview conducted within one month of the students’ return from their travels. Students’ were compensated for their participation in the study with a certificate to a local coffee shop.

Each of the programs in this study offered an orientation session for the participating student 2-3 weeks before their departure. The program director allowed me 15 minutes at the conclusion of each orientation session to explain my research project to the students and distribute questionnaires to willing participants. Students had been prepared for my involvement at their orientation by the aforementioned invitation email. After I provided an overview of the study, students who did not wish to participate were able to leave the room. The students that remained, completed their questionnaires in the orientation room and returned them to me before they left for the day. The students that completed the questionnaires were able to indicate their interest in participating in a follow-up interview.

A select group of students was chosen from each program to participate in pre-departure and post-travel interviews. Of the pre-departure interviews, 13 were held at in
a seminar room in a separate department of the university, as the majority of students lived near the campus. The remaining two interviews were held via Skype, as the students were located outside of the city. During the post-travel interviews 10 occurred in person, nine at the university and one in the north end of the city at a coffee shop. The remaining five interviews were conducted via Skype as many of the students had returned home for their summer holidays.

**Proportional Representation**

One function of the pre-departure questionnaires was to assess the diversity in beliefs of the students traveling to each destination. Based on the demographic and spiritual information provided in the questionnaire, the students that participated in the interviews represented the overall make-up of the study group. For each program, more students volunteered for interviews than I had space to accommodate, providing me with choice in my selection of interviewees.

**Research Instrument**

**Questionnaire.**

The research survey tool, having been refined during the pilot study, had six, page-long sections: consent, follow-up contact information, demographic information, previous travel experience, spirituality, and primary identities. In the first section students were informed of the study, introduced to me as the researcher and were asked to provide written consent if they agreed to participate in the survey. The second section was particularly important for the overall study process as it was in this section that the students indicated their interest in participating in the interviews. The bulk of my collected data, relevant to this study, began on the third page as students entered their
demographic information and past travel experience. (See Appendix E: Study Abroad Questionnaire)

The fourth section of the questionnaire, beginning on page four, was my construction and allowed students to describe their spirituality/faith/religion by responding to open ended questions. This was followed, in questions 9 through 11, by three charts borrowed from Astin and Astin’s (2005) College Student Beliefs and Values Survey (CSBV). The three questions addressed students’ perspectives on existential matters, their own spiritual practices and factors that have influenced their spirituality. These questions allowed the students to self-select from predetermined answers, providing me with details that were helpful in the follow-up interviews. The final section of the survey focused on identities and was adapted from Goodereau’s (2009) Equity Flower and enabled students to visually represent the identities that were valuable to them. The final section was considered the most cumbersome in the pilot study and four students from the Jordan program left it completely blank. In the end, I did not analyse this data for the group, but only used it to design relevant questions for the students participating in follow-up interviews.

**Questionnaire language.**

During the duration of this research, people initially often located themselves outside the study based on the language that was used. For instance, several students asked if they still qualified to participate in the study even if they were not religious. In order to capture a full range of students’ perspectives, and to ensure that students thought broadly about their personal beliefs, I chose, throughout the survey, to use the tri-term
spirituality/faith/religion. The use of this term supported my constructivist position, allowing students define and present their experiences through their own interpretation.

**Interviews.**

The student interviews were constructed based around the core research questions and tailored to each student using information provided on their survey. During the pre-departure interview, I sought the views of the students on five main topics:

1. Core values
2. Ultimate Goal/Purpose
3. Experience with formal religion
4. Dealing with conflict/multiple views
5. Importance of Study Abroad

I began by asking each student to describe their core values and what they saw as their ultimate goal in life. From there, I asked them to locate their anticipated travel, whether they perceived it contributing to their ultimate goal. I allowed students to branch off and discuss other ideas that they felt were connected, before moving on to talk about their experiences with formal religion. This section, on religious/faith/spiritual beliefs, differed in length depending on students, as some had significantly more to say than others. Finally, I asked them about their past travel experience and their perceived value of studying abroad. (See Appendix F: Pre-travel Interview Guide)

The post-travel interview was often shorter in time than the pre-departure conversation. I began the interview by asking for three examples of positive and negative experiences on the trip so I could get a sense of their overall experience. I then asked the students to recount critical conversations with their peers, professors and local people.
Following this I asked them if the dominant religion was visible and if they believed anything different about the world since returning home. (See Appendix G: Post-travel Interview Guide).

**Analysis and Validation**

In keeping with the predominantly qualitative, phenomenological nature of this study, I approached my analysis of the interview data using Creswell’s (2009) four steps:

1. Identify statements that relate to the topic.
2. Group statements into meaning units.
4. Construct a composite.

During the coding segment of my analysis I followed, in detail, Tesch’s (As cited in Creswell, 2009) eight steps of categorization beginning with carefully reading all the transcriptions, then sorting emerging themes while continually reworking topic categories. Tesch’s process was particularly helpful and provided tangible steps with which to systematically sort my data. During my coding, I created diagrams of the topics, linking related themes in order to determine the order in which the data should be presented. The interview analysis was approached using Fowler’s theoretical framework outlined in Chapter Three. Specifically, students’ pre-travel and post-travel interviews were examined for the three features of transition outlined by Fowler: endings, neutrality and new beginnings. These three categories are outlined in further detail in Chapter Five. In order to ensure the validity of my study I approached my thesis supervisor in order to triangulate my findings and provide a second perspective on my interpretation.
Scope

This thesis research focused entirely on the students participating in the study abroad programs. They were, of course, not the only participants involved in these programs and were joined abroad by professors and program administrators. They also interacted with local people, guest speakers and hospitality staff within their country of destination. Although each of these groups of individuals most likely observed students during their studies I chose to focus exclusively on the students’ experiences as described by themselves.

Limitations

Without question the largest limitation to both the relevance and depth of this study was time constraint. The majority of the study was designed, conducted and documented from January – December 2010. Changes in students’ spirituality cannot be fully understood by examining the change during only two points of time as this study did. Further follow-up research would greatly enhance this study and solidify the relationship between study abroad and spiritual development. To accommodate for this restraint I limited the analysis of students’ experiences, focusing on whether some change or transition occurred rather than attempting to identify specific stages. This time limit was the natural result of this thesis being prepared for my master’s program and was unavoidable.

Another possible limitation was the use of Skype for some of the students’ interviews. I observed that the Skype interviews were often shorter and less in depth than other interviews. Students seemed to feel less comfortable talking out their answers at length and responded in what could be described as soundbytes – short contained
sentences with little elaboration. Had all the interviews been conducted in the same manner this would not be considered a limitation but since there was variation between the interviews, this may have had an impact of the depth of information I gained from certain students.

One possible limitation that can be inferred from the student quotes in the first chapter was that students may have been more aware of religious or spiritual issues due to the pre-travel interview (See page 6). While this should be noted, it is a natural element of many qualitative studies that the process of interviewing itself is often developmental or constitutive and it did not present a significant concern in this study (Creswell, 2009).

**Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the methods and tools used to collect and analyse data in this research. It is the final chapter in the pre-results section of this thesis document. In the following three chapters the findings of the study are presented and analysed. Chapter Five presents as picture of the students’ spirituality before they travel abroad, Chapter Six describes the students’ interactions with the host countries formal religions and Chapter Seven identifies the spiritual development of certain students throughout the study abroad program. Each of these chapters addresses a separate component of the research questions and offers a fuller picture of how the students experience spiritual development on short-term study in developing nations.
Chapter Five

Identifying Students’ Spirituality

“You know, there are supposed to be these fundamental truths about religion that people are supposed to follow and it was just so clear to me that they weren’t following any of the truths they were just following rituals and traditions and it was all pretty meaningless.” (K 1)

There is nothing static about spirituality. Around the world, new spiritual expressions are mixing with traditional beliefs in a constant process of reinvention. Within Canada students with seemingly homogenous upbringings identify their spirituality and see it develop in unique ways. Throughout this thesis the student participants were extremely willing to talk about their spirituality. Their personal narratives, told during pre-travel interviews were particularly helpful in understanding their spiritual journeys up until the point they traveled abroad. As the students recounted stories of dissonance and new beginnings, a picture of their spirituality emerged that is outlined in the chapter below and described in the students’ own words.

Up to this point, the chapters of this thesis have introduced, situated and framed the present study. In the last chapter I outlined the methods used to gather and analyse data in this study. I established the need for a qualitative, phenomenological study that allowed students to construct their own meanings through interviews. I then described the construction of this study’s research tools. The chapter concluded with the study’s limitations.

In this present chapter I analyse the results of the questionnaire and the pre-travel interviews to describe students’ spirituality or what Fowler terms faith. First, I present the overall response rates for the student questionnaire. Second, I describe how students
perceive their spirituality, presenting quotes from the questionnaire and pre-travel interviews. Third, I outline key themes of dissonance and new beginnings in students’ narratives from the pre-travel interviews. Specifically, students’ relationships with formal religion are examined by highlighting features of several students’ spiritual journeys. Finally, the last section attempts to identify student’s Centres of Supra-ordinate Value, the unifying narrative that gives meaning to their ultimate environment, concisely known as their spirituality. Both students’ academic field of study and their core values are shown to be influential in conceptualizing students’ forms spirituality. This chapter begins to address the sub-question:

1. How do students define and identify their sense of spiritual self before... they study abroad?

As I present these results I occasionally refer to the number of students who hold a specific viewpoint or share a similar response in their interviews. By using numbers I am in no way suggesting that my students’ responses are in some way statistically significant. Rather, because of the phenomenological nature of this study, a divergence of views is expected and when, in contrast, repeated similarities are encountered, they are noteworthy.

**Overall Response Rates**

The questionnaire was the main source for understanding group trends and choosing representative participants for the interview phase of this study. The questionnaire responses revealed that the students who participated in the three programs had diverse experiences with spirituality and a range of relationships with formal religion. The response rates for the questionnaire were high as a proportion of the total number of
students traveling abroad. This was because the questionnaire was administered in person at the pre-departure orientation and students were encouraged to complete it before leaving the session. A total of 45/61 or 73.7% of students participating in the study abroad programs completed the questionnaire.

Students were very eager to participate in the interview phase of the research. In each program more than five students, my target number, volunteered to be interviewed. This allowed me to choose my participants from those who were willing. All the students who were invited to participate in the pre-travel interviews chose to join in post-travel interviews resulting in an interview completion rate of 100%. Table 1 shows the distribution of questionnaires and interview’s by program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Questionnaires</th>
<th>Pre-Travel Interviews</th>
<th>Post-Travel Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1: Participation by program*

**Demographic Information**

In the first section of the questionnaire students were asked about their age, year of study, gender, nationality and ethnic background. Some variation was seen in age and ethnic background, but the majority of participating students were white Canadians in their early twenties. The following tables show the exact division of students according to their demographic identifiers.
Table 2: Age of student participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>18-21yrs</th>
<th>22-25 yrs</th>
<th>26-30 yrs</th>
<th>31+ yrs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Gender of student participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Ethnicity/Cultural Background/ Race of student participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Caucasian-European</th>
<th>African</th>
<th>African + other</th>
<th>Korean</th>
<th>Chinese/ Tawainese</th>
<th>East Indian</th>
<th>Caribbean/ Native American</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Nationality of student participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Canadian</th>
<th>Dual Canada+</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1 (Barbados)</td>
<td>4 (2 Korea; 2 USA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1 (Argentina)</td>
<td>1 (USA/German)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (Somali)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Academic Program

Each group of students took one course while traveling: Kenya offered Peace and Conflict Studies, Ecuador offered Environmental Studies and Jordan offered Archaeological Sciences. The majority of students were in academic programs directly related to their study abroad course offering. During the follow-up interviews it became clear that for some of the students, their academic identity was influential in their way of making meaning of their experiences and ordering their ultimate environment. This will be discussed in more detail in the final section of this chapter. The curriculum of the
study abroad program and the students’ academic discipline also influenced how much students interacted with, and perceived their host country’s religions. This connection is outlined in Chapter Six. Tables 6-8 show the academic majors of the participating students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of students</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6: Kenya Students by Academic Major**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Environmental Subject (Env Sci, Forestry, etc)</th>
<th>Neuro-science</th>
<th>Political Science/Film/ Journalism/</th>
<th>History</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of students</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 7: Ecuador Students by Academic Major**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Anthro/ Archeology</th>
<th>Near &amp; MidEast Civilizations</th>
<th>English/Econ / Politics</th>
<th>Sciences</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of students</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 8: Jordan Students by Academic Major**

The above tables provide a picture of the various students who participated in the international study programs traveling to Kenya, Ecuador and Jordan in the summer of 2010. Similar trends of cultural and academic diversity were seen between each program. The only exception is seen in the category of race/culture/ethnic background in which the students traveling to Kenya are a more diverse group. For age, gender and academic major, the trends are similar across each program. When choosing participants for the follow-up interviews I wished to have diversity in the areas that were evident amongst students. I chose to have one male interviewee for each program as well as one student whose academic major was in a separate subject. However, I only chose to interview students under 25 years of age so that the interview questions would align with Fowler’s description of faith transitions in early adulthood. While I am not suggesting that these
demographics be used as control variables in this study, I did use them to choose a sample of interviewees reflective of the diversity trends of the whole group.

**Individual Description of Spirituality: Self-Selection**

After students completed general demographic and study abroad location information, the fifth page of the survey began a series of questions designed to allow students to describe their spiritual sense of self (See Appendix E: Study Abroad Questionnaire). In the first question I provided students with a range of terms from which to self-select. The terms were listed as follows: *secular, agnostic, spiritual, atheist, searching, religious, faith* and *other*. Students were encouraged to select as many terms as they felt described them. For students from each of the programs the most frequently selected terms were *agnostic* and *spiritual*, followed by *atheist* and *secular*, although *secular* was often combined with another term. Table 9 shows the number of times each term was selected, accounting for the terms that were chosen multiple times.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Times Selected</th>
<th>Secular</th>
<th>Agnostic</th>
<th>Spiritual</th>
<th>Atheist</th>
<th>Searching</th>
<th>Religious</th>
<th>Faith</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single answer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple answer</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Times Selected</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 9: Self-selection responses*

It should be noted that the terms *religious, faith* and *searching* were only chosen by a few students. Though this thesis provides an in depth exploration of students’ relationship to formal religion I do not attempt to uncover why so few students consider themselves *searching*. Future research would be helpful in understanding whether university-aged students feel settled in their beliefs or are still searching for alternate ways of understanding their ultimate environment.
Agnostic

Following the self-selection segment of the questionnaire I asked students the open-ended question: How do you describe your spirituality/faith/religion? This question allowed students to tell me in their own words how they defined their beliefs and elaborate on the above selections. The answers to this question showed that there was diverse range of specific beliefs among the students and very few hold strictly to prescribed formal beliefs or religions. It also became evident that students ascribe individual meaning to certain words.

The term agnostic was the term most frequently selected by students in this section. However, when asked to elaborate on their beliefs, it was evident that the term had different meanings for different students. Below are listed five of the answers given by students who selected only agnostic to the follow-up question, How do you describe your spirituality/faith/religion?

“Not strong.”

“I really do not know what I feel, being in science I have come to have a hard time believing a God exists due to the lack of proof but I think I still do believe there is some kind of God.”

“Not religious.”

“I am a religious studies student so I believe I look at religion in an academic way.”

“I was atheist for many years and recently decided to consider myself agnostic, not because I'm leaning towards a specific faith or religion but because I'm not 100% sure greater forces don't exist.”
The above quotes show that although these students may use a common word to describe themselves, their subsequent explanation of that word has huge variance. The final quote aligns most closely with the commonly used definition of *agnostic* while the other students are reacting to the word *religion* rather than describing the word *agnostic*. At the same time, while these students do not have a concrete set of beliefs that they adhere to, they still do not consider themselves spiritual searchers. They are established in their position as *agnostic* and, as the interviews illuminated, are not actively searching for new ways of meaning making.

Fowler’s (1981) concept of *faith*, as a way of ordering one’s ultimate environment, is helpful in understanding the 13 students who selected *agnostic* as their sole answer. These students, though seemingly aspiritual, still have a tacit, unarticulated spirituality that provides a unifying value to life’s big picture. The final section of this chapter seeks to establish what those values are through analysis of the pre-travel interviews.

**Spiritual**

The diversity of opinions, seen among the student quotes above regarding the term agnostic, was also present in the responses of students who selected *spirituality* as their descriptive term in the pre-travel questionnaire. Many of the students that chose the term spirituality also defined it uniquely and a degree of uncertainty is evident in the responses below:

“‘It’s a new-found spiritual side that I'm trying to explore.’”

“Complicated, but deep.”

“Open and includes a variety of components of different faiths.”
“No structure or beliefs or rituals; I don't deny any religions; I prefer values such as harmony with nature, karma.”

There does not seem, at first glance, to be a cohesive or overarching understanding of spirituality in the above quotes. On the contrary, these students seem to be saying that they have something spiritual about them but it cannot be articulated or quantified. By selecting key words in the quotes above one begins to see that the students’ spirituality is exploratory, complicated, varied and structure-free. I do not put this forward as a concrete definition but rather as a way of listening to the students’ meanings in order to conceptualize their spirituality.

Atheist

Several of the students selected the term atheist as their descriptor in the first question. Their responses to the open-ended question express a definite belief that there is no higher power or that religion/spirituality/faith was not a priority to the students. The following statements are selections from the responses of students who made the single choice of atheist for their answer.

"Non-existent/ I have none.”

“I tend to put my faith in science.”

“I do not believe in any higher power or the concept of souls.”

“I am an atheist, I would say I am mostly influence by science and evolution.”

“I was raised Muslim in a very Christian part of <Canadian Province>. I have explored various religions, but ultimately have found that I am atheist.”
There is little ambiguity in the responses of the above students. In contrast to both the agnostic and spiritual students, there seems to be a cohesive self identify for the students’ who consider themselves atheists.

Each of the three main terms outlined above, agnostic, spiritual and atheist, are helpful in understanding how the students traveling abroad describe and understand their spirituality. For these three main groups of students, their open-ended responses suggest that there is a progressive amount of certainty as students move away from spiritual beliefs. On one side of the spectrum are the students who see themselves as spiritual yet do not ascribe to a specific definition. In the middle are the agnostic students who come closer to a cohesive definition for their selected term but believe spirituality is unattainable. Finally there are the atheist students who have closed the door to existential matters but can clearly articulate their position. Figure 2 plots the spectrum of student beliefs from fluid to fixed concepts. This understanding sets the stage for the exploration of individual journeys and personal change in Chapter Seven.

**Figure 2: Fluidity of identifying terms**

**Identifying Transitions: Dissonance and Formal Religion**

The central question of this study asks how students’ develop spiritually through studying abroad. To answer this question it is essential to establish how students have changed spiritually in the past, what caused those changes and where they are spirituality before studying abroad. In Chapter Three, Fowler’s (1981) description of faith
transitions is outlined. Fowler shows that individuals go through times of transition when their previous ways of making meaning are inadequate to deal with certain experiences. The realization of this inadequacy is dissonance. When dissonance is encountered it may lead to an ending of the current way of making meaning of one’s ultimate environment. Following the ending, individuals enter a neutral zone where they explore new options. Finally they emerge from the transition with new ways of ordering their existence, or new beginnings. Fowler suggests not all individuals necessarily progress to more mature stages, nor is there a guarantee that they will reach new beginnings. In analysing the pre-travel interviews of students participating in this study, I was searching for evidence of dissonance, endings, neutrality and new beginning in their stories of the past. Without question the strongest evidence of dissonance and a subsequent ending occurred for students who had had a break with the formal religion of their childhood. These breaks led some of the students into new ways of making meaning, though as the narratives below reveal other students were still in a holding pattern.

“I’m not religious”: Reactionary Definitions.

Throughout this study, particularly during my personal interaction with the students and program staff, I often heard comments such as, “I’m not religious, but I’d like to be part of your study.” In response to this comment, I would explain that I needed a variety of views and invite the students to participate. The questionnaire and interview responses also saw students reacting to the word religion. Although, when inviting students to describe their beliefs, I used the tri-term spirituality/faith/religion, more students reacted to religion than any other term. On a related note, none of the students
used, or reacted, to the term faith in their responses. Responses such as the following were common:

“Not religious.”

“My feelings of spirituality are not directly connected to religion but I definitely connect with the spiritual experiences that arise from religious rituals of all kinds.”

“I'm not very religious.”

“I pray, but I am not that religious.”

“I would say that I am spiritual but I do not, however, say that I am a religious person.”

The above reactions led me to investigate students’ past and present relationships to formal religion in order to understand more fully how students define their spirituality. I found that secularization was a common theme, with a third of the students having broken with their religious upbringing at some point in time. For the students who had moved away from religion, their stories involved disillusionment with perceptions of hypocrisy or irrationality in the religious tradition to which they belonged. Even students who currently practice a religion were hesitant in their relationship with formal religion and did not like the term religious. The themes that emerged in the pre-travel interviews are outlined below.

Secularization: A break with religion

In order to understand students’ reactions to the term religion I explored how they had related to formal religion throughout their lives. Though a small number of students identified with formal religion, that was not the case for the majority. For 11 students, it was an unfamiliar concept, one with which they had no real experience. For 18 others, as
follow-up interviews revealed, religion was a concept they no longer wished to be associated with.

Students from Christian, Buddhist, and Muslim backgrounds, had experienced moving away from a formal religion. By contrast, two of the students who participated in interviews identified as Jewish and although both indicated that they had never been pushed to believe in God as children, both identified with the religion on a cultural level and observed holidays. Hence for these two student there was no dramatic movement away from belief as no belief in God has been previously held.

**Irrational and Hypocritical: Leaving religion**

The pre-travel interviews provided detailed insight into why some students had a major transition away from religion. Of the 15 interviewees, eight had moved away from their religious upbringing. The reason given by the students fell into two distinct categories. For six of the students they had seen something that they felt was contradictory or hypocritical in the way their religion was practiced, for the others a journey of exploration lead them gradually away. The following three quotes provide insight into the movement away from religion for students from the former group:

K1 “When I was 17 ... each church [decided] - do we vote to include homosexuals in our community or do we not. So I went to the church forum, they held like three of them... So I went and I listened to them and I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. And my town is very racist and very homophobic and based on that I couldn’t believe it and believe this community and these values. You know, there are supposed to be the fundamental truths about religion that people are supposed to follow and it was just so clear to me that they weren’t following any of the truths they were just following rituals and traditions and it was all pretty meaningless.”
K6 “One of the personal issues I have with my family is that we’re not doing so well financially....I see a lot of people who believe in religion tend to depend a lot on this notion of faith and from my observation in middle school I tend to think that is a bit absurd to believe on a higher power for your financial situation... They tend to go to temple and if you want to do a wish you have to donate. And the more you donate the more your chance of your wish coming true... and honestly I don’t really see what religion’s done for me.”

J5 “I remember one day thinking why do we have to dress up for church? Why do we have to wear a dress or heels and a hat? Where in the bible does it say we have to dress up? Isn’t God loving and not judgemental about what we wear? Won’t he accept us for who we are? What makes us different than the homeless person who is wearing rags and comes into the church? So what I did was one day I went to church on my own and I wore jeans and t-shirt... and the old...ladies came and were like ‘why aren’t you dressed up?’”

Each of the above students could pinpoint the specific events that made them question formal religion. They perceived the community as hypocritical or irrational and spoke about the situations with emotion. For the other two students being interviewed, they went through an exploratory time of other religions before they decided to distance themselves from formal religion altogether. This quote from one of the students traveling to Jordan shows a particularly complex journey:

J2 “I became really religious when I was twelve-ish. Like, I was praying 5 times a day I was doing all the very Muslim things to do. [Then] I started picking and choosing ... take what I want and
leave what I don’t like. And then it became apparent that if there are some things that I don’t like then maybe there’s something wrong with the whole religion. And then I started to explore other religions. And the first one that I came upon which I’m sure a lot of teens do at that age was Wicca. I think maybe it was our way of exploring something completely different; maybe something that our parents wouldn’t like too much... I was interested in different ways of life more than anything. I was interested in Buddhism for a while... I read about Judaism … but I think I was more disillusioned with the idea of God, so I … left the mainstream religions behind.”

The above quotes are powerful narratives of students’ journeys away from formal religious. Words such as *meaningless* or *disillusionment* reveal that a significant break has occurred. These terms indicate that there has been a transition, for the students, in line with Fowler’s stages of faith. Although the focus of this thesis is to identify change, not necessarily specific stages, the above quotes suggest that students were launched into the transitional phase between Stage 2: Mythic-Literal faith and Stage 3: Synthetic-Conventional faith. According to Fowler the transition between those stages is often signalled by “disillusionment with previous teachers and teachings [and] conflicts between authoritative stories.” (Fowler as quoted in Wolski Conn, 1986, p. 226). It is clear that the students have had such experiences. They have become disillusioned with religious communities and question the anti-homosexual, financial and traditional religious practices they encountered.

In keeping with Fowler’s transitional model it is important to ask how the above students re-oriented their meaning-making after becoming disillusioned with religion. For the majority of students, no articulated or formal system of beliefs replaced religion
in their lives as an organizing force. Rather, as the last section of this chapter outlines in more detail, the students have “a more or less consistent clustering of values and beliefs, but [they have] not objectified it for examination and in a sense [are] unaware of having it.” (Fowler as quoted in Wolski Conn, 1986, p 226).

While six of students did not articulate a new unifying value that ordered their lives, two of them did indicate that they had embraced new ideologies encountered in their readings of various philosophical works.

E4 “Through what I’ve read, what it triggered is this greater faith and understanding that all things that happen are from man’s own decision at least this is the way I perceive it ... a more humanist outlook. I’m not at all closed or rejecting of reading religious texts because it is arguably part of philosophy.”

K1 “I guess like it goes with Gandhi... I started reading Gandhi when I was like 12, which is super young. He has a bunch of beliefs about spirituality and what he thinks religion is and he really thinks religion is searching for truth. And he had a very spiritualized approach to religion. Spiritualize politics, don’t politicize religion. I really, really believe that.”

For both of these students their reading of philosophical thinkers was helping to re-orient their lives.

Overall, eight of the students I interviewed had similar stories of secularization. The above results are reflective of the trend toward secularization in many post-industrial, developed nations outlined in the World Values Survey (Norris & Inglehart, 2004). The majority of students participating in the study were agnostic or atheist and because of this the study abroad programs in question were indeed contributing to the interaction of
diverse worldviews. The students were traveling to nations in which there is a high participation in formal religion and the above results lend importance to the research questions and general query of what occurs when secular students travel to religious, developing nations. The specific interactions of students with the host country’s religions are outlined in Chapter Six.

**Practicing, but not religious: Individuality and a lack of judgement**

Not all students involved in this study had moved away from their religious upbringing. There were 11 students who indicated on their questionnaire that they presently practiced a religion. However, although these students selected yes when asked if they currently practice a formal religion, only 6 selected the term *religious* as describing themselves. Furthermore, 5 of those 6, selected other terms to combine with religious – such as *spiritual* or *faith*.

This range of responses suggests that students desired to maintain some individuality in their subscription to religion. The following comments are supportive of this suggestion:

“I’m catholic and go to church every Sunday because I get a sense of comfort and relief, but I wouldn’t call myself religious.”

“[I practice] Christianity – but not according to what most understand it to be.”

“Spiritual based religious doctrine – extremely integrated into my daily life.”

Of the two students who participated in the pre-travel interviews, two described themselves as religious. Both students fell on the spectrum of Christianity but for each, being formally religious by no means meant subscribing to the beliefs of a specific
doctrine. The first student stated her frustration with the hypocrisy that she too saw in religion. She emphasized that she did not wish to be associated with all things Christian:

K4 “I think most people have a really bad view of Christianity - hypocritical, judgemental ...I just don’t want to be associated with that.. [But] there’s a different vein where it’s more about living a certain way than judging others.”

The second student was not as concerned about labels and did not hold exclusively to Christianity as the only option.

K3 “I go to church for several reasons. One is because I just like the feeling, I feel like I’m safe, it’s really comfortable... I feel like I can talk to someone, um, I would say God. That’s where I say I’m not religious. I go to Catholic Church so I say Jesus Christ, but it doesn’t have to be Jesus Christ. I go to Catholic Church because I used to from before. If I were something else I would stick to that as well. I don’t have to be a Roman Catholic. So I go and it’s like self-reflection... I wouldn’t name the person or the entity. I talk to someone who has a bigger power, who can listen to me endlessly without judging me.“

A similar theme in both the narratives of the students who had left religion and the narratives of the students that had remained, albeit keeping their distance from labels and formality, was the reference to the concept of judgement. This was not a term I had introduced in either the questionnaire or the interviews, and yet in most of the responses this notion had a determining effect either for or against formal religion. One student quoted above (J5) said challengingly, “Isn’t God loving and not judgemental?” but clearly found that the people who represented her religion were judging her. The students who had maintained their religious beliefs experienced just the opposite. One associated
with a different way of Christianity that does not judge others, while the second student valued prayer because God won’t judge her.

**Religious belief as a new beginning**

The two students who indicated that they practiced a formal religion had both experienced a transition of faith-stages that resulted from dissonance in their experiences just as their peers had. However, for these students the new beginning they encountered re-oriented their lives around certain religious traditions, albeit while maintaining their individuality. For both students the event that sparked their dissonance involved their parents. Both students had grown stronger in their religious beliefs through challenging family situations: the death of a parent for one and, for the other, the divorce of her parents. Previous to these events, the students indicated that they did not take their religion seriously. The challenges in life, however, had launched them into a transitional phase with religion being the outcome or new beginning that Fowler identifies as the start of the next phase.

For all the students I interviewed who recounted stories of dissonance in their beliefs, their stories related in some way to formal religion. For eight students it meant a move away from religion after seeing contradictions they could not reconcile, while for two others they found religion as the resolution to dissonance caused during challenging life experiences. Each of these students’ narratives aligns with Fowler’s (1981) theory that individuals develop in their way of structuring their ultimate environment throughout life. For the students quoted above, their stories of spiritual change are defined by their relationship to formal religion.
Identifying Centres of Supra-Ordinate Value

Science

The above section shows the spiritual dissonance and new beginnings of students who related in some way to formal religion. These students moved toward or away from religion in some identifiable manner. Because of this, their transitions between faith stages are easily illuminated. In contrast, the five remaining students that were interviewed had received no formal upbringing in religion. If Fowler’s claim about the universality of faith is to be embraced, one should be able to view these students’ experiences through the lens of faith development, identifying their ways of ordering their ultimate environment.

Of the five students who had not grown up in a religious context, four pointed to science as the value centre that organizes their ultimate environment. The following quote from one student traveling to Jordan indicates a scientific view of the world that was reflected in other students’ interviews as well:

J4 “[Religion]’s not important in my life at all. As a child, actually, my dad told me a fairytale version of evolution. [Religion] never really came up…

“Well my grandfather passed away while I was seven. Once again it was all explained in terms of science. He had lung cancer – when I was seven I sort of had a rough grasp on it – but it was never eased using religion.”

This student had been given the unifying value of science by her parents with which to organize her life’s bigger picture. She indicates that she was satisfied with the scientific answers her parents presented to her existential questions about the origins of
the world and death. There was no suggestion in her interviews that she had, at any point experienced dissonance in her scientific beliefs.

For three of the students traveling to Ecuador, it was the specific subject of Environmental Science that provided the Supra-ordinate Value Centre in their life. One student referred to the importance of working together with nature in order to make the world a better place. That value was embedded in her scientific outlook and influenced her bigger goal in life of contributing to environmental restoration:

E1 “Because I am so environmentally inclined I feel that I have to...work toward shifting back to what it should be, how we should be living with our resources...That’s part of respecting how evolution did its thing and not working against it.”

The unifying value of Environmental Science, as expressed by these students, has all the elements of a Centre of Supra-ordinate Value (Fowler, 1981). Environmental Science allows students to understand their place in the world in relation to nature, their work and other people. I suggest that Environmental Science is their Supra-ordinate Value, not merely one of many competing values, because it establishes their relationship to all other people on earth, not merely a specific subset. Furthermore, the students draw from this value a sense of vocation or life-calling (Fowler, 1996). The students have a unifying narrative that gives them the imperative to work toward a sustainable world.

A clear picture of Fowler’s relational faith triangle can be drawn from the way these students described their commitment to the environment. These students indeed are part of the complex dynamic of faith stages, with the organizing narrative of science giving value and meaning to their lives. Figure 3 shows the faith triangle that defines these students’ lives
Figure 3: Science as Centre of Supra-ordinate Value

It may appear at first glance that these students have a CSV but are not developing along faith stages, as their narratives have little indication of dissonance. However, Chapter Seven offers an in depth examination of one students’ story and shows that while her CSV does not change, her commitment to it is strengthened through studying in Ecuador.

Other Fields of Study

Each of the students referred to above was pursuing a scientific major in their university studies. The organizing of their ultimate environment, therefore, factored into all aspects of their lives: home life, personal beliefs and vocation. This was also seen for several other students whose ways of making meaning of the world were directly linked with their academic field of study. Students were very quick to identify themselves with their major and link the things they are learning at university to their lived experiences. For one anthropology student, the concept of understanding others’ beliefs was learned in his university class. The following answer is in response to a question about how he will adapt to Jordan:

J1 “I encounter a lot of [different opinions] at work. I would just be respectful of their priorities, what they view as important. I wouldn’t try to change their views. I guess that’s something we
learn in anthropology. I try to be respectful of everybody’s priorities and decisions.”

This student is using what he has learned in anthropology, his academic major, to order his interactions with who do not share his understanding of the world. The ability to look beyond one’s beliefs to understand those of others is part of developing spiritually according to Fowler (1981). For this student, his subject has provided a framework that allows him to develop in this area.

As a group, the students from Jordan were less apt to talk about their academic subject in meaning making ways. This was in direct contrast to the Kenya and Ecuador programs which seemed to provide students with ordering values of peace and environmentalism. One student traveling to Kenya was majoring in Women and Gender Studies and the importance of her feminist worldview could be seen in her desire to help the world and work toward change in her vocation:

K1 “I’m a radical feminist, that how I would construct myself. So I’m really a strong believer in change and I think we, that people, should be constantly working toward change and reforming things (Interviewer: How did you come to identify as a feminist?) I definitely would say through academics... In highschool I was called a feminist all the time and I really didn’t understand it, but basically because I wasn’t a doormat. And then when I came to UofT I started taking like women and gender classes.”

The subject that this student majored in at university provided a unifying narrative that gave voice to her experiences. She admits that before she embarked on women’s studies she did not understand who she was. Now, however, she understands what it means to be a feminist. She also has a
sense of her purpose in life, changing the world which she later explained involved working against neoliberalism.

The above student quotes suggest that academics, specifically university subjects, play a significant role in shaping and imaging some students’ ultimate environments, or spirituality. These quotes are from students in social science fields and while it may seem that students in such subjects are more likely to link academics and large picture life meaning than their peers in other subjects, the students with an environmental science focus had similar views. Further research would be helpful exploring the link between students’ spiritual development as it appears that university is playing a significant role in shaping and forming students’ ultimate environment by providing, through subjects, cohesive narratives that structure their world.

**Common Values and Goals: Honesty and Changing the World**

At first glance there appears to be no common understanding or experience of spirituality amongst the students. I was presented with three groups: one that was generally against or hesitant of religion, a complex minority that ascribed to some individual form of religion and a secular, science-based contingent. The students’ beliefs were highly personal and appeared to be unique for each individual. As one student said:

[Belief] is an individual experience. You can look at every single religion in the world they each have different trends. There is no single answer... because it is what you make of it – it is, arguably, less important.

Fowler’s (1981) work, however, accounts for this variation in beliefs. His concept of *faith* suggests that individual’s life values illuminate the tacit or implicit CSV that guides their lives. In light this, I began the pre-travel interviews asking students what they
considered to be their core values and what saw as the ultimate goal in life (See Appendix F: Pre-travel Interview Guide)

I was incredibly surprised to see repeated similarities among students’ responses. The most frequent response was honesty in answer to the question: What are your core values? Of the 15 interview participants, 10 responded with honesty or integrity. It is important to note here once more that I do not reference the number of students in a quantitative manner or suggest that these numbers are somehow statistically significant. Rather, these numbers are significant because they indicate a homogeneity of students’ values that is in contrast to the diversity of beliefs outlined in the previous sections. The responses to the pre-travel interview questions left no doubt that the student participant valued honest, integrity and being oneself. The following quotes are revealing:

K1 “I really value honesty. Is that an answer? (Interviewer: yes, that’s fine) Okay, I really like honesty.”

K4 “I guess integrity is really important to me. Goes hand in hand with honesty, people who are themselves. Integrity, being who you are and being consistent with that.”

K3 “With any sort of interaction with people if honesty is involved... the relationship always works out. Whatever I do I try to be honest.”

J2 “I don’t like fake, I think it is good to be true to yourself and who you are.”

Although the homogeneity of values is in contrast to the diversity of spiritual identities shown above, the values themselves are by no means in conflict with the students’ narratives. In fact, it is not surprising that in a group of students who so highly
value honesty and integrity, there would be experiences of frustration with hypocritical religious communities.

Other core values stated by students were education, careers, family, respecting others and having an open mind. In the student responses there were no outliers or values that did not fit within the above categories. Each student’s answer was reflected by at least one other student, not exclusively in their program.

In terms of students’ ultimate goals, the responses of the students fell into three categories: finding a career that makes them happy, supporting their family and contributing something to the world. The desire to contribute to the world was seen more strongly among the students traveling to Kenya and Ecuador, with six out of the ten students expressing views such as the following:

K2 “I don’t think it’s enough to just make yourself happy, I don’t know, I get happy making someone else happy, so yeah, just finding a job that allows me to do that every day. I just want to leave my mark on the world in some way.”

K3 “I guess Mother Theresa – always giving, always helping the poor – really struck me, really what I want to do”

E1 “I wouldn’t be happy in my life if I didn’t at some point work toward shifting back to what [the world] should be, how we should be living with our resources.”

E4 “I suppose make a contribution to the world which would leave its mark for which I could get recognition.”

The academic programs in Kenya and Ecuador focused on Peace & Conflict and Environmental Science respectively, and mostly likely attract students with a pre-disposition toward contributing to the world. For the students mentioned in the previous
section, this altruistic attitude most likely stems from the unifying value of Environmental Science that orders their ultimate environment. For the two interview participants who identified as practicing Christianity a spiritual imperative was evident in their desire to help the world. One is suggested in the reference to Mother Theresa above, although Mother Theresa is a role model for more than just religious adherents. The second student was more explicit in linking her desire to help the world with her spirituality. Her answer, when asked about her ultimate goal was:

K4 “To be excellent at what [God] is asking me to do and to love that and love the people around me and to maintain dignity for them and myself.”

Later she also asked the rhetorical questions:

“What about wanting to go overseas because you love people?”

Apart from these examples, the majority of the students did not explicitly link their spirituality to their desire to contribute to the world. However, if I adopt Fowler’s comprehensive definition of faith, I can suggest that in some fluid and flexible way, the students traveling to Kenya and Ecuador have a spirituality that identifies them as contributors to the world. In applying Fowler’s faith triangle, the other is easily identifiable as those that students help or are joined with in their mission. At the same time, the centre of supra-ordinate value (CSV) is not as easily identifiable, though for some it is definitely related to their academic major as the last section shows. Based on the above quotes students’ higher value or value of ultimate importance appears to be the drive to help the world itself. Therefore, the students’ faith triangle is held together by an understanding that others are committed to the same cause.
This imperative to help, identified by so many students in their interviews, presents a primary way of identifying students’ spirituality. Two of Fowlers’ key elements of faith are present: relational, as shown above, and constitutive. The constitutive nature of this suggested spirituality of helping the world is seen in the connection that several students made to their life work or vocation. The drive to help the world was not just something students used to establish the meaning of their lived experiences but established where they saw themselves in relationship to the world. Fowler’s (2004) later work made this connection between faith development and vocation – establishing that all the ways and meaning our existence has are determined by our faith relationships.

It is safe to suggest that this imperative may not be the largest or ultimate environment faith-triangle for all the students. Indeed for the Christian student (K4) who was quoted earlier, it is her larger faith-relationship to God that gives her the help-the-world drive. However, for at least eight of the interviewees this faith relationship of helping the world was the highest organizing principle apparent in their lives. The homogeneity in group values was significant and opens a large area for further study.
Conclusion

Assessing Alteration: What is spirituality and how does it change?

Before embarking on Chapter Seven, where I consider whether students’ personal spirituality has altered as a result of study abroad, it is important to synthesize the above findings. Who are these students, how do they describe their spirituality and what values do they hold that may be taken as implicit forms of spirituality?

First, the students’ journeys are deeply individual. The uniqueness of the students’ journeys is shown repeatedly in the interviews as students define their selected terms and continually re-assert their separation form formal religion. Their individuality was also evident as the students embraced the opportunity allowed by the questionnaire and described their own spirituality. They did not just assume I understood what the various terms meant, but they took the time to explain them.

Second, formal religion is not adhered to by a majority of the students, but is key to defining their spirituality in a responsive way. Experience with spiritual transition is evident in the student’s stories of disillusionment with formal religion. Despite religion being a defining force for many of the students, several had no experience with it all. Many of the students, however, have the ordering value of environmental science or helping the world that is evidently a main piece in constructing their spirituality or making meaning of their ultimate environment. Finally, although students’ journeys are individual, they share values and common goals for their lives.

I have now established how these students identify themselves and what constitutes spirituality for the different groups. However, before addressing the final research questions in Chapter Seven, specifically assessing the extent to which students’
spirituality is altered, it is important to establish what is meant by alteration. In Chapter Three, I touched on Fowler’s indicators of transition between stages: the ending, neutral zone and new beginning phases that students pass through. Clearly, many of the above narratives show that transitioning through stages is not foreign to students. My investigation of their study abroad journeys attempts to pinpoint just one of many alterations that occur throughout these students’ lives. Within the diverse student experience we see examples of students who have transitioned away from formal religion and experimented with various types of spirituality. We also see students who have remained within the scientific belief system in which they were raised. As I proceed on to the final chapters of this thesis I will be concerned with whether study abroad contributes to, or initiates, a further transition in or through faith stages.
Chapter Six

Encountering Religion:

Sights, Sounds and Academic Content

“Okay – so I have a question. I am not sure how to evaluate African religion. Are the traditions and the rituals and the circumcision and coming of age and the spiritual cleansing and things that go on like that- is that part of their religion?... It felt different than how I experienced religion at home.”

- Kenya Student

In the previous chapter I presented the results of the pre-travel questionnaire, complementing that with information from the pre-travel interviews, in order understand how the students defined their personal spirituality. The results indicate that many of the students had little experience or negative experiences with formal religion and even those who identified as religious were hesitant to do so. Many of the students identify themselves as agnostic or spiritual but defined those terms in unique, personal ways. At the same time many of the students had similar core values and ultimate goals such as honesty, family, careers, happiness and making the world a better place, pointing to a cohesive though unarticulated spirituality. I suggest that these results make the research questions particularly relevant and reiterate my interest in knowing what occurs when predominantly agnostic students who, are hesitant about formal religion, enter countries in which religion is practiced by the majority of citizens.

In this chapter I begin to examine the post-travel interviews. I describe students’ interactions with, and perceptions of, their host country’s religion. This chapter addresses the two sub-questions:
2. In what ways does study abroad alter students’ perspectives of the host country’s religion/religiosity?

3. In what ways do students interact with the dominant religions in their host countries during short-term study?

The results of the post-travel interviews were the main source for answering the above questions. During these interviews students were asked whether the host country’s religion was visible, whether they had conversations with local people or classmates about religion, and whether they encountered religion or religiosity in any other ways, such as academic study. The responses to these questions were different for each student, although similarities did exist among students in each destination. This chapter discusses students’ observations and conversations about religion as well as their interactions with the local people. I also explore the academic course inclusion or exclusion of religion comparing the approaches to religion taken by each program. I conclude this chapter by suggesting that big pictures questions need to be part of the formal knowledge that students gain in their study abroad curriculum and that interactions with local people are necessary for a deeper understanding of religion’s global influence.

**Observations of Religion: Shiny churches, syncretism and the call to prayer.**

The three study abroad destinations chosen for this study were overtly religious nations where symbols of Protestantism, Catholicism and Islam are evident in daily life. However, through this study I sought to understand whether the visiting students’ themselves would observe these symbols and perceive the society to be more religious than Canada. The experiences of each student group were different based on location. In Kenya, students observed beautiful, new churches amid the poverty, in Ecuador
syncretism came as a positive surprise, and in Jordan students’ observations of religion reshaped their understanding of Muslim culture.

**Kenya.**

For the students traveling to Kenya, three of them mentioned the prominence of churches in the cities and villages they visited. They noted how the churches were the most expensive buildings in the area and were a contrast to a lot of the poverty they witnessed.

K1 “When we were in Nairobi, we saw a lot of crosses that were huge and lit up with lights from “Evangelical” Christian places. And there were a lot of churches everywhere that we went, in all the towns and stuff. And the churches would be, like, the nicest building... I think it was such a stark contrast to home, like in Canada, where churches were built like maybe a hundred years ago - so they’re old, they’re not as nice. But when you see it in Kenya - where everyone lives in huts - and then there’s a nice cement building with a tin roof and that’s the church. I thought that was such a contrast - it was the shining part of the community.”

K2 “Everywhere we went, especially in the rural areas churches were everywhere. And what was interesting too was that they were some of the most well built buildings... the churches will have a coat of paint and they’ll be built with something that looks like cement versus people [in] the community where we were live in mud huts. I thought that was really interesting but we didn’t actually get to experience anything of local religion.”

Both of the above quotes come from students who had a Christian background growing up. During a subsequent interview, when I asked the student who had been raised Buddhist if he had noticed any symbols of religion he said,
K6 “...the only religious exposure that I got is the just the temples. As we were driving by we saw a lot of Hindu temples. You know I really didn’t see as many churches compared to the Hindu temples or mosques.”

Although no widespread conclusions can be made from the observations of four students, it is interesting to note that students’ observations of the same nation can completely different. Making this discrepancy more noteworthy is that fact that I conducted six interviews with students traveling to Kenya and only one student, the one without the Judeo-Christian heritage, observed the temples.

Another observation that two students made of Kenyan religiosity was the repeated, unconscious, reference to God or the Bible often made by guest speakers or the media.

J4 “One of the interesting things about Kenya that I didn’t really expected and I should have – in the newspaper, on the 6 o’clock news, even in the world cup during the breaks when they would have updates on it people would quote scripture even if they didn’t believe in God.”

J3 “When people would come and speak to us, they would mention God in passing which isn’t done here [in Canada].”

The students who traveled to Kenya would be the only group that observed widespread use of religious language. This may simply be explained by the prevalence of the English language in Kenya. News reports and newspapers were readily accessible to the students in their own language and were even a requirement to watch or read for some of their class discussions. The other two programs had a language barrier between the students and their host culture so such an observation may have been less likely –
although neither of the Spanish-speaking students on the Ecuador trip made such an observation.

In terms of whether student observations within Kenya produced a more positive view of the nation’s religion, there is little evidence from the interviews to suggest this was the case. While students were quick to recall their observations of religion, they did not attribute alternative meanings to these observations. In the following discussion about Ecuador and Jordan, it is clear that several students traveling to those locations altered their view of the host country’s religion either more positively or negatively. But the students traveling to Kenya merely stated their observations and did not extend these observations with normative positions. Only in reference to the Maasai guide did one student express pleasure in the guide’s ability make light of his religion, but this did not seem directly related to an alteration in her own opinion of religion generally. Later sections, however, reveal that the Kenyan program’s academic contextualization of religious beliefs may have framed students’ personal observations of Kenyan religiosity.

Ecuador.

The students who traveled to Ecuador visited two religious sites as part of their weekend tourism. One was a Roman Catholic church built by the Spanish and the other an ancient Inca ruin used in the pre-colonial religions of the Andean region. The students were positive in their appreciation of both sites. However, two of the students seemed particularly surprised that the church had incorporated Inca spirituality into its architecture and symbolism. The first noted:

E4“The vast majority of everybody are Christian but they do have an acknowledgement of the history of the past. You do see people who are dressed in this traditional clothing and there is
pertinence as well of a lot of Inca symbolism. You can read this in lots of places and it’s rather accurate that there is the incorporation of certain elements of Inca tradition into the church although fundamentally it remains Christian.”

For a second student, the term syncretism was a new concept learned on the trip to Ecuador. She seemed happy to find that traditional religion had somehow remained through the colonial influence:

E2“"We got to tour a couple of churches in the old part of Quito which was really fun.... I also learned a term “syncretism” which is ... [joining] the traditional beliefs with Catholicism... It was really neat to see the syncretism in real life.... This cathedral has some architecture in the Catholic styles but there was also a huge sun symbolizing the sun God of the traditional religion. We were told it was a way to preserve the beliefs.”

This students’ encounter with syncretism was influential in providing a more positive view of Ecuador’s religion and colonial Catholicism more generally. In her pre-travel interview the student had considered the Spanish conquest as the only reason formal religion had entered Ecuador and could not understand why it would have remained. Her visit to the church in Quito, however, resulted in a more positive view of Catholicism because of the possibility of traditional beliefs being given a place in formal state religion.

Other observations of the formal religion were also present in Ecuador. Two of the students traveling mentioned roadside crosses as symbols of the religiosity of the people. One of the students was familiar with a similar practice in Canada but for the other it was entirely new:
E2 “In terms of whether [religion] was hidden or not, it was fairly overt, I could see symbols like crosses and things like that. What I really noticed… there were crosses at the side of the road marking roadside memorials similar to what we have here [in Canada] and of course it is nice to see that and sad to see that.”
E3 “In Ecuador there were visible signs of Christianity - churches obviously. And I thought what was really neat was – I’ve seen this in movies – was the crosses at the side of the road…Little crosses were sometime set up at the side of highways just to commemorate accidents.”

For the three students quoted above (E2-E4), their observations of religious symbolism in Ecuador were quite positive. They appreciated the incorporation of traditional beliefs in the colonial religion and found the roadside memorials meaningful. For these three students their observation of religious symbols was the totality of their interaction with Ecuador’s formal religion and each of them was positively impressed. Their perceptions of Catholicism were more positive after having traveled to Ecuador. As the next section reveals, however, the fourth student on the Ecuador trip (E1) had an entirely different perception of Christianity after she engaged in conversations with local people and her professor about environmental preservation.

Jordan.

The students traveling to Jordan were prepared in their pre-departure orientation to accommodate the overt presence of Islam visible in Jordan. The students were aware that they would see women who veiled and hear the call to prayer every morning. Indeed
two of them noted these observations in their post-travel interviews, but said that in general Jordan’s form of Islam was less conservative than they had originally thought.

J1 “The only real shock we had was it wasn’t as conservative as I had expected it to be. The big example was, we went to an Irish pub ... it was in Amman and Amman is very, very, Muslim. There was a group of women and they were wearing the skimpiest outfits that I had seen in weeks. It was like a club in Toronto.”

J3 “…it’s so much more liberal. Here[in Canada] we have this idea Islam is very conservative. But there [Jordan] it’s so much more lenient. It’s true that guys and girls aren’t supposed to talk but if you become friends with someone... we hugged - but not in public- just goodbye hugs.”

In contrast, however, another student who had past travel experience visiting Pakistan found the Muslim culture in Jordan more conservative than she expected:

J2 “The locals are a bit more reserved and conservative versus Pakistan... I don’t know why exactly. I thought Pakistan would be a bit more reserved… It was the way they [in Jordan] dressed that seemed more conservative to me.”

For three of the students traveling to Jordan, their perceptions of religion were positive because they realized that the Islamic culture was not as conservative as they had supposed. At the same time, the student (J2) who had experience with Pakistan’s expressions of Islam found Jordan more conservative and reserved. For the first group, their perceptions of Islam were more positive and nuanced having traveled to Jordan, for the latter she became aware of global differences in religious expression.
Although all of the students made observations of religious practice, two of the students traveling to Jordan suggested that religion was not that important during their visit.

J1 “Religion wasn’t that much of an issue.”
J2 “Well you could see religion in the sense that they had the call to prayer five times a day you could see people walking to the mosque. There were visible signs of people practicing. But when you were not focusing on the actual obvious stuff ... You really didn’t talk about religion much. It was more like they [the locals] just avoided the topic all together”

These students did not consider the presence of religion to be a daily reminder of the difference between their host and home countries. This is in direct contrast to their classmate who found living in a religious country to be challenging:

J3 “Here [in Canada] I don’t really don’t interact with religious groups. We’re not a part of any church or anything. So to be completely surrounded by it all the time – like the call of prayer – I’ve never heard it before. But 5 or more times a day... for me it was different. I wouldn’t say it was a shock – but it was different. I mean there were churches everywhere and we were looking at ruins of churches. So I was like okay – another church (sounds exasperated).”

The students who participated in the Jordan study made similar and, perhaps predictable, observations of religion in the country such as the call to prayer and the presence of churches and mosques. However, each student attributed different value and meaning to these observations. For some, the local dress requirements were less than expected, presenting Jordan as more liberal. For others, the dress was more conservative in comparison with past travel experience to Muslim nations. Although one student
found it quite “different” to be surrounded by religion at all times, others did not consider religion a significant factor based on observations. The following section will reveal, however, that students’ exposure to the Christian-Muslim divide in Jordan suggests that religious ideologies are strongly influential in community dynamics.

**Discussing religion: Warriors, bar talk and an honest shop keeper.**

**Kenya.**

The students who traveled to Kenya had the opportunity to visit three distinct regions within the country: Nairobi, the Maasai Mara and Mombasa. Each of these regions has a different religious tradition: Christianity, traditional animism and Islam. However, the only location in which the students conversed with locals about their religious beliefs was in the Maasai Mara. During their time there, the students were paired with a local guide name Matthew\(^2\) who taught them about Maasai beliefs. Their interaction with Matthew was mentioned as a highlight by three of the students before reference was made to specific beliefs or religion.

K2 “We went up to the Maasai Mara and we were hanging out with our guide Matthew, who was a Maasai warrior and it was just really cool and he was like 28 and we’d just hang out like any other guy. He’d take us on a medicine walk and a weapons training and show us how to throw a spear. He’s killed like 7 lions... he was so funny. The Maasai believe in some form of magic, so he took us on this medicine walk... I was joking with him, ‘Matthew the Maasai can fly, right?!’ And he’s like, ‘of course they can fly’.— and we’re running through the field he’s teaching me to fly. He had a really great sense of humour, you

\(^{2}\) The name here has been changed for confidentiality
know. It’s his beliefs and I’m sure he takes it seriously ... but he jokes about it.”

K4 “Probably my biggest highlight was having the Maasai guide... he’s a real Maasai and it was really great to travel with him... We got to speak a lot about FGM and even about the drought – he has lost 150 cattle the year before and it put a face to the program.”

The opportunity to engage with a local person whose experience was extremely different than their own was powerful for the students. The quotes above show the deeper understanding of another culture that came through learning about it from someone who they considered a peer.

For another student (K1) in the Kenya program, the time spent in the Maasai Mara led to a dramatic re-thinking of what religion is and how it is lived out. She questioned me during the interview about whether certain traditional ways of Maasai life, such as female genital mutilation (FGM), are considered part of religion. The complexity and richness of her questions is shown below:

K1 “So, I have actually been thinking of the whole religion aspect because I wanted to keep in mind the project. Okay – so I have a question. I am not sure how to evaluate African religion. Are the traditions and the rituals and the circumcision and coming of age and the spiritual cleansing and things that go on like that- is that part of their religion?... It felt different than how I experienced religion at home.”

What became clear to this student was that religion was not a separate element in the lives of the people but intertwined with their daily practices and rationales for those practices. Later on the same student explained to me how some things that she had considered characteristics of Christianity in Canada were part of African culture in the Maasai:
K1“ So I think that - and I know this is just my idea of religion - but I see family values and people being a family unit - I see that as religion. Because of Catholicism and Christianity in general, promoting the solid family unit that goes to church and what not. So I kind of associate the nuclear family with religion. But the people we met in Kenya hold really strong to family and community ties. So I don’t know why I associate that with Christianity and my upbringing. “

This student was attempting to reconcile the finite Western meaning of the term religion with the overarching values that structured life in the Maasai. I had not presented the students with Fowler’s concept of faith outlined in Chapter Three, but it is clear that this student is searching for a more nuanced understanding of how religious beliefs are manifest in the significant traditions and organizing structures of community life in Kenya. The dilemma she is facing may be a result of the modern, Western tendency to dichotomize life into sections and systems. Fowler, drawing on the work of Wilfred Cantwell Smith, describes the evolution of the word belief that is helpful in situating the above students’ questions (Fowler, 1981). Fowler outlines how the word belief, previously a commitment of the whole self to something of ultimate value, has been reduced to describe the systems of cognitive understanding held by various people. Expressions such as “What do they believe?” have reduced questions of ultimate meaning to the explanation of contained belief systems. This is reflective of societal modernization in which much of life is organized and categorized separately.

I suggest that this Western mode of systemizing life accounts for the above student’s difficulty. Had I asked her whether she encountered Fowler’s concept of faith she would have easily have pointed out many of the local ways of perceiving their
ultimate environment. Instead, she was searching to find an isolated representation of religion in a holistic and integrated society. This student was not the only one to wrestle with the segmentation of life. During the post-travel interview segmentation emerged as a theme for the Ecuador students as well.

**Ecuador.**

For the students traveling to Ecuador, three of the four had positive impressions of the religious symbolism – both the syncretism of the churches and the crosses at the side of the road. However, these observations were entirely unrelated to their academic subject and were more in the realm of cultural appreciation or tourism. For the other student, however, a specific conversation occurred at a local bar in the Galapagos, followed by a discussion with her professor in a church, making her extremely wary of certain aspects of formal religion and forming a new opinion about American Christianity.

The first mention of religion, in this students’ interview, was in her answer to the general introductory question, “what challenges did you face?” She told me the story of how difficult it was to see the local people in the Galapagos breaking the fishing regulations about maximum catch numbers. In conclusion to her story she said:

But the people in the Galapagos, they don’t understand why they can’t fish because God made them stronger than fish so they can eat them, and made them stronger than trees so they could cut them, but they’re not allowed [by law] so they’re confused.

I was surprised that she referenced a belief in God before I had even re-introduced the topic of the study. I questioned her further, saying “Did you read that or did you hear that in conversation?”
Her response was,

There was someone who said that - and it was a guy in a bar and his friend was a tour guide and they argued about it.

At this point in the interview she branched off on a topic relating to the Galapagos Island immigration policies and I thought the conversation about religion and overfishing was finished. However, at the conclusion of the interview when I asked, “Is there anything you believe different about the world after having traveled to Ecuador?” her response indicated a heightened wariness of dogmatic religious belief, specifically taking the Bible literally, which she connected to American Christianity. Without prompting, she reiterated her concern with the overfishing and related a later conversation with her professor to the previous discussion with the local men.

I just remember two times when I thought about this. One time when we were visiting - actually we were doing a tour of Quito. We saw a church and we went into it and it was big they were letting us walk around.... I was talking to my professor ...and he’s just this grumpy British man, and he was saying he read a study and it said 67% of Americans believe the word of the bible to be, like, the definite last word. And then when we were in the Galapagos and they were like’ God says we can fish because we’re strong and I don’t understand why I have a maximum catch... this is my turf.’ And I was thinking it’s dangerous almost to believe the word of the bible in a literal sense. I always sort of felt that in some cases you would need religion... and something to look forward to... But it’s scary to think how precious the land in the Galapagos is and how if it were up to the bible- but in the US like 67% believe that... I just think it’s scary to think that... I disagree with it very strongly.
This student’s experience was completely different than that of her classmates. Specifically, her interactions with the local people of the Galapagos Islands and her professor’s contribution to her understanding of religion left her with a more negative impression of formal religion. Furthermore, she would be the only student to have a conversation with a local person that related to both religion and her topic of study. No other conversations, linking the two were referenced in other interviews.

Jordan.

During the post-travel interviews with students traveling to Jordan, the conflict between Muslims and Christians was a common narrative for every student. Four of the students recounted the same, specific story of a local, Christian shopkeeper, with whom they had built a friendship. Near the end of the students’ stay in Jordan, the shopkeeper expressed his hatred toward Muslims. The shopkeeper’s unguarded words surprised the students. During the interviews I was not strongly aware of this story, hearing instead the message, outlined above, of the two students who said religion was not too important in Jordan. However, when reading the transcripts I found that for these same students, as well as the other three on the Jordan trip, Muslim-Christian tensions were significant in their interviews. The incident with the shop keeper was described in detail in the following interview excerpt. The narrative came in response to a question about whether the guide books prepared the student (J1) for Jordan.

J1“Well in Madaba it’s more Christian than Muslim in comparison to elsewhere in Jordan. And we had met a shop keeper. Throughout the summer we had befriended him and we went to his place for tea every other day. And he taught us a lot about Jordan. Actually he invited me over to his house to meet his family. I was the only one from the team to do that. But on the
last day he really surprised us because he is Christian and he had this really intense hatred for Muslims. Just in conversation he [said] a lot of vial things that I had never heard before. The guidebooks don’t prepare you for that sort of thing... We listened to him politely, then let him talk and then things went back to normal.”

The above student’s story explicitly shows his surprise at learning that his friend had animosity toward Muslims. Three other students mentioned the same incident. Two of the narratives are below:

J2 “With the shop keeper ...we did sit down and talk about [religion]..... But somehow while they do avoid the topic of religion - when they do talk about it sometimes what you hear is really negative. I guess there are underlying tensions in the town. Sometimes when they start talking about it you feel a little uncomfortable about what they’re saying cause their not as - you’d think they’d be a bit open-minded with both dominant religion there, but they’re not.”

J3 “But this one time we were in a shop and the shop owner was a Christian ... He seemed like a nice person, he treated us nicely. But toward the end of the trip when we started talking...the shop keeper immediately was like ‘Oh these Muslims are so bad.’ And he started picking the flaws in their religion. He was just like ‘they’re hypocrites.’ ... For me, my best friend is Muslim and it put me in a very awkward position. Thankfully that talk ended really quickly.”

Due to the frequent repetition of the shop-keeper story I suggest that it was significant as the students develop their views on religion. Although each of the students expressed their discomfort with the shopkeeper’s opinions, none of them explicitly linked that conversation with more negative views of religion generally. Rather
the students repeatedly mentioned the hospitality and tranquility of life in Jordan which seemed to have led to positive views of the local community despite the animosity they observed.

**Academic Content**

During the pre-travel and post-travel interviews, some students were quick to answer my questions through the lens of their academic discipline or related studies. In light of this it seems appropriate to examine how each of the courses taken by the different groups did or did not address religion. Each of the programs approached the subject differently. For those traveling to Kenya, religion was a continual variable in their research on peace and conflict. In Ecuador, by comparison, religion was not addressed in the context of environmentalism. And in Jordan, though religion permeated the social and historical life of the region, the students were not given any sort of academic analysis of the subject.

**Kenya.**

The program of study for the students traveling to Kenya was Peace and Conflict. From the perspective of the students, as indicated through the post-travel interviews, religion was researched for their papers and written about as a variable for conflict in their final reports. They also visited a mosque as a group for tourist purposes. Religion did not appear to have been addressed by the professor or guest lecturers although, as shown above, there was an unconscious mention of God and allusion to the bible. The following quote locate religion in the Kenya course:

K6 “The only religious aspect that we learned about was through the 2007 political violence that happened in Kenya and how religion played a role. Nobody really talked about religion but it
is assumed that people know what the main religions are and they’re mostly catholic.”

In Kenya, religion and the churches have a strong-present day force. While the students studied the Christian and Muslim beliefs for their papers, they did not learn about religion experientially in the same way they learned about Maasai beliefs. In fact the above quote shows the student’s limited knowledge of the strength of Christian denominations in Kenya beyond Catholicism. For the students traveling to Kenya, religion was a dynamic current issue, but the programs framed their understanding of the dominant religions with a solely academic lens.

Ecuador.

The Ecuador program focused on Environmental Science in a nation with a strong Roman Catholic history and the presence of indigenous beliefs. The previous section showed how one student encountered a local man who approached his fishing through a worldview that was strongly influenced by his Christian beliefs. While this story appears to indicate that local beliefs and environmental practices may be linked, the Environmental Science program did not address these issues once according to the students. Rather, religion indigenous beliefs were exclusively tourist events and did not fuse with the students’ studies at all.

It is also important to highlight the influence of the professor on student K1’s perception of religion. While the program visit to the Church in Quito was purely for tourism the professor had a strong impact on how the student interpreted what she saw. Several higher education studies have pointed to the impact of professors on students’ experience in post-secondary (Chickering, 1969; Heath 1968; Jacob, 1957). It may come as a surprise to this particular professor that their comment during a tourist event was
remembered by the student. For this particular student, that brief, informal conversation with the professor would be the only one that helped facilitate her experience of religion in Ecuador. In light of the significant conversation she recounted about overfishing and religious beliefs the program may have benefited from a more formal inclusion of local beliefs in the course curriculum. At the same time, one conversation in the Galapagos does not indicate that all Ecuadorians hold certain existential understanding of their relationship with nature. Rather further research is needed to determine to what extent religion is an influencing factor and whether it warrants inclusion in the program curriculum as my findings suggest.

Jordan.

In the Jordan program the focus of study was Archaeological Science. The students were participants at an archaeological dig and spent the majority of their days finding and categorizing sherds. None of the students mentioned the greater context of their studies or made reference to conversations about the history of the area. In contrast to the other programs, the students from Jordan were less likely to talk about their academics than social interactions or tourist visits. At the same time, Jordan has overt symbols of religion and rich religious history that could not have been absent in their academic archaeology. My assumption that the evidence of religion must have some bearing on the students’ academic pursuit may be in error. However, based on the post-travel interview responses it appears that the program relegated religion to historical tourist sites rather than including discussions within the program.

The Jordan example may be symptomatic of the tendency of the modern university to isolate and specialize subjects of study. While the students encountered
first-hand the present day conflict between Christians and Muslims the program had a historical, archaeological focus and facilitating students’ experiences with the local religion most likely did not fall within its scope. While putting limitations such as this on the scope of a program is completely justified and practical for successful execution, in the end it is not the academic program that is the central focus for students’ returning home. None of the students who participated in the Jordan program focused on the archaeological dig as the highlight of their experience. Rather class trips and interactions with local people and classmates were the defining characteristics. In comparison to the experiences of students studying Environmental Science and Peace and Conflict Studies, the focus of Archaeology did not seem to offer an overarching narrative with which the students’ could orient their worldview. Further research would be needed to establish more certainty or develop causality for this. Whether the normative focus of the Kenya and Ecuador programs or the isolation of academic subjects is the root, the Jordan students’ transcripts suggest that the academic programs was not a definitive feature of their travels.

The variation between the programs’ curriculum inclusions of religion raises the following questions: What makes a knowledge subject tourism or curriculum? When do religious sites become historical tourism? Future research is needed to explore these ideas and offers compare the findings with the related subjects of study on the home campus.

**Conclusion**

When I embarked on this study I had the informal expectation that students might interact with their host country’s religion and subsequently alter in their opinions of religion or perhaps develop spirituality in some way. For most the student participants,
however, their observations of religious traditions were not linked to their own spiritual or religious change. As the following chapter shows, the only inter-religious dialogue that resulted in personal, spiritual dissonance happened between two Ecuador students who became friends during their travels.

The stories of the students traveling to Kenya, Ecuador and Jordan paint a colourful picture of Canadian students’ encountering diverse cultures and their attempts to make sense of their experiences. Each country visited by the students, and the multiple regions they visited within each nation, had a unique expression of its particular religion and manifestation of indigenous beliefs. While the students traveling to Ecuador and Kenya made many observations of religious symbols, and some students were positively impressed, they had few conversations with local people about their beliefs. In contrast, the students traveling to Jordan engaged briefly with a local person about religious beliefs and yet had no inclusion of religion in their subject. Overall, spirituality and religion were peripheral subjects in the curriculum of all three programs and the regional religions did not seem to be a strong influencing factor in students’ spiritual development.
Chapter Seven

Spiritual Journeys

“I was more of a shaded person [before] and I’ve become brighter and more passionate. Even my friends have noticed the change...I’m more motivated. I signed up for synchronized swimming to do something new... it is a great feeling to want to do something new.”

- Vivian (Kenya Student)

In the previous chapter I presented the interactions of the students with their host country’s religion and the alterations in students’ perceptions of religion as a result of study abroad. The findings reveal that students’ interaction with their host’s religion consisted mainly of observing the religion symbols although the students traveling to Jordan had some formative conversations. Students’ perceptions of their host country’s religion altered when a specific incident or observation created a more negative or positive view. The curriculum of the academic programs, however, appeared to keep religion as a historical or tourist issue. Overall, religion was overtly present in all the locations but students had few interactions related to religious or spiritual beliefs.

The overarching purpose of this thesis research is to determine whether studying abroad in non-Western nations alters students’ spirituality. The results presented in the previous chapters provide a complementary analysis of the context in which the students live and study while abroad. This chapter, in contrast, grapples with the specific nature of the individual students’ spiritual change, as revealed through their post travel interviews. The first section describes five of the fifteen interviewees, for whom no change in spirituality was noticeable during their time abroad. Although there may have been some sort of shift in the way the students construct their ultimate environment
during their time abroad no such change was evident in the interviews. By comparison, for seven of students a spiritual transition or dissonance was identifiable during their travels. However, with each student there were differences in the extent of their transition and each was at a unique place within the transition process. The second portion of this chapter presents these changes using three of the students’ own words in order to capture their unique understanding of their development. A final, smaller group of students had spiritual-related experiences on their trip that, instead of altering their spirituality, confirmed the present way they structure their life’s meaning. The third section of the chapter depicts the positive experiences of students who related spiritual encounters that reaffirmed their current spirituality.

**Indicators of Spiritual Change: Ending, neutral zone and beginning**

In order to identify whether students’ spirituality is in any way altered during their time abroad, I turn to the work of James Fowler and his Stages of Faith (1981). Fowler suggests that individuals’ spirituality is altered when one’s current ways of making meaning are inadequate for certain lived experiences. For many of the students described in Chapter Five, they had encountered a time where the religious traditions in which they had been raised became incompatible with their experiences and they subsequently separated themselves from the religious tradition. This separation is what Fowler terms an *ending*. After ending one way of making meaning, individuals often enter a *neutral zone* in which they explore different options and look for ways to begin reordering their existence. Not all individuals will emerge from a neutral zone nor is there any guarantee that they will progress to a more mature form of spirituality. The final element of transition is the *new beginning* when individuals find a new way of
ordering their ultimate environment and begin to situate themselves within a new narrative.

For this thesis research, I am not concerned with the full process of student’s movement between Fowler’s faith stages. Such a goal would require a more longitudinal study. Rather, I am interested in whether students experienced any indication of movement through the above phases of transition as a result of studying abroad. During my analysis of the pre-travel interviews it was often clear that a student was comfortable with their specific stage, being satisfied with their understanding of life’s ultimate environment. For these students I examined their post-travel interviews searching for either a confirmation of their current beliefs or dissonance that suggested dissatisfaction. For other students past life experience had led them to the neutral zone, having left one form of making meaning without finding another. For these students, I wished to understand if they had made any movement toward a new beginning. Overall, in analysing the post-travel interviews my primary concern was whether students had moved into a new way of making meaning or experienced dissonance with their current understandings as a result of study abroad.

**Peripheral Spirituality**

Of the fifteen students who were interviewed for this study, five did not present any evidence or description of a spiritual change during their time abroad. Three of these students were from the Kenya program (K2, K4 & K5) and two were from the Jordan program (J2 & J4). While each of these students described their spiritual journey in their pre-travel interview, their follow-up interviews failed to draw forth a substantive conversation about how they order the bigger picture in their lives and what they consider
of ultimate value. Their interviews also lacked the dissonance that suggests a tacit change of stage or the excited indication of new beginning. This does not suggest that they did not engage with the program, indeed each of the students had trip highlights to share with me and most of them seemed to have enjoyed their travel experiences immensely. Rather, in recounting of significant events after they traveled they did not ascribe any spiritual-related meaning their experiences or new understandings. In response to the question, “Do you believe anything different about the world after your travels?” one student gave the following response:

J4 “Kind of... I think every experience adds to that a little bit. I think in the grand scheme of things it probably did.”

The above quote is reflective of the lack of significance each of the five students placed on spirituality during their post-travel interviews. This does not empirically prove that none of these students experienced or will experience spiritual change as a result of their travels, but none was evident during my follow-up interviews.

**Alterations in Spirituality**

Throughout the post-travel interviews it became clear that certain students had indeed experienced some form of spiritual alteration during their time abroad. For some who had been searching for meaning, they were able to re-order their lives around new values. For others, specific travel experiences resulted in dissonance that would lead them to question previous accepted values. Among the latter students the dissonance ranged from tangible, articulated conflicts to subtle ripples in their established spirituality. Each of the instances is recounted below and I have attempted to retain their story quality as far as possible in order to convey the momentum of the journeys that these students are on.
Vivian: Finding Passion in Africa (K3)

Perhaps the most dramatic, or life changing, experience occurred for a female student who traveled to Kenya. During the pre-travel interview this student was quiet and hesitant in her speech. She recounted some of the life challenges that had shaped her and sparked deep questions. However, the follow-up interview strongly suggested that this student was beginning to make meaning of her life in a more cohesive way. I will call the student Vivian and her story is considered below.

In both the work of Fowler (1981) and Astin (2006) key events in people’s lives are linked to changes in their spirituality. In the spirituality section of the student questionnaire that I used in this study, I borrowed a question from Astin’s College Student Beliefs and Values Survey that asked students whether the death of a friend/relative had ever strengthened or weakened their spirituality. It was in response to this question that the student participant Vivian first revealed the evolving nature of her spirituality.

Vivian’s mother had died when she was in grade seven. Her mother had been the religious person in the family and prior to her death she had insisted that the children be baptized and attend church. Vivian said that though she was forced to attend church before her mother’s death, within a year or two of her loss, Vivian began voluntarily going on her own. She describes her transition in the following way:

Before she passed away, I never really liked going to church. I would sit there and sleep and never like the feeling of going there – it’s quiet, it’s boring. But ever since, after [her death], I go to church for several reasons. One is because I just like the feeling, I feel like I’m safe, it’s really comfortable, it’s relieving me, it’s really nice... it’s like self-reflection... Praying is talking to
yourself, it’s not talking to God... I wouldn’t name the person or
the entity. I talk to someone who has a bigger power, who can
listen to me endlessly without judging me.

During the interview Vivian was quite quick to say that she was not religious.
She did not want consider herself fixed to the idea of Christianity but continued with the
religion because she was raised in it. She mentioned that had she been raised into some
other religion, she would most likely follow that instead.

Vivian’s response to her mother’s death is reflective of a movement into a tacit,
conventional faith. In her choice to attend church she is embracing the desires of her
mother, but she is still hesitant to exclusively identify herself as Christian. Vivian does
not indicate that church afforded her with a new image of how she views her world and
makes sense of her mother’s death, rather she seeks a sustained comfort found by
speaking to a higher power at church. When asked what role her new spirituality plays in
ordering her life’s values, Vivian replied that her spirituality is actually quite peripheral
and she makes decisions based on her daily experiences rather than a spiritual narrative.

Further evidence from the pre-travel interview with Vivian also confirms that she
does not have a cohesive, unifying vision of her life. She tells me of an encounter with a
career counsellor at her university that deeply shook her and illuminated the lack of
meaning her life currently has.

I went to the [University] Career Centre because I was applying
for my program. I made my resume and wrote my coverletter and
I went. And I was talking to the counsellor and I never came
across a person like the counsellor. He was very special in a
way... he was helping me find out the goal in my life. It wasn’t
like he was just going through my resume and correcting what I
wrote... but he was like “why do you want to apply for peace and
conflict studies?” Well I was like “I was involved in model united nations before” and he was like “why did you want to get involved in model united nations before?” Then I’m like well I did something before. He was like why did you want to do that before. He was going back to the root and I’m like, “What’s my passion in my life and what’s my goal in my life?” I was very lost I almost broke down, like emotionally broke down. I felt so lost.... I want to become a teacher but... I don’t think that’s my goal, that’s just what I want to do.

In this narrative, Vivian is identifying her lack of ultimate meaning or purpose guiding the things she does. Vivian’s description of the encounter, when viewed through Fowler’s faith stages is less of a new beginning than it is an ending. She is a very successful student and has an idea of what her career will be, but she does not know why she does the things she does, nor has she identified an ultimate goal for her life. Rather than consider such questions as peripheral, Vivian considers them very important and internalizes what the career counsellor asked her. She said in the interview that she was grateful that the counsellor asked her these questions. This encounter with the counsellor may signify that Vivian is reevaluating her engagement with the world and is seeking meaning and purpose.

Vivian’s pre-travel interview provides a helpful picture of her spiritual journey up to the point of her travels to Kenya. Her mother’s death and her encounter with the career counsellor are identified by her as key points in her spiritual development. These events, however, are not a direct step into a tangible understanding of her life, but might be conceived as movement into a neural holding pattern. Her post-travel interview, then, will be examined for indications that Vivian’s spirituality has moved out of the holding pattern in some way.
During the post-travel interviews, many of the students were brimming with excitement and so I was not surprised that Vivian was also very enthusiastic as she told me stories of her travels in Kenya. When compared with her pre-travel interview, however, there was a noticeable difference. Much of Vivian’s hesitation was gone. She seemed certain of the stories she told and expressed her opinions with conviction. When asked if she thought she had changed or found the passion that the career counsellor asked her about, she replied:

I have definitely realized that I have become more passionate.... today was my first day of school. Normally, I would be just frustrated and don’t like to read - but I definitely loved today. I have two classes... I was just so happy sitting in my lectures. And I was more of a shaded person [before] and I’ve become brighter and more passionate. Even my friends have noticed the change...I’m more motivated. I signed up for synchronized swimming to do something new... it is a great feeling to want to do something new.

The observations that I had made about Vivian were reflected in her narrative. She noticed the change in herself and had found motivation to engage in new activities. Although there were evident outward signs of change, there was no clear indication that Vivian had adopted a new way of making meaning of life’s big questions. There were a few experiences on her travels that may have helped to situate her own existence in a global context. First, she mentioned that she had made friends with Kenyan locals and that helped put a face to the poverty. Furthermore, she was more certain of her desire to be an educator since she saw education as the key to supporting impoverished communities. But these new understandings were not explicitly linked, in her interview, to a greater narrative of the world. Although the changes in her outward behaviour
suggest she was embarking on a new beginning, this beginning was still tacitly understood. In response to my probing about where her new passion came from, Vivian gave the following answer that brilliantly captures the evolving, tacit nature of her new beginning:

I don’t know, I don’t think so. I haven’t actually realized that, but I might realize it later in the year, because I’m realizing so much every day. I’m walking down the street and I’m realizing I’m smiling, unlike before. I realize that I want to make friends, unlike before. I was very afraid to talk to new people. But I smile at new people it’s something I’ve learned. So I’m realizing more of my personal changes first and then I’m going to probably realize I have different views toward the world.

Vivian’s own analysis of her personal change is an excellent explanation of the spiritual changes in her life after studying abroad. The changes are visible, her actions are different, but articulation of why these changes occurred will likely come in the future.

One concluding clarification should be made about Vivian’s experience in Kenya. While her personal change was more pronounced than many of her peers it is important to note that she spent longer in Kenya than any other students. After completing the University’s program she stayed on as a volunteer for two months. The friendships she made with local people were primarily a result her volunteer work after the academic program ended. The long-term nature of Vivian’s stay raises questions about the effective nature of short-term or long-term programs. Although research has been conducted comparing the length of student travel in Europe, it may be helpful to have comparisons of short and long-term programs in the developing world.
Anice: Show Me Satisfaction in Jordan

For many of the student participants in this study, the process of being interviewed sparked their own questions about life’s ultimate environment. For one particular female student traveling to Jordan, her uncertainty about life was hidden under a cheerful disposition until certain words in the interview caused her to reflect on her trip in a new way. The interviews gave voice to a dissatisfaction that she had thought was universal until she observed the contentment of the local people in Jordan. I have chosen to call her Anice in the following description.

Anice shared a similar story with many of the students who had moved away from religion. Her teenage experience of challenging the hypocrisy of her church community by refusing to dress up for Sunday service is found in Chapter Five (J5). Following her exertion of independence at church, she indicates that she and her mother moved neighbourhoods and left religious communities behind. For Anice this spiritual transition in high school marks the ending of one way of making meaning that was connected with formal religion. This is the first alteration in spirituality seen in Anice’s journey.

Following her break with formal religion, Anice appears to have fully moved into a new phase of spirituality. In her pre-travel interview she was able to articulate tangible, cohesive values and strongly held beliefs. Anice valued family, being aware of the global events, being loyal to the right things and respecting other people. Overall, Anice appeared to have constructed her ultimate environment around living wholly with others and exploring the world. During a break from post-secondary studies she had traveled to several countries and explored other cultures. This phase of Anice’s life suggests that she is contentedly at rest in synthetic-conventional spirituality typical of most teenagers.
Another spiritual transition marked and perhaps sparked, the end of Anice’s travels. Though she had been able to see the world, she became unsatisfied with her current work and decided to enrol in the University and explore other options. During the pre-travel interview with Anice, I would never have guessed that she was dissatisfied with her life. Her cheerful, social demeanour made her a joy to interview. However, during the interview, when asked about life’s ultimate goal, Anice instead reacted to my use of the word satisfied in the question. Anice adamantly stated the following:

No one is ever satisfied with anything... someone who is in their 80’s could still be bitter they never got that red corvette they wanted. Or even I’m not satisfied that I’m still living at home with my mother. For me I try to set myself reasonable goals... I take things lightly – so if something I want doesn’t come to me – well boohoo – Get over it - something better will come to me.

For Anice, the process of leaving her job and enrolling in university was symptomatic of her underlying dissatisfaction with life. Her restlessness suggests that her way of ordering her existence may not have been sufficient. She was seeing the ending of her previous centres of value. During the first interview, Anice’s dissatisfaction did not seem to be significant enough to merit a transition. Rather she seemed to have made peace with her situation and was taking her own dissatisfaction lightly. But during the post-travel interview I asked Anice if she believed anything different about the world after her travels and response shocked me. Her cheerful smile faded and, with wide, sincere eyes she said:

The people in Jordan - they seemed really happy with their lives. They weren’t the richest of people. They worked in museums, they worked as barbers, they worked in cafes, they have their own shops, and they’re happy. One guy told me, “All I have is my
house, I have my car, I work at AVIS, I have my friends and family. I’m enjoying my life. I was like wow- I’m not enjoying mine. This one guy I spoke to... he said that Canadians are stressful. We’re so stressed out with our lives – that’s why we’re all cold. We need to relax... and be grateful. Over there you could just relax and enjoy life.

For Anice, the dissatisfaction with her life that she had alluded to in the first interview was highlighted during her time in Jordan in stark contrast to the contentment she perceived in the local people. Her reiteration that she was not enjoying life provided more evidence of her spiritual transition away from her past ways of making meaning. Anice’s story is an example of just one aspect of Fowler’s transition model. From the time-bound vantage point of this research Anice has only experienced an ending. There is no further evidence in the interviews that suggests she has yet found anything to replace the values she previously held. At the same time, this is not a cause for despair. Anice appears to be transitioning through the neutral zone as a result of studying abroad and the fact that she has seen contentment in the people in Jordan offers the possibility that she too can find it. Had she remained in her pre-travel interview state where she believed that nobody was satisfied, her spiritual journey may have remained hopeless. At the same time, after listening to Anice’s story one has the feeling that the end is missing. Her time in Jordan has offered opportunity for growth in her spiritual journey but we are unsure whether she will find satisfaction or even whether these big picture questions will remain important to her home life. I do suggest, however, that Anice’s travels in Jordan did present the possibility of spiritual development for this particular student.

Cecilia: Reconciling Religion and Science
During almost every post-travel interview the students were very descriptive about their inter-personal relationships, both good and bad, that occurred on their trips. It was clear that the personal relationships, predominantly with others on the trip, were influential in the overall positive or negative experiences of the students. But would it follow that these relationships would in any way alter students’ greater purpose or spirituality? In fact, in only two of the interviews did there seem to be any connection whatsoever between friendships and spirituality. But in the case of one female student in Ecuador, her friendship with a Muslim student on the same trip raised questions for her about the role of religion in life and gave her a more positive perspective on Muslims. In the following story this student will be referred to as Cecil.

The trip to Ecuador was comprised of mainly white, Canadian women in their early 20’s. Most of these women came from secular backgrounds and the majority were enrolled in scientific programs at university, which aligned with their overarching worldview as well as the environmental focus found on their trip. Because of the homogeneity of students on the Ecuador program I had not expected there to be interactions within the group leading to questions about how to centre one’s life. But perhaps it was this same homogeneity that meant the one Muslim student on the trip would be influential on other students. Cecil was one of the influenced students.

During her pre-travel interview, Cecil described her overarching values and life goals within a scientific paradigm, with a specific focus on environmentalism. Her aim was to work in a vocation that promoted environmental sustainability. Cecil had been raised by scientific parents who took her around the world with them on projects with a humanitarian focus. In terms of overarching life-narrative or value centres, Cecil had
had little conflict in her own spirituality throughout life. She accepted the holistic, science-based view of the world that saw her as an integral part of the environment and gave her cause to work toward sustainability. She did not describe a time when these values were in conflict with her lived experience and she expressed her disinterest in philosophical question about subjects such as afterlife since the answers could not be found with certainty.

In terms of formal religion, Cecilia was very tolerant of those who did believe in religion although she herself had not been raised with it. As she explained: “It doesn’t bother me, I just don’t want to do it.” Her extensive travels had exposed her to Hinduism and other religions. The majority of these religions she felt were helpful to society and gave people a good sense of peace. The only exception Cecilia had was based on her travel experience in the Middle East. While in a Muslim country, she found herself feeling uncomfortable with the way the men interacted with women. At the same time she was able to separate the values found in the religion with the way the men acted:

I’m not [exactly] scared of the Islamic faith... It’s a good faith.
When you read the Koran it says good things. But I don’t know if
I’d walk up to a man in [Muslim city] and talk to him.

For Cecilia, her perspective of the world before her travel to Ecuador was cohesively build around an environmental discourse that offered her a role in the world and defined her interactions with others. She was also comfortable with most religious expressions of those around her. The only hesitations she had were a result of her experience with Muslim men, but as the following story shows, her new friendship built in Ecuador caused a ripple in her spiritual journey.
The group of students traveling to Ecuador included two males, one of whom was a devoted Muslim who practiced his faith on the trip. In this description, his name is Adeem. For Cecilia it was a conflict in her view of the world that Adeem could believe in religion and at the same time study environmental issues from a scientific standpoint. During her post-travel interview she dramatically explained how crazy and fascinating it was to meet someone like him. She had several stories that recounted their conversations about faith and religion during the trip. It became clear that she was truly attempting to understand his perspective and how he experienced his religion. The following narrative provides insight into her attempts to understand her new friend:

We did have one guy on our trip, Adeem, and he was Muslim and I spoke to him a lot about it. His parents are very Muslim and they don’t believe in evolution. But he believes in both, like he’s accepting both. When he’s talking to his scientific friends he doesn’t deny anything, when he’s talking to his religious friends he doesn’t deny anything either. And he’s really strict. He prays five times a day, no alcohol....When we were traveling he had his own room, he had an application on his Iphone that showed him which direction to pray. But he also was studying the same stuff as us and was very open and he wasn’t resisting it. I talked to him a lot about that because it really puzzled me because I feel people will either believe in creation or believe in evolution. It’s not often that you find someone who says “I’ve studied both, I know people who believe either, I don’t deny either, I believe in both.”

...It was interesting to have that constant reminder that that person exists throughout the trip... he was always there seeing the same things as me and I would look at him and wonder if ever any of the stuff would change his mind. I asked him often. “How
do you feel after you pray?” He said, “I just feel peaceful.” I remember then thinking - even if you are, you know, sciency, it doesn’t hurt to feel peaceful. If it does good to your body and your soul and your mind then, I don’t know, I’ll support him - I’m just not going to do it.

...We asked him all the time... like when someone’s colour-blind you question ‘What colour’s my shirt’ all the time (Interviewer laughs). Well, you know, very Muslim on a trip with 17 girls in the middle of the woods! And he was very anti – you know no drinking and stuff, but he would still come out with us and stuff. And one of the time when I told you I spoke with him we were at a bar and everyone was drinking and stuff and I noticed that he was just standing there and I went up to him and he said he was feeling really overwhelmed.... we talked about that... we argued but his response was that he still accepts both.

It is clear from the above narrative that Cecilia is fascinated by Adeem’s ability to accept what she had previously considered to be opposing perspectives. Later in her interview, when discussing an unrelated challenge she faced on the trip she referred to Adeem’s opinion on the matter and how she had valued his advice. The friendship was a key feature of her non-programmatic learning experience while in Ecuador. I am not suggesting that Cecilia has transitioned out of her established mode of constructing the world according to science. Rather the most that can be said about her interaction with Adeem was that it broadened her perspective on the world and opened the possibility of adding to, not rejecting her scientific-environmental worldview.

One of Fowler’s (1981) descriptions of the nature of faith development involves an individual’s ability to understand and express the beliefs and values of another. While Cecilia did not experience an overt transition in her spiritual journey, she definitely grew
in her ability to understand and value another’s spirituality. No longer did she just see Adeem as strange, she was able to understand the benefits of his religious practice from his perspective.

The importance of Cecilia’s broadening of perspectives is interesting in light of another connection. In Chapter Six I outlined the newfound concern with religion that one of the Ecuador students had after a conversation with a local man and her professor. This student was Cecilia. It is significant that while she came to see how specific religious beliefs may cause a community to further degrade the environment, she also came to see how one could hold both their religious beliefs and science beliefs at the same time. She also came to understand that religion could be beneficial on a personal level.

For Cecilia the trip to Ecuador seems to have caused a small amount of dissonance in her way of making meaning, specifically she is questioning what beliefs are compatible in making means of one’s existence. There is no suggestion that Cecilia will adopt a religious perspective or significantly alter her own spirituality, but her interviews are helpful in identifying dissonance that may lead to new ways of ordering her world.

For each of the students’ whose narratives are outlined above, their time abroad sparked big pictures questions and altered their spirituality. Their experiences are shared by four other students on the trip whose spiritual development was linked to anything from falling in love to becoming independent from their parents. Although not a guaranteed, universal experience, studying abroad definitely has the potential to alter students’ spirituality.

**Confirming Value Centres**
The initial question driving this study focused on identifying students’ spiritual change during study abroad. However, as I analysed the interviews, it became clear that for some students their spiritual journey while abroad was defined, not by alteration, but by a reinforcement of already held beliefs and values. This was the case for three students, two traveling to Ecuador and one traveling to Kenya. Two of their stories are below.

**Maia: Walking Where Darwin Walked**

When I began my study of the students traveling to Ecuador I found, upon reviewing their questionnaires, that the majority approached life with a secular, scientific worldview. At first I was concerned that this study would have little relevance to their lived experiences no matter how strongly Fowler stressed the universality of faith. Almost as soon as the interviews began, however, it became very clear that these students had a very cohesive, and often articulated, sense of their ultimate environment. There was a clear suggestion of science as their centre of supra-ordinate value. I touch briefly on the strength and content of this self-identified, environmental-scientific worldview in Chapter Five. The environmental science students as a whole appeared implicit in their scientific spirituality but there was one student who explicitly identified that her mode of constructing the world through science had spiritual undertones. In this thesis she will be named Maia and her story is below.

Maia had been raised to be, as she identified, a secular Jew. The worldview she was given was predominantly scientific and she participated in Jewish holidays with her relatives. She did not recount a time when her way of ordering the world was brought into question. Like many of the environmental science students, her academic subject
provided her with a sense of purpose and belonging in the world as well as goals for a future vocation.

But Maia differed from her colleagues in that she articulated a possible spiritual element in her excitement about traveling to the Galapagos. She was aware that she attributed greater meaning to certain physical events. Her travels were significant because of their relation to her ultimate environment. Specifically, her trip to the Galapagos Islands was not just a trip to learn about the environment, but a chance to walk where Darwin walked. She described it in the following way in her pre-travel interview:

And the fact that Darwin was there – I guess this is a sort of an interesting spiritual thing - sort of feeling the presence of Darwin there. I don’t if I actually will. I feel like I might. But that’s like me projecting what I will feel. But it is amazing because so much is untouched since he was there.

Maia’s larger, ordering value of environmental science caused her to situate herself as part of the community of scientific thinkers reaching back into history. This sense of identity attributed significance to her opportunity to go where Darwin had been beyond just the immediate reality of visiting the Galapagos.

During Maia’s follow-up interview I wished to know whether or not she had indeed felt Darwin’s presence in some way during her stay in the Galapagos. Before I had a chance to ask her directly, she said that one highlight of the trip was, “...being where Darwin was.” Later she also said,

When we went to the islands where there weren’t any human inhabitants, it was basically the same as it was when [Darwin] was there and it was easy to feel like he could have been with us as well. I remember saying on the trip several times – I wish Darwin was here right now.
Maia is recounting how her imagination played a role in constructing the significance of her destination, beyond the tangible realities. In Fowler’s discussion of faith the imagination or the way individuals construct images of their ultimate environment is key to understanding their faith relationships. For Maia, there is no doubt that she has had a spiritually confirming experience while on the study abroad program, strengthening the ordering value of environmental science in her life.

**Kyra: The strength of Maasai women**

Environmental science was not the only academic subject that offered a unifying value centre for students’ lives. One student traveling to Kenya explicitly stated that her way of making meaning, and greater life goals, were linked to a radical feminist perspective. During her travels to Kenya, she experienced aspects of local culture that seemed to confirm her view of the world and strengthen, rather than alter her spirituality. In the following narrative she will be Kyra.

Kyra grew up in a rural, Ontario town and attended church with her family regularly. When she was in middle school, she decided that she did not believe in the religion presented to her by the church. Even though her parents still attended, she stopped. Later the rest of the family would too.

I went to church ...and I listened and I participated in bible school and all that stuff. But I really didn’t believe in it because I thought it was ridiculous. The little stories, you know what I mean... When I was 12-13 that’s when I stopped going. I said no, no more, I’m not doing this. And a couple of years later, my parents still went and then they just stopped going. So probably by the time I was 15 they had stopped going too. I’m not entirely sure why.
Later, when Kyra was 17, the church she had previously attended had a vote on whether they should include homosexuals in the congregation. Kyra attended the public meetings surrounding the vote and was shocked at the animosity she saw in her community. Her story of these meetings is recounted in Chapter Five. During this same phase of her life, Kyra began to read feminist scholars and identified with what she read. Through her readings and later in her Women and Gender Studies program at university she strongly adopted the radical feminist identity and ideologies.

I’m a radical feminist, that how I would construct myself. So I’m really a strong believer in change and I think we, that people, should be constantly working toward change and reforming things. I really like strong people, people with strong characters - that no matter what your values or your characteristics are, that you stand by them.

... I am really against neo-liberalism... and so [my ultimate goal] is really for that to be gone. A lot of oppression, and not just for women but for racialized bodies as well, comes through neo-liberalism....Neo-liberalism works to keep certain people in their places and to bring people down I guess. And so I think that that needs to be completely reformed.

It is clear in the above quote that Kyra’s unifying narrative of feminism has given her both a lens to view the world and a sense of purpose for her future vocation, promoting change. Throughout the interview Kyra was able to clearly articulate her perspectives. Kyra was the only student on all three trips who articulated her spirituality in this way, although she was not the only student whose spirituality was directly linked to their subject of study.
During Kyra’s time in Kenya she saw first-hand the oppression of women in rural communities. She vividly recounted the words of the Maasai women who came as guest speakers to her class. She also observed how the work of the women allowed the community to continue and the inequality that existed in the division of labour. In response to a question about the challenges she faced on the trip, she replied:

The women’s roles... Women have to get water. If men are caught helping carry water then they have to pay a fine to the other community members or the person who caught them. And the women have to collect all the fire wood, and I was left asking what do these men do all day? Because my perception is that they don’t really do anything. It was such hard work, I would never be able to do that - I would quit. And they’re in charge of all the cooking, taking care of the kids, laundry, etc. Everything! And all the men in the community - I guess this isn’t a nice thing to say - they were all just lounging about.

Kyra’s observations in Kenya confirmed her value of working against oppression and seeing women attain equity. She saw education as playing a key role in raising the position of women in Kenya:

Education is proven to slow down marriage and childbearing because the ideas are there and women aren’t confined to the home. The girls learn more than collecting water and you know fire wood. They can think through things themselves and make their own decisions. But if they’re staying at home and helping their moms they don’t have the same ability to question things, especially if you’re completely indoctrinated with tradition.

It is interesting that Kyra’s own ordering of values came through education and she ascribes education with the power to liberate others by allowing them to question norms. For Kyra, her position as a feminist defines her own spirituality and her relation
and perspective on others. Her participation in the international study program deepened her commitment to and understanding of her subject major, confirming her spirituality.

**Conclusion**

I entered this research with the primary purpose of identifying changes in students’ spirituality as a result of studying abroad. I found that not all students experienced alterations in their spirituality, but rather some were confirmed in their current beliefs while others did not engage with interviews in ways that allowed me to understand their spirituality.

**Relationships**

For most of the students whose spirituality was confirmed or altered in some way, their friendships with local people and classmates played a key role. The personal relationships that students encountered were given the most attention by students during their interviews. Some of the transcripts read like society papers telling about the social dynamics between students and indicating that personal relationships are highly valued by these university students. As the format of study abroad programs changes to short-term stays in which students remain in a cohort and are not hosted by local people, research may be needed to pinpoint exactly how the personal interaction between participants and local hosts is changing and how these possible changes are related to study abroad outcomes.

**Academics**

For the environmental science students, as well as Kyra who traveled to Kenya, their ultimate values were strongly influenced by their academic discipline. Not all academic disciplines are guaranteed to offer students meaning making for their ultimate
environment, nor is there assurance that all students with a particular major will apply their discipline to life’s big questions. It is important to note, however, that some students are indeed engaging with their discipline as a centre of supra-ordinate value. For these students, their study abroad programs offer a time of emersion in their discipline allowing them to focus their whole self on the issues of ultimate importance to them. As the above narratives indicate, study abroad plays a role in confirming and/or altering students’ beliefs.
Chapter Eight
Concluding Reflections on Academic Pilgrims

The movement of students across the globe has long been an established part of academia: graduate students travel abroad to be mentored by specific scholars; families emigrate so their children have access to university and undergraduates move between continents learning languages and experiencing new cultures. While globalization has greatly increased the frequency and ease of international academic mobility, the majority of student travel or immigration happens along two established, geographic trends. First, there is the movement of students from less developed to more developed nations. These students often relocate permanently in their destination countries and have been the subject of much international student research. Second, there is the movement of students from developed nations to other developed nations. The largest example of this type of mobility is seen in within the European region as the ERASMUS program allows for over two million students to study outside their home country (European Commission, 2010). In North America, most international study opportunities also send students to Europe, although China has recently risen in popularity as a destination (Karram, 2010). Both these dominant trends in student movement transfer students to economic centres of power.

In contrast to these traditional models of international study, globalization is seeing a new breed of shorter, subject-specific study opportunities emerge at North American universities. No longer is language-learning prioritized in these programs, nor are they hosted by the receiving nation (McKeown, 2009). Rather, week or month-long programs, arranged by the sending institution, and linked to specific courses, are
increasing in popularity. While, many of the students traveling in these emerging programs are still moving toward the economic and political centres of power around the world, an alternative transfer is being seen. A small portion of North American study abroad programs are sending students from highly developed, industrial nations to less developed, economically peripheral nations. While still in the minority, these programs exist at universities across North America. They expose students’ do a range of issues not present in traditional program, raising some important questions: Do students develop the same intercultural skills as in traditional programs? What are the learning outcomes for these subject-specific programs? And finally: Does study in developing nations alter students’ spirituality, re-orienting their ways of making meaning of life’s big picture? It is the last question with which this thesis research has been concerned.

**Recounting this Thesis Journey: Overview of Past Chapters**

The first two chapter of this thesis identified the need for research that explores the spiritual impact of students’ participation in international study programs. Chapter One presented the rapid increases in global movement leading to interactions between cultures of varying religiosity. I also established my role as the researcher and presented the main research questions. Chapter Two reviewed the related literature that has informed this study and located the current contribution.

In Chapters Three and Four of this thesis, the theoretical framework and methodology were outlined. Chapter Three showed how the work of James Fowler (1981) and his stages of faith were used to define the concept of spirituality and assess how spirituality develops. Chapter Four outlined the qualitative, phenomenological nature of this thesis investigation. I detailed the research sample of students traveling to
Kenya, Ecuador and Jordan as well as the questionnaire and interview tools that were used to collect data. I concluded Chapter Four by stating the time constraints that limited this study.

The following three chapters presented the analyses this study’s results. Chapter Five described the students’ pre-travel responses, outlined how the students define their spirituality and narrated features of students’ spiritual journey up until the point of studying abroad. I suggest that although the majority of students are not religious, formal religion has played a role for many of them in shaping their current spirituality. For other students their academic subject is the key narrative around which their ultimate environment is structured. Their field of study, then, becomes a type of spirituality for these students.

In the sixth chapter of this thesis students’ interactions with the host countries’ religions are presented from the post-travel interviews. The students do not interact extensively with the religious traditions and these interactions do not appear to be connected to students’ spiritual alterations. Rather, students’ exposure to the formal religions of their host country is facilitated through the official curriculum for two of the focus programs, limiting religion to a merely historical phenomenon.

In Chapter Seven, this thesis climaxes as I answer the lead research question surrounding students’ altered spirituality. Though not all students encountered a spiritual change during their time abroad, questions of ultimate purpose are central to many students’ experiences, altering the spirituality of some and confirming that of others. Chapter Seven uses the students’ own narratives to show how their time abroad is connected to, and in many cases advances, students’ spiritual journeys.
In this present, concluding chapter I have summarized the research outlined in the previous chapters. In the following section I briefly outline areas for further research that I encountered throughout this thesis. I also offer some suggestions for the design of study abroad programming. I then pan out from my narrow focus on individual spirituality to reflect on the phenomenon of North American students traveling to developing nations for short-term study at the beginning of the 21st Century. I contrast the emerging trends with historic examples, asking the following question: How do historical examples of learner-centred, European travel from centres to peripheries allow us to conceptualize and analyse present day trends in international student movement to the peripheries?

**Future Journeys:**

**Suggestions for further research**

Throughout the documentation of this thesis research I have often concluded a section by indicating that further research would be helpful in a specific area. The following list is a summary of those topics:

1. Research identifying how individuals in specific age-cohorts across Canada identify their spirituality and construct their ultimate environment.
2. Exploration of the term searching. To what extent are university-aged students in Canada searching for new or more defined forms of spirituality?
3. Pinpointing where the drive among Canadian university students to help-the-world comes from. What is the Centre of Supra-ordinate Value unifying their narrative?
4. Determining if there is any connection between environmental degradation/protection of endangered biospheres, and religious or cultural values.
5. Comprehensive description of the place of religion in a broad range of academic disciplines. What makes a subject tourism or curriculum? When do religious sites become historical tourism rather than current events?

6. Comparison of academic, social and spiritual outcomes of short-term vs. long-term study abroad programs.

**Considerations for the Design of International Study Programs**

During the analysis of these research findings, I have occasionally made suggestions for study abroad program design. Below, I have summarized those suggestions:

1. Acknowledgement that students are asking big picture questions on international study programs with foci such as Environmental Science or Peace and Conflict. Provision of space for students to engage with those questions. Facilitation of those questions by program faculty.

2. Explanation of religious beliefs by those from the host region.

3. Broadening the scope of historically based subjects such as Archaeological Sciences that occur in developing nations to facilitate students’ engagement with local culture.

4. Provide opportunities for personal social interactions between students and individuals from the host country.

**Analogies of Student Travel**

The current movement of North American students across borders into the developing world needs to be viewed beyond the modern lens of study abroad
North American international study programs are almost two hundred years old but forms of learner-focused, Western European travel have been historically documented for thousands of years. It is necessary to identify the key features of the current phenomenon that will allow for an appropriate comparative analysis with past travel patterns. Three key features of are identifiable from the international student mobility with which this thesis is concerned. First, the short-term nature of study abroad has always distinguished it from the travel of international students who migrate to another nation for full degree completion. From the early 19th Century, the students who traveled to Europe did so with the understanding that they would return to their sending institution to complete their degree (Gore, 2005). The short-term nature of emerging study programs is even more pronounced since the programs under scrutiny in this research are one month-long and take place during summer vacation. A second key feature of the international study programs under examination is their focus on the learner. Students are not traveling merely for tourism or relaxation but to gain a specific knowledge that is enhanced by their destination. This focus on the learner distinguishes undergraduate student mobility as a subset of the greater trend of international academic mobility that also takes subject experts and teachers abroad for research or to impart knowledge. While the movement of experts is a worthy area of study, the key feature of the student mobility discussed here is the focus on the learner. Finally, the third key feature, already outlined above as a main distinguisher of new forms of student travel, is the movement of students from developed to developing nations.

Too often, the main connection made between study in developing nations and other forms of travel presents the student participants as tourists, with the understanding
that tourism is degrading to the host country (Timothy & Olsen, 2006). However, if the three features above are taken as a guideline to examine historic examples of Western-European travel, tourism is not only possible analogy to be found. Examples such as political exiles, warriors, new world settlers and even medieval scholars all offer occasions when individuals traveled out of Europe for various reasons. However, not all of these examples are short-term, learner-focused and involve a visit to the economic peripheries. Satisfying all three requirements, however, are the journeys of the early sea-explorers and those of the pilgrims in the middle ages. These characters present a rich comparison that will help highlight key features of student movement at the beginning of the 21st Century. Each type of travel will be analysed by asking who was going, what knowledge they sought and what was the outcome of their travels?

Pilgrims

Some of the earliest travel writing available in the European tradition comes from the journeys of pilgrims as far back as the 4th Century, CE. One such individual was a young nun named Egeria who walked on foot from Europe to see the sites of the Middle East or Holy Land in 333, CE. An account of Egeria’s travels is in letter form to a woman who is most likely her patron, funding her pilgrimage (Sivan, 1988). For pilgrims such as Egeria it was common for their journey to last several months. Many of the pilgrims were hosted along their journeys by other monastic orders who offered hospitality. While there would have been other individuals traveling with Egeria, both men and women, women played a visible role in the world of pilgrimages as the travelers, funders and hosts of the journey. It is also interesting to note that while pilgrim’s were economically privileged to some extent because of their connection to patrons and holy
orders, they themselves were not people of means and traveled humbly as guests of others.

For pilgrims such as Egeria, their journey was centred on gaining new understanding of their faith by being in the location of biblical stories. Egeria writes passionately about walking in Jesus’ footsteps at the Sea of Galilee or drawing water in Nazareth as Mary may have. The knowledge that these pilgrims sought was the physical, experiential portion of the religious texts they had been studying cognitively (Leyerle, 1996).

An interesting feature of early pilgrimages from Europe was the imparting of knowledge by those in the host region. For Egeria, the nuns she visited did not just offer room and board, but guided her through the sites in their area and explained the religious significance. There is also a record of pilgrims being given tokens from their hosts that would symbolize their visit. It is important to note that for Egeria and her fellow pilgrims, the local community outside of their hosting monasteries does not appear to be the source of their learning but rather those with the same religious convictions as their own. They are not seeking to learn about the other religions of the area but come with a set understanding of the knowledge they wish to gain.

While the personal outcomes of Egeria’s story are common for many pilgrims not all pilgrims write of their spiritual transformation and growth in their travel journeys. Writings from select pilgrimages a few centuries after Egeria say less about the individual’s spiritual renewal and more about the glamour of the holy sites and the local brothels (Leyerle, 1996). While not in the majority, these examples still offer a nuanced
perspective of pilgrimages and acknowledge that personal transformation is not a
guaranteed outcome.

For Egeria, her pilgrimage took just under a year and was key to her spiritual
development. She became an example for others of untiring devotion to God and there is
evidence that church authorities used her journey as a model for others to do the same
(Sivan, 1988). While personal outcomes are evident in the writings of the early pilgrims,
little is said about the greater social impact of their journeys beyond her example being
heeded. Rather Egeria and others like her embarked on spiritual quests, seeking location-
specific knowledge that would be for personal growth.

Though the earliest pilgrimages are recording in the Middle Ages, pilgrimages
were still popular a thousand years later during Europe’s dramatic social change. The
commercialization of pilgrimages and other features of the Holy Roman Empire would
fuel the Protestant reformation, pitting region against region and decentralizing long held
authority. Much of Martin Luther’s own work stemmed from his pilgrimage to Rome in
1510. What had mostly likely intended to be a personal, spiritual journey, instead
contributed to the restructuring of European political and religious authority.

Pilgrims still travel throughout the globe seeking spiritual awakening today.
Current pilgrimages are often shorter than their 4th Century ancestors and less often
involve homestays and travel by foot. They are however, life changing for the
participants and provide income and meaning for the host region (Timothy & Olsen,
2006). They still resemble the early European pilgrimages that were driven by a spiritual
quest, hosted by those in the destination country and existed for thousands of years before
the perceived exploitation of pilgrims would launch Europe into a tumultuous era.
Early Sea Explorers

Johnson (2009) has suggested that the collective, Western memory of fictitious explorers and adventures is a strong motivator for students who travel abroad, yearning to encounter new people and vistas. The adventures of real historical characters are often as compelling. Early sea explorers such as Columbus, forging out on the eve of colonialism to find trade routes, provide a helpful comparison to the current day travel of students. Before Columbus discovered the American continents, the majority of European explorers engaged on short-term journeys along the coast of Africa and beyond. They were exclusively male, engaged in commercial pursuits such as trading goods. A small minority, such as the Polo family, is recorded to have engaged in diplomacy and re-located semi-permanently to the kingdom of the Cathay (Dent, 1929). Taking Columbus as an example, we see an established businessman and navigator whose famous first journey was funded by merchants and nobles. Explorers were often hosted during their journeys by the nobles and rulers of their destination.

The travels of many of the pre-colonial explorers were not for the national interest of conquering new lands but the forging of new economic ties by establishing trade routes and purchasing goods. The explorers were in essence market researcher. They did not travel in order to learn the diverse knowledge offered by the host location but for the negotiation of business transactions that would provide Europeans with access to the goods of that region.

Columbus and his fellow explorers had much to gain personally from their adventures. First, a successful trading mission resulted in material wealth in the home country, for both they and their noble investors (Canny, 1992). Second, many explorers
gained continent-wide fame and recognition for their exploits. The possibility of being made nobility was also present for those traveling abroad. These benefits often came after incredible personal risk. For Columbus, his journeys were fraught with dangers and he would end up returning to Spain in chains after a mutiny in his governed colony. High seas exploration was notoriously dangerous and there was little guarantee of success in their endeavours.

The journeys of a successful explorer also had the potential to advance their country’s position in Europe. Columbus’ journeys are perhaps the most extreme example of this due to their unexpected outcome of encountering the Americas. But Portuguese and Dutch explorers were also key national symbols for their exploration of the African coast and success in trading.

These early explorers were traveling during a time when the world was in flux. The mighty kingdoms of the East, and the limited resources of Europe were increasing world trade. With Columbus, a new era of colonization and conquest would begin, an unexpected result of his sea exploration. The rise of the nation-state, the claiming of new lands and the Enlightenment philosophies of Europe would define the following centuries. It was a scene of change and the explorers were part of the cast.

While the travel journeys of pilgrims and sea-explorers share some distinct commonalities with present day student mobility away from economic centres, each is linked to broader field of higher education research in other ways. The pilgrims were members of monastic orders in Europe, the same monastic orders that preserved much of the ancient knowledge cannons throughout the Middle Ages. The elite, cloistered nature of the medieval university has been likened to secluded monasteries of European
Catholicism (Rashadall, 1987). The explorers too emerged at the same time as the inception of the modern university. Though the two phenomena are not directly linked, both pilgrimages and exploration grew out of Europe’s drive to discover, exploring new land and new knowledge.

**Study Travel to the Peripheries**

The above narratives of Egeria and Columbus provide a reflective comparison on today’s movement of students’ to economically peripheral nations. The sample programs of this thesis research took students to Kenya to study Peace and Conflict, Ecuador to study Environmental Science and Jordan for Archaeological Sciences. The students were there for a short amount of time and had a learner focus in their travels. While the specific journeys of the students are outlined in the previous chapters, it important to consider broadly who was a part of each group, what knowledge they sought, and what were the outcomes of their travels?

Like the pilgrims of old, both male and females have a place in the study programs being offered abroad at Canadian universities. For each program, with the largest percentage traveling to Ecuador, women were in the majority. Ecuador was also the most culturally homogenous group with all the women being white Canadians enrolled in a scientific major. Kenya and Jordan both attracted a slightly broader range of cultures and majors to their programs, with a large number of Asian-Canadians participating in the Jordan program.

For each of the programs the knowledge the students sought was enhanced by being physically in the geographical location but the scope of the knowledge was predetermined by the sending institution and facilitated by faculty traveling with the
students. Furthermore, unlike the pilgrims mentioned above and unlike many traditional study abroad programs, these students were not hosted and guided by local people of their destination. Rather, the guest speakers and organizations that did participate in the programs had an established connection to the body of knowledge that the sending university had pre-established. The Kenya program could perhaps be said to stray from this trend during the time the students spent in the Maasai Mara when they were entirely entrusted to a local guide who took them on walks and showed them the region from his perspective.

For the student participants in this study, there were numerous personal outcomes of their travels abroad. Students grew in confidence, several mentioned understanding their subject more clearly and all of them considered the programs a positive experience. One outcome that recurred as a theme across programs was students’ new awareness of the complexity of the world and limitations of being a foreigner. For the students traveling to Kenya, many returned home understanding new dimensions of poverty and the challenges of development work in Africa. Several of the students traveling to Ecuador mentioned that their own presence in the fragile environment was problematic. While the trip advanced their learning they feared it did ecological damage as well. Finally, the students traveling to Jordan, though less enamoured with their academic pursuits, became friends with local people learning about hospitality and community in new ways, but not knowing how to carry those values home. The personal outcomes for each student on each program were many, re-shaping their academic and social knowledge.
The world of Europe’s early explorers has many similarities to the present day environment of globalization. When Columbus sailed, Europe was on the brink of inventions and reformations with the dawning of the Enlightenment. Europe was also regaining its position of formidable power and would spread this around the globe with the discovery of the New World. Today, an economic discourse of innovation and advancement is spread through vast technological networks around the world. The evolving nature of study abroad programming may be linked to these changes as short-term programs allow students to consume a quick moment in a host country, learning knowledge that is framed by the sending institution. If these programs do reflect greater trends of globalization, what then are the implications? Does this indicate a shift in the worldwide interactions between individuals? Will these changes occur smoothly or with friction?

I would like to suggest the most important result of this thesis research was establishing that for some of the students, their field of study provided an ordering value for their ultimate environment, therefore, defining their spirituality. The connection between spiritually and students’ field of study was mainly seen among the students traveling to Kenya and Ecuador. This may have been due to the normative focus of their course subjects, Peace and Conflict, Environment Science. Both subjects are linked to a potential vision of the world as a place of personal and ecological harmony. Particularly for several of the students traveling to Ecuador their environmental worldview provided them with a sense of life’s purpose, established their relationship with others and was leading them into a specific vocation. Their journey to Ecuador was linked to the greater value of environmental wholeness that drove their lives. A few of the students traveling
to Kenya were also confirmed in their life values through their program. Whether feminists, teachers or Christians, these students came away from Kenya better understanding their place and purpose in the world. In reflecting on these students, it does not seem accurate to call them tourists or explorers. They are traveling abroad as a way to experience their beliefs and participate in the process of peace or environmentalism that guides their lives. They are on a spiritual journey. They are academic pilgrims.
References


Carlson, J.D. & Owens, E.C. (2003). *The sacred and the sovereign: Religion and
international politics. Washington, D.C: Georgetown University Press.


University Press.


PROTOCOL REFERENCE #25027

March 2, 2010

Dr. Tony Chambers
Department of Theory and Policy Studies
OISE/University of Toronto
252 Bloor St. West
Toronto, ON M5S 1V6

Ms. Grace Karram Stephenson
Department of Theory and Policy Studies
OISE/University of Toronto
252 Bloor St. West
Toronto, ON M5S 1V6

Dear Dr. Chambers and Ms. Stephenson:

Re: Your research protocol entitled “Study abroad and spirituality: The experiences of Canadian students on short-term study in developing nations”

ETHICS APPROVAL

Original Approval Date: March 2, 2010
Expiry Date: March 1, 2011
Continuing Review Level: 1

We are writing to advise you that a member of the Social Sciences, Humanities & Education Research Ethics Board has granted approval to the above-named research study, for a period of one year, under the REB’s delegated review process. Please ensure that you submit an Annual Renewal Form or a Study Completion Report 15 to 30 days prior to the expiry date of your study. Note that annual renewals for studies cannot be accepted more than 30 days prior to the date of expiry, as per federal and international policies.

All your most recently submitted documents have been approved for use in this study.

Any changes to the approved protocol or consent materials must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process prior to its implementation. Any adverse or unanticipated events should be reported to the Office of Research Ethics as soon as possible.

If your research has funding attached, please contact the relevant Research Funding Officer in Research Services to ensure that your funds are released.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your project.

Yours sincerely,

Daniel Gyewu
Research Ethics Coordinator
Appendix B
Study Information Letter

Study Title:
Study abroad and spirituality: The experiences of Canadian students on short-term study in developing nations.

Researcher:
Grace Karram Stephenson
MA Student, Theory and Policy Studies, OISE/UT
grace.karram@utoronto.ca
416.766.3143

Purpose:
Study abroad is often acclaimed as a life-changing experience for undergraduate students. Yet little research has been done for students traveling to non-Western, developing nations. This project provides a comparison of students traveling to Ecuador, Jordan and Kenya as part of a summer abroad program.

The process of change that students undergo while abroad has long been the subject of study of social scientists in the psychology and linguistic fields. This research project adds to that body of knowledge by examining how this process of change is manifest in students’ spirituality and identity while traveling to developing nations. As more and more students choose to study in non-Western, developing nations where religion is practiced in overt ways, it is important to understand how students interact with these religions and how their perspective of the host country changes as a result. The results of this study have implications both for those who design study abroad programs and those who participate in them.

Participation:
Thank you for considering participating in this study! Your participation is completely voluntary but I encourage you to do so as it will provide you with a reflective space to better understand your study abroad experiences. Students who participate will be compensated for their time.

Students who choose to participate will be asked to fill out a questionnaire during their orientation day at Woodsworth College. It should take no more than one half hour of your time. Five students from your program will also be asked to participate in two interviews, one before you leave and one within a month of your return to Canada. Each interview will be no more than one hour. Participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time through verbal or written communication with the researcher. If you are chosen for an interview, it will only be recorded with your consent. Also, you are not obligated to answer any question you do not feel comfortable answering and no judgments or evaluations will be made about your answers. All information used in this study will be confidential – institutions, country location and student names will not be identified in publications or presentations. The only people who will see it will be myself and my thesis supervisor (see contact above). You are free to withdraw from this research at any time without penalty. All information collected in this study will be securely kept – locked in the personal office of the researcher. All research will be destroyed three years after collection.

Thanks again for considering this study and feel free to email or call me with any questions,

Grace Karram Stephenson
Researcher: Grace Karram Stephenson,
MA student, Higher Education, OISE/UofT
46 Hook Ave
Toronto, Ontario
M6P 1T3
grace.karram@utoronto.ca, 416-766-3143

This research is happening under the supervision of:
Dr. Tony Chambers
TPS, OISE/UT 6th Floor
252 Bloor Street West
Toronto, Ontario
M5S 1V6
tchambers@oise.utoronto.ca, 416-978-1215

NOTE: This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Toronto. If you have any questions related to your rights as a participant in this study or if you have any complaints or concerns about how you have been treated as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Ethics,
ethics.review@utoronto.ca, 416-946-3273

Please keep a copy of this letter for your records.
Appendix C
Participating College Consent Form

Title: Study abroad and spirituality: The experiences of Canadian students on short-term study in developing nations.

Researcher: Grace Karram Stephenson,
MA student, Higher Education, OISE/UofT
Contact: grace.karram@utoronto.ca, 416-766-3143

Supervisor: Dr. Tony Chambers
TPS, OISE/UT
Contact: tchambers@oise.utoronto.ca, 416-978-1215

On behalf of the Woodsworth College Summer Abroad Programs, we have read and agree to the following: (Please check)

☐ We have read the information provided by the research and have had the research project satisfactorily explained to us.

☐ We agree to allow the researcher, Grace Karram Stephenson, one half hour with our students to administer a questionnaire and recruit volunteers for follow-up interviews.

☐ We agree to send an email to our students informing them of the project and we agree to provide space during our pre-travel orientation for the necessary group meeting.

☐ We understand that the program and college identity will be held confidential by the researcher and the research results will be used only for scholarly or university administrative purposes.

☐ We understand that students’ participation is completely voluntary and they are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

☐ We understand that this research project poses no physical or psychological harm to the students or persons of Woodsworth College or the Summer Abroad program.

☐ We understand that audio-tapes and interview notes will be kept in a secure location in the researcher’s personal office and destroyed three years after the information is collected, and that this consent form will also be kept in the same secure location.

Name: _______________________
Position: _____________________
Signature: ____________________

Name: _______________________
Position: _____________________
Signature: ____________________
Please check if you would like a summary of the findings of this study upon completion. This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Toronto. If you have any questions related to your rights as a participant in this study or if you have any complaints or concerns about how you have been treated as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Ethics, ethics.review@utoronto.ca, 416-946-3273.

Please keep a copy of this letter for your records.
Appendix D
Student Recruitment Email

Email Message
Dear Study Abroad Student,

My name is Grace Karram Stephenson and I am currently a student at OISE here at UofT. On your orientation day, I will be on site administering a questionnaire with students in your program who are traveling to <host country>. This is an excellent opportunity to give your perspective and help us learn more about study abroad programs and the students who participate in them. Students will only be asked to give half an hour of their time on orientation day although there will be opportunities for further follow-up. Compensation will be provided for participating students.

If you are interested in joining in this project, please read the attached information sheet. You may volunteer by emailing me at grace.karram@utoronto.ca or signing up the morning of orientation day.

Thank you,

Grace Karram Stephenson
MA Student, OISE/UT
grace.karram@utoronto.ca
416.766.3143

This study is happening under the supervision of:
Dr. Tony Chambers
Theory and Policy Studies, OISE/UT
tchambers@oise.utoronto.ca
416-978-1215

This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Toronto. If you have any questions related to your rights as a participant in this study or if you have any complaints or concerns about how you have been treated as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Ethics, ethics.review@utoronto.ca, 416-946-3273
Appendix E
Study Abroad Questionnaire

STUDENT CONSENT FORM

Project Title: Study abroad and spirituality: The experiences of Canadian students on short-term study in developing nations.

PLEASE CHECK IF YOU AGREE TO THE FOLLOWING:

☐ I agree to complete a questionnaire, provide feedback on the questions and learn more about this research project.

☐ I understand that this study is for the purpose of better understanding the experiences of university students at the University of Toronto and the results will be used only for scholarly or university administrative purposes.

☐ I understand my participation is completely voluntary and I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

☐ I understand that my identity will be held in confidentiality and will not be used in any publications by the researcher and that other participants will be asked to respect the privacy of all participants.

☐ I understand that I may decline to answer any specific questions during the questionnaire or interviews and that I will not be judged or evaluated on my responses.

☐ I understand that audio-tapes and interview notes will be kept in a secure location and destroyed three years after the study is completed, and that this consent form will also be kept in the same secure location.

Name: (Print) ________________________________________________________________

Signature: __________________________________________________________________

Date: ______________________________________________________________________

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS

☐ I agree to be contacted after this information session should I be selected to participate in pre-travel and post-travel interviews.

☐ I agree to participate in 2 interviews, each one hour long maximum, before and after I study abroad.

☐ I agree to be audio-taped during all follow-up interviews if applicable.

Signature: __________________________________________________________

Date:  _____________________________________________________________

Please indicate your contact information and check the best method by which to contact you before and after your time abroad:

☐ Phone: __________________________________________________________

☐ Email: __________________________________________________________

☐ Location (city/town) after your return from study abroad: ________________

Please indicate the format of follow up interviews you would most prefer: (check one)

___ Face-to-face
___ Phone
___ Skype IM
___ Skype videophone
___ Other IM
___ Other, please specify __________________________________________

☐ Please initial if you would like a summary of the findings of this study emailed to you upon completion.
STUDY ABROAD AND SPIRITUALITY SURVEY

Demographics
Age _____ Major/Program ____________________________
Gender F / M Year in school _____
Nationality ____________________________ Ethnicity/Cultural Background/Race _______________

Travel Experience
1. Have you traveled outside of Canada for any reason before? Y / N
2. Have you traveled to a developing (third world) country before? Y / N
   a. If YES (Y), where did you travel? ____________________________________________
   b. If YES (Y), where did you stay while you were there? ________________
3. Have you ever traveled to a nation where <religion> was the dominant religion? Y / N
   a. If YES (Y), where have you traveled?
      ____________________________________________
   b. If YES (Y), with whom did you travel?
      ____________________________________________
4. Were you raised in Canada? Y / N
   a. If NO (N), where were you raised?
      ____________________________________________
   b. If NO (N), at what age did you come to Canada?
      ____________________________________________
Travel Abroad

1. Why are you participating in a study abroad program?

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________


2. Why did you pick <host country> as your destination?

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________


3. What do you expect to gain from your time in <host country>?

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________


4. Do you have any apprehension or fears about studying abroad? If so, what?

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________
1. Of the following words, circle the ones that best describe you:

SECULAR     AGNOSTIC     SPIRITUAL     ATHEIST

SEARCHING   RELIGIOUS    FAITH

OTHER: ___________________

2. How would you describe your spirituality/faith/religion?

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

3. Have you ever practiced a formal religion?  Y / N
   a. If YES (Y), are you currently practicing?  Y / N
   b. If YES (Y), what religion?

______________________________________________________________________

4. What spirituality/faith/religion traditions did you receive from your parents or those who raised you?

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

5. Who do you look to in your life for spiritual guidance or as a spiritual/faith/religious authority?

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

6. What do you know about the faith/spirituality/religion of the country in which you are studying abroad?

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________
7. In what ways, if any, do you anticipate adapting your behaviour to the religious practices of your host country? Why might you adapt your behaviour?

8. Describe any time that faith/spirituality/religion have been addressed in your university program by you or someone else (lectures, readings, discussions, papers you’ve written)?

9. Please indicate the extent to which each of the following describes you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>To some extent</th>
<th>To a Great Extent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having an interest in spirituality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Believing in the sacredness of life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Feeling unsettled about spiritual and religious matters</td>
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<tr>
<td>Believing only what I can see or can be explained</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feeling good about the direction in which my life is headed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feeling a sense of connection with God/ Higher Power that transcends my personal self</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feeling a strong connection to all humanity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feeling disillusioned with my religious upbringing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Having an interest in different religious traditions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Being committed to introducing people to my faith</td>
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<td>Believing in the goodness of all people</td>
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<td>Being thankful for all that has happened to me</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seeing each day, good or bad, as a gift</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seeking to follow religious teachings in my everyday life</td>
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<tr>
<td>Believing in life after death</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### 10. How often do you engage in the following activities (mark one for each item):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Daily</th>
<th>Several times/week</th>
<th>Once a week</th>
<th>Monthly</th>
<th>Less than monthly</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prayer</td>
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<td>Meditation</td>
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<td>Self-reflection</td>
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<td>Tai Chi or similar practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spiritual/religious singing or chanting</td>
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<td>Spiritual/religious discussion groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading of sacred texts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attending religious services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other readings about faith/religion/spirituality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*From Astin & Astin (2004). College Students' Beliefs and Values Survey.*

### 11. In what ways have the following experiences changed your religious/spiritual beliefs?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Weakened</th>
<th>Strengthened</th>
<th>No Change</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New ideas encountered in classes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Romantic relationship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Financial difficulties</td>
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<td>Personal injury or illness</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Break up&quot; with romantic partner</td>
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<td>Parents' divorce or separation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Death of a close friend or family member</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other crisis involving a friend or family member</td>
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<tr>
<td>Epiphany/Conversion/Mystical event</td>
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<tr>
<td>Natural disaster</td>
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<tr>
<td>Campus tragedy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Global/National/Ethnic tragedy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*From Astin & Astin (2004). College Students' Beliefs and Values Survey*
Primary Identities

People have many identities or ways of understanding themselves. Some identities are more prominent than others. Please rate the importance you give to your various identities. Write your primary identities in the large circles and your secondary identities in the smaller, outer circles. Please expand the diagram if necessary. Consider the following categories, but feel free to create your own or add more:

- Gender
- Activity/Sport
- Religion
- Education
- Career Aspirations
- Sexuality
- Class
- Political
- Social Cause
- Family
- Nationality
- Friends
- Ability
- Other

Appendix F
Pre-travel Interview Guide

Student Name and Number:

Program:

Interview Date and Location:

Study Abroad
1. Why have you decided to study abroad?
2. Why did you pick <host country>?
3. Is study abroad an essential part of the undergraduate experience, should more students do it? Why or why not?
4. What outcomes do you expect to get from study abroad?
5. What other experiences can have the same outcomes?
6. Does location matter in achieving the above outcomes? Would you be able to have <specifically cited outcome> in another location? Why or why not?

Spirituality
7. One outcome that we did/did not cover in question #2 is spiritual or #4 religion development?
8. People have a lot of different words that describe the spiritual or religious or faith side of their lives. What words or expressions do you use to describe yourself?
9. What do you know about the dominant religion of <host country>? Where did you learn your information about the religion of <host country>?
10. Was religion or spirituality an important factor in your decision to study in <country>? Why or why not?
11. In what ways do you practice your spiritual or religious beliefs?
12. How similar or different do you think the faith/religious practices will be in <country> compared with Canada?
13. How much effort should study abroad students put into understanding or accommodating the religion of a country that they visit? Do you have any plans of this sort?
Appendix G
Post-travel Interview Guide

Student Name and Number:
Program:
Interview Date and Location:

1. Please tell me about 2-3 positive events from the trip
2. Please tell me about 1-2 challenges of trip
3. As you experienced new things and processed what you were experiencing were there any distinct conversation that helped you digest what you saw?
   o Please tell me about some of the conversations that you had with those on your trip?
   o Please tell me about some of the conversations with those from the culture
   o Did you have any conversations about religion, spirituality or beliefs, values, etc.
4. Could you see the popular religion(s) when you were there?
   o In all location or one more obviously?
   o Was the dominant religion as you had expected it to be?
5. Did you feel that you or those in your group did a good job accommodating the local culture?
6. You have mentioned...
   o Item specific to student – usually related to personal goals of the trip
7. Do you feel that you believe anything different about the world?
   o Specifically about spirituality or people’s core beliefs...