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Building bridges: overview of an international sustainable tourism education model

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to present and explore a sustainable tourism education model that employed Fair-Trade learning principles and experiential learning philosophies. In collaboration with universities in Mexico and the United States, the model employed an international tourism curriculum that explored issues concerning the environmental, economic, and cultural impacts of global tourism. Field experiences challenged students to think critically about tourism issues from various perspectives in order to gain a holistic understanding of the multidimensional issues. Students met with farmers, fisherman, hospitality providers, tourism outfitters, business owners, government officials, regional non-profits, and local citizens to gain a broader perspective. The summary observation of this paper found the model to be successful in promoting student learning and effective in building bridges across nations through the development of strategic partnerships. The lessons learned involved the importance of administrative support, the significance of faculty engagement, and the importance of building relationships.

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Introduction

Driven by a relatively strong global economy, a growing middle class in countries with emerging economies, technological advances, new business models, affordable travel costs, and visa facilitation; international tourist arrivals grew to reach the 1.4 billion mark in 2018 while earnings generated by tourism grew to 1.7 USD trillion dollars (World Tourism Organization, 2019). In today's world, boundaries between nations are blurring as the production, marketing, and delivery of tourism goods and services has become borderless. Consequently, the impacts of globalization and international tourism reach every corner of our planet and the industry is facing a variety of complex challenges pertaining to the health of the natural environment. Learning about sustainable tourism development is not only a process of gaining knowledge, values and theories related to sustainable tourism but it also calls for a changing of mind sets and active engagement of the student in matters relating to more sustainable tourism futures (Tilbury, 2011).

It has been said that global tourism characterizes the epoch of the Anthropocene, the historical moment when humans have become a force capable of affecting life on this planet

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(Gren & Huijbens, 2015). In response to these concerns, global cooperation is essential if political, economic, social, and environmental problems are to be addressed. There is a need for internationalizing the curriculum in the field of tourism education with aims to better prepare and equip students for the challenges of globalization (Sangpikul, 2009).

This paper explores and describes an international sustainable tourism education model that featured academic credit-bearing tourism courses in the U.S. and Mexico that combined traditional classroom-based lectures series with highly immersive experiential learning opportunities in a global setting. Specifically, the experiential learning approach challenged students to think critically about tourism issues from various perspectives in order to build a broader understanding of the diverse issues facing the industry. Students met with farmers, fisherman, hospitality providers, tourism outfitters, business owners, government officials, conservation minded non-profits, and local citizens to gain a holistic perspective.

Sustainable tourism concepts and Fair Trade Learning principles were emphasized in this initiative that involved students from Mexico studying alongside U.S. students in Colorado and students from the U.S. studying alongside Mexican students in Baja Mexico. This model is especially relevant given the geographic characteristics of Baja California Sur and Colorado. Respectively, both of these regions are world class tourism destinations characterized by exquisite natural beauty, fragile environmental resources, and burgeoning pressure from increased tourism. As such, sustainable tourism fits these regions well as it strives to positively impact socioeconomic development in locales with diverse culture, wildlife, biodiversity, and leisure opportunities (Nyaupane & Thapa, 2004; Stronza, 2007). Currently, both regions are experiencing increasing pressure on natural resources due to exponential tourism growth and this context provided the theme for the curriculum. At the heart of the curriculum was the predicament that while natural resources fuel tourism in these regions, tourism can negatively impact these natural resources.

The purpose of this paper is to explore and present the outcomes associated with an experiential education model applied in an international tourism setting. Two specific perspectives were examined in the development and evaluation of this educational model. The first perspective assessed how experiential education promotes student learning and personal development in international sustainable tourism courses. The second perspective explored the role of partnerships and local stakeholder engagement in supporting an international experiential education model.

The structure of this paper includes a Theoretical Framework for Educational Model section that discusses the philosophical underpinnings employed to develop the model, a Description of the International Sustainable Tourism Education Model section that defines and explains the model, an Outcomes section that describes the results obtained from application of the model, and finally a summary Conclusion section.

The theoretical framework for educational model

Experiential education

The philosophical underpinnings of the international education model drew significantly from the foundations and principles of experiential education. Thus, experiential education provided the theoretical framework in this project for organizing and communicating

ideas about how the international sustainable tourism model functions. It provides a conceptual structure for thinking about how the model is organized, as well as its overarching goals, pedagogical approach, guiding philosophy, objectives, and curriculum. Overall, the philosophies of experiential education offer scaffolding for the project and specify the mechanism through which learning occurs.

Given the complex and applied nature of tourism education, the choice of pedagogical approach has been recognized as a critical area for consideration (Lundberg, 1998). It has been argued that sustainable development education should be strongly aligned with active and participatory learning processes, because it encourages learners to ask critical reflective questions, clarify values, envision more positive futures, think systemically, respond through applied learning and explore the dialectic between tradition and innovation (Tilbury, 2011). Structurally, the tourism field is particularly well suited to techniques that expose the student to the practical applications of the subject and its complexity and inter-relationships (Cooper, 2002). Experiential learning is well suited for international tourism education as it bridges the gap between the classroom and the real world. Subsequently, the approach in this model mirrored a growing number of tourism programs that are starting to employ experiential learning in tourism education for its ability to enhance student learning, create personal growth opportunities, and add value to the educational experience (Lee & Dickson, 2010).

Experiential education is a pedagogical approach first articulated by John Dewey that advances the idea that education should be rooted in and transformed by experience. Experiential education can be defined as a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience with enhanced knowledge resulting (Kolb, 1984). One of the fundamental beliefs of experiential education is that experiences are not educational in and of themselves; rather, true learning necessitates a cycle of concrete experiences, reflection, conceptual analysis, and experimentation (Dewey, 1997). Resultingly, in the educational model the complete experiential learning cycle was applied to the field experiences as the mechanism for learning. Usually included as a supplement to the traditional teaching configuration of lectures and tutorials, field experiences, as a form of experiential education, provide different insights and additional learning experiences than those provided by traditional classroom methods (Hirsch & Lloyd, 2005).

Research has shown that experiential learning has the potential to enrich international tourism education (Lee & Dickson, 2010; Ruhanen, 2006). However, there is a dearth of research evaluating the specific impact of tourism field trips on student learning (Xie, 2004). Moreover, there has been little research completed on extended tourism field experiences spanning a number of days, or indeed, weeks (Arcodia & Dickson, 2009). While there are studies in a diversity of disciplines that document examples of experiential education, there is a need for current research to report and demonstrate this approach within tourism education (Arcodia & Dickson, 2009, 2013).

Fair trade learning

The concept of Fair Trade Learning also informed the theoretical framework for this project. In this context, Fair Trade Learning is best described as a global educational exchange that prioritizes reciprocity in relationships through cooperative, cross-cultural participation in learning, service, and civil society efforts (Hartman et al., 2014). It

accentuates the goals of economic equity, equal partnership, mutual learning, positive social change, transparency, and sustainability. Fair Trade Learning explicitly engages the global civil society role of educational exchange in fostering a more just, equitable, and sustainable world (Hartman et al., 2014). The practices of Fair Trade Learning were actualized in this educational model as U.S. students traveled southbound to Mexico and Mexican students traveled northbound to the U.S. to study sustainable tourism and reciprocate the cross-cultural exchange together.

Sustainability

One of the increasingly prominent characteristics developing in tourism education is a greater emphasis on sustainability and the relationship between the natural world and tourism. The most prominent sustainability feature of the educational model was the development of academic courses in the U.S. and Mexico that featured highly immersive experiential learning opportunities focused on local sustainability issues.

Consequently, sustainable tourism was the focus of the curriculum and provided the context for teaching and learning. Sustainable tourism in this context is closely aligned with the tenants of ecotourism, which embodies the natural, cultural, and social dimensions of tourism while striving to minimize the negative impacts and maximize the economic benefits for local people and their natural and cultural environments (Honey, 2008; Moswete & Thapa, 2015; Nyaupane & Thapa, 2004). Furthermore, the curriculum encompassed elements of sustainable development, which can be defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the needs of the future (WCED, 1987). Sustainable development focuses on three areas: environmental protection, economic growth, and social equity. As such, theories and concepts pertaining to sustainable development provided a lens from which to evaluate the relationship between tourism and the natural world.

The consensus in the existing literature calls for a need to teach sustainability within the tourism curriculum in order to prepare students for the demands of the tourism profession (Barber et al., 2011; Deale et al., 2009). Some scholars have even pointed to an apparent disconnect between the general consensus that sustainability is important to the tourism industry and the lack of teaching sustainability in tourism classrooms (Boley, 2011). Teaching sustainable tourism demands that students move beyond just knowing and understanding material to a level of learning that requires them to apply the information to complex problems and evaluate the sustainability of decisions (Posch et al., 2006). Resultingly, the application of tourism theory to practical real world matters was the focus of the curriculum. The intent of the curriculum was to expose students to a myriad of perspectives concerning how tourism and environmental issues are interwoven in both Colorado and Baja California Sur. Complex issues with competing perspectives served to create an element of cognitive dissonance in students and stimulated critical thinking with regard to these challenges. Overall, incorporating sustainability into the tourism curriculum provided students with the opportunity to learn about and debate complicated environmental issues facing the tourism industry and the health of the planet.

Minority inclusiveness

In today's global society, international education has grown to be an essential component in higher education and thus needs to become more widely accessible to college students. Overall, study abroad numbers are going up, however data suggests that minority student participation is stagnant at what can only be considered to be woefully low levels (Picard et al., 2010). Low minority participation rates in study abroad represents a missed opportunity for these students to develop the skills necessary to be competitive in a global society. Consequently, our educational model addressed the need to provide equal access to study abroad opportunities for all students as an exercise in social justice that has become a necessity for universities (Martinez et al., 2010).

Description of the international sustainable tourism education model

As previously described the educational model focused on the use of experiential education, fair trade practice, sustainability and minority inclusiveness. We accomplished these disparate ends by first envisioning a means by which a representative group of students from Mexico and southern Colorado could come to understand each other and the specific tourism issues of each country and region in a meaningful way. We leveraged Colorado State University system resources in Todos Santos, Mexico as an initial point of contact and recruited students and faculty from both Colorado State University – Pueblo (CSUP) and Universidad Autonomous of Baja California Sur (UABCS). We further studied the local issues in both countries, made contacts with officials in Mexico and the United States, organized classes and curricular materials, and planned a series of immersive experiential visits to engage the student in both the United States and Mexico. Following are details of the model which further highlight how each of the previously described theoretical underpinnings was accomplished.

Participation

As a designated Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), Colorado State University – Pueblo (CSU-Pueblo) is uniquely positioned to lead an initiative developing pathways to Mexico that enhance cultural connectivity to Latino heritage and cultures. An HSI is officially defined as an institution of higher education that has an enrollment of undergraduate full-time equivalent students that is at least 25% Hispanic students. As an HSI, CSU-Pueblo serves a diverse student population that is nearly 50% minority status, with 31.5% of student identifying as Hispanic. CSU-Pueblo partnered with the Universidad Autonomous of Baja California Sur in Mexico, a similarly positioned and publicly supported regional comprehensive university in La Paz, to promote academic and cultural exchange between students. Overall, 46 students from Colorado and Mexico participated in five courses over a two year span from 2018–2019. The course titles and student participation numbers are featured below in [Table 1](#).

Experiential field experiences

The aim of these field experiences was to provide students with contextual learning about significant issues in and around sustainability and tourism. It offered the opportunity to

Table 1. Student enrollment in five sustainable tourism courses.

	# of Students
2019 Sustainable Travel & Alternative Tourism (U.S. students)	9
2019 Ecotourism (U.S. students)	11
2018 Colorado Tourism (Mexican students)	8
2018 Sustainable Travel & Alternative Tourism (U.S. students)	8
2018 Ecotourism (U.S. students)	10
Total Students Participating	46

put into practice theoretical concepts learned in the classroom in order to build knowledge and skills which would progress student learning. The overarching intent was to provide experiential education opportunities that stimulated deeper learning and global thinking about international tourism issues. This approach provided students the opportunity to think critically about tourism issues as they met with a diverse set of local stakeholders. An example of some of the field experiences that emphasized experiential education and engaged local partners are featured in [Table 2](#).

Outcomes

The development of this international sustainable tourism education model was explored with two specific perspectives in mind. The first perspective assessed how experiential education promotes student learning and personal development in international sustainable tourism courses. This perspective was explored both quantitatively and qualitatively. Specifically, the sustainable tourism courses evaluated student learning quantitatively through a variety of assessment methods including critical research papers, class presentations, reflective papers, experiential learning projects, and international tourism

Table 2. Examples of field experiences emphasizing experiential education.

Field Experience	Description of Field Experiences
Espiritu Santos Island	Students explored this protected natural area in the Sea of Cortez and worked with local conservation organizations to examine how increased pressure from tourism was impacting a sea lion colony and whale shark nursery.
Balandra Bay	Students visited a primitive coastal area outside of La Paz to examine the impacts of increased tourism on natural resources. They explored the associated challenges of balancing tourism growth with environmental preservation.
Sierra La Laguna Biosphere	Students explored the mountainous region of Baja and met with local ranchers to learn of efforts to promote cultural tourism and conservation with three main objectives in mind: conservation, training, and sustainable human development.
Ecotourism Symposium	Students helped coordinate an Ecotourism Symposium at the Colorado State University's Todos Santos Center and participated in multiple collaborative work sessions with regional stakeholders to plan the symposium.
Rancho Pescadero	Students visited this luxury resort outside of Todos Santos to examine issues surrounding sustainable agriculture, organic farming, and agritourism.
Rocky Mountain National Park	Students visited this world renowned park to discuss the notion of social carrying capacity. The focus was on examining the level of recreational use an area can withstand while providing a sustained quality of recreation.
Red Rocks Amphitheater	Students explored this municipal park and outdoor concert venue to highlight how tourism in Colorado is fueled by natural beauty and outdoor resources.
Royal Gorge Bridge	Students visited this nature-based commercial tourism facility to explore how commercial recreation and environmental conservation can co-exist. This trip included a tour of the attractions and a meeting with park management.
CSU – Fort Collins	Students took a tour of the campus to explore sustainable development. This visit provided a model for how an intricate set of sustainability standards can lead to environmentally responsible decisions and efficient use of natural resources.

reports. In the qualitative assessment, students were asked to voluntarily participate in an anonymous online survey with open-ended questions that collected student observations on personal growth and cultural development.

The second perspective explored the role of partnerships and local stakeholder engagement in supporting an international experiential education model. This model involved developing and forming community partnerships to facilitate experiential education opportunities. Collaborations and strategic partnerships were identified as key components and critical elements in this international model. This perspective explored the role and function of partnerships in this model while also investigating their effectiveness in supporting the model.

Perspective #1 – student learning

The first perspective assessed how experiential education promotes student learning and personal development in international sustainable tourism courses. Student learning was measured in the traditional sense through academic performance and proficiency in achieving course learning objectives. Of the 46 students that participated in these sustainable tourism courses emphasizing experiential education, each of them mastered the course objectives and successfully completed the course. In addition to measuring students' proficiencies in mastering course learning objectives, qualitative data was collected that evaluated the international experience from a personal growth and cultural development perspective. The emerging themes that arose in qualitative assessment included: enhanced personal growth, a broadened worldview, cross-cultural development, increased environmental awareness, and an elevated passion for international education and learning.

Students that participated in these courses described having transformative educational experiences. The majority of students participating in the courses were new to international travel and the immersive study abroad experience created an opportunity for personal growth. The qualitative data revealed that students consistently reported enhanced personal development as a result of participation in the international sustainable tourism courses. One student commented that the experiential learning opportunities "helped me step out of my comfort zone and expand my horizons". Furthermore, through the application of the experiential learning cycle, students reported many instances of self-reflection and self-awareness. A number of students reported the experience to be "eye opening". One student commented that, "The experience left me self-reflecting on my own beliefs and behaviors and analyzing how they affect others." Another student commented that "I have realized that I am somewhat of a judgmental person. I will not say these thoughts out loud, but I will think them. Now, when I catch myself judging someone, I will remind myself that I should not make assumptions and be positive towards them." Another comment along the lines of personal growth was "I have considered my own biases and how they affect my opinions and actions". These findings of personal growth from study abroad are consistent with previous literature demonstrating a relationship between international field experiences and enhanced personal development (Dwyer & Peters, 2004).

Another theme that arose in the qualitative evaluation was students broadening their worldview as a result of the international experiential education opportunity. A comment

from one student that illustrates this concept is this quote, "I have realized that a lot of my political views were things that I just agreed with or went along with because I surrounded myself with people with those views, but they did not really line up with what I believed." Another student reported that cultural exchange experiences encouraged them to "start thinking about my way of life and how many things I have that I take for granted." Moreover, one U.S. student commented that this experience helped them "understand how Mexican communities' function and that a lot of people in the U.S. don't get the chance to personally visit Mexico and thus have preconceived perspectives about a culture and area in which they have never been. This is dangerous." Another student reported that the cultural exchange experiences offered "new perspectives that I normally would not see." These comments were consistent amongst the students and demonstrate how this experience helped students broaden their worldview. This emerging theme supports previous research that has shown that extending the classroom beyond the conventional campus setting to include an actual international encounter with other people and cultures is a valuable educational practice as studying abroad promotes a worldview and awareness of global issues (Dolby, 2007). This approach addresses the challenges of teaching intercultural proficiency in a traditional classroom setting by providing "concrete experiences" with other cultures that prepare students for the complex, multicultural global marketplace (Muñoz et al., 2006).

Another theme that emerged in the evaluation was increased environmental awareness as result of experiences emphasizing direct interaction with the natural world. The curricular exploration of how tourism and the natural world are entwined encouraged students to think critically about sustainability issues. For instance, one Mexican student commented that "I want to share all my experiences with other people so they will be able to understand how to act or treat our environment and how it is important for everybody." Another student stated that after immersive field experiences in the natural world, "I am now trying to think about conservation more and not wasting resources". Another participant reported that the course "helped me realize that I could do more globally". Furthermore, the experience motivated some students to take action, one student reported that they have now "started organic gardening" and "conserving water when they shower". A quote that summarizes this emerging theme is "I think every single person needs to be informed of what they do that impacts the environment. The more people are informed, the more change that can take place." This emerging theme that direct experiences in the natural world promote environmental awareness is consistent with previous research that has demonstrated this relationship (Chawla, 2008). Furthermore, this finding reinforces literature demonstrating that learning experiences which place students in real-life experiential situations where they are required to apply theory to the real world are immensely valuable (Ruhanen, 2006).

A final theme that arose in the qualitative evaluation was an enhanced passion for international education and learning as function of this study abroad model emphasizing experiential education experiences. One student reported that "Honestly, I really want to have another experience like this one, I think nobody stops learning and never forgets. This experience will always be in my memories because of what I saw, felt, and lived; I will take it with me forever." Another student reported that the highly experiential courses encouraged them "to stop trying to memorize the material I study in school and rather try to genuinely understand it." Many of the students that participated viewed this

experience as a once in a lifetime opportunity, with one U.S. student reporting that “Going to Mexico for this class was by far the best experience I’ve had in college. Being able to experience Mexico through ecotourism gave me an experience that I would have never gotten otherwise.” Another student commented that “The trip to Todos Santos was the best experience I had in college. I learned just as much in the week in Mexico as I did in the previous two years of school.” Furthermore, students returned from the course and volunteered to serve as ambassadors for the initiative, one student stated that “I would never change the experiences I had for anything. This trip turned out to be much more than I ever would have hoped for and would recommend it to anyone looking to study abroad!” This finding that experiential education promotes student motivation and enhances student’s passion for learning is consistent with previous research establishing this relationship (Sibthorp et al., 2011).

Perspective #2 – partnerships

This perspective explored the role of partnerships and local stakeholder engagement in supporting an international experiential education model. Collaborations and strategic partnerships were identified as essential in this model as community engagement is a fundamental element in supporting a successful experiential education model. Research has demonstrated that one of the key areas in the provision of tourism education is collaboration between stakeholders, including: tourism educators, students, tourism service providers, and government authorities (Cooper, 2002; Solnet et al., 2007). In this international sustainable tourism model the role and support of partnerships and community engagement were assessed based on the number, quality, and nature of partnerships developed. Foundational partners for Colorado State University – Pueblo were the Partners of the Americas Foundation, the Universidad Autónoma Baja California (Mexican University), Todos Santos Eco Adventures (community partner) and the Colorado State University Todos Santos Center. Secondary partners were Tiburón Ballena México (whale shark conservation organization), CONANP (Mexican – National Commission of Protected Natural Areas), Mario’s Surf School (local tourism business), SETUES Baja California Sur (BCS Government – Secretary of Tourism), National Outdoor Leadership School – Mexico (outdoor education organization), Mar Libre (reef and mangrove restoration organization), Alianza Keloni (sea turtle conservation organization), and the Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Los Cabos, ITES-Los Cabos (Technical School of Los Cabos).

Partners of the Americas Foundation

In developing this sustainable tourism education model, a key step was procuring financial and administrative support. The development and launching of this initiative necessitated external financial support. Resultingly, it was a 100,000 Strong in the Americas Grant from the *Partners of the Americas Foundation* in partnership with the MetLife Foundation, as part of a public-private collaboration between the U.S. Department of State and NAFSA: The Association of International Educators, that provided the initial startup funds to move this project forward. Irrefutably, obtaining grant funding to support this sustainable tourism education model was essential to its success as it helped to leverage and encourage community support. In addition, it was critical in acquiring additional university support. Overall, the grant award functioned to ensure

accountability and was a motivating force as the university worked to honor the commitments it made to the funding agency. Notably, the Fair Trade Learning component of the initiative that involved Mexican students traveling northbound to Colorado would not have been possible without the support of grant funding. The grant award covered 100% of the Mexican students' expenses (plane tickets, food, lodging, excursions). Furthermore, some ambitious and far-reaching goals were set and realized as a result of the grant proposal and award. One of the positive outcomes of the grant award that supported Fair Trade Learning was the seed money to start this initiative and the ability to ensure equitable access to the courses through affordability. An indicator that the grant partnership was successful is evident in the fact that the university now has a financially stable international sustainable tourism model.

Universidad Autonoma Baja California Sur

International coalitions are regarded as a powerful tool to increase the global orientation of international education (Shetty & Rudell, 2002). One of the most important steps in developing this international education initiative emphasizing experiential learning was building a partnership with a foreign university to develop a joint model. The Universidad Autonoma of Baja California Sur (UABCS) was a strong partner in this international tourism initiative and pivotal to its overall success. The UABCS faculty in the Alternative Tourism department were extremely collaborative and active participants in curriculum development. Furthermore, the UABCS students were very engaged and committed to the educational experiences. Their positive participation promoted transformative experiential learning opportunities for all the students involved.

Todos Santos Eco Adventures

Effective collaboration between tourism educators and tourism service providers enhances the quality of education and results in quality graduates who meet the needs of the tourism industry (Anderson & Sanga, 2019). Todos Santos Eco Adventure's (TOSEA) involvement in curriculum planning and development was essential in the development of a holistic sustainable tourism curriculum and hands on field experiences. TOSEA is the leading eco-adventure company in Baja California Sur and possesses a deep knowledge of the area and works with many strategic partners. As a sustainable tourism business, TOSEA provided a model of an organization that is committed to tourism as well as to the health and well-being of the local environment and community. The organizations network of partners and local knowledge were imperative to the success of the field experiences and key to exploring the region. The owners of the community-minded tourism business donated services and provided subsidized costs to students. This crucial industry-specific information is vital to higher education institutions in their efforts to respond to the shortage of skilled personnel in the tourism field (Renfors et al., 2020). Overall, TOSEA's guides served as community experts and helped deliver course content.

Colorado State University Todos Santos Center

Another partnership essential to the success of this international education initiative was the support of the Colorado State University Todos Santos Center. The CSU Todos Santos Center is an international extension of Colorado State University and presents an opportunity for CSU students to grow as global citizens in their understanding of and appreciation for other

cultures. The staff and resources at the center were critical in identifying curriculum opportunities, working with regional partners, and facilitating field experiences. Structurally, the residential facility provided a host site from which to explore the Baja California Sur region.

A number of lessons were gleaned from this evaluation that could be helpful for others looking to replicate pieces of this project. In order for this model to be successful, a key component was campus buy-in and support. This effort necessitated a campus culture that valued international education. The full backing and commitment from the university administration was paramount. This effort demanded and received assistance from multiple layers of the university, from the university president to the administrative staff. It cannot be overstated that institutional engagement and campus partnerships were essential in the model as this type of multinational effort and multi-institutional initiative was novel for the university. Overall, this effort placed a high administrative burden on the university and taxed resources. However, with a high level of university support and commitment, these obstacles and challenges were surmountable.

Prior to this initiative, faculty-led academically sponsored study abroad opportunities at CSU-Pueblo were uncommon. Throughout this process, the biggest advocate and strongest campus partner that championed this effort was the university's Office of Extended Studies. This department was a strong advocate for the initiative and undoubtedly instrumental to its success. The office was dynamic and facilitated the administrative processes necessary to develop new academic courses and manage the logistical and procedural functions required for the immersive field experiences. From working with the financial aid office, to registering and enrolling students, to marketing the courses, to handling travel arrangements, to risk management, to accounting, this office was vital to the effort's accomplishments.

Perhaps the most important lesson gleaned from this evaluation was the significance of faculty support and involvement. Faculty commitment drove the success of the international sustainable tourism courses as the execution of the experiential learning opportunities inevitably fell in the hands of professors. Faculty in the U.S. and Mexico were passionate leaders and dedicated countless hours to this initiative. Experiential learning is a time and labor intensive approach to education. Teaching study abroad courses is a highly demanding for faculty as they must serve in a twenty-four hour a day capacity in a multitude of roles such as program leaders, lecturers, international trip leaders, tour guides, administrators, overseers, facilitators, managers, and supervisors. The accomplishments of this initiative ultimately depended on faculty driven efforts as they were responsible for carrying out the majority of the objectives and possessed valuable local relationships. This finding is consistent with previous research that has shown the faculty are the face of study abroad programs for students as they make initial appeals and often seal the deal by encouraging and supporting students in ways that go beyond the call of duty (Picard et al., 2010). Throughout this initiative, professors invested their time and energy into courses and attracted students with their enthusiasm and passion. Furthermore, faculty were able to leverage their existing personal relationships with students to encourage student engagement and drive enrollment.

Another lesson gleaned from this experiential education initiative was the importance of building and developing relationships across educational institutions and community partners. Relationships built upon shared experiences and common goals were critical to the success of these international education efforts. This aligns with previous research that

reports that the key to developing effective partnerships is active participation, cooperation, and collaborative interaction among stakeholders (Solnet et al., 2007). Furthermore, it has been posited that meaningful education can only be provided if collaborations are built on a mutual trust between different stakeholders (Anderson & Sanga, 2019). This concept was congruent with this approach as the common trust built between partners and stakeholders involved in this initiative was an essential ingredient to its success. In this sustainable tourism education model, partnerships were viewed as relationships and were built on mutual respect and a shared vision. A key focus of this initiative was nurturing and developing these relationships with the establishment of common objectives and goals. The relationships in this initiative grew deeper over time and were strengthened through shared experiences and reinforced by successful efforts that cultivated trust. This finding is consistent with previous research that has shown effective cooperation between tourism educators and tourism stakeholders enhances the quality of curriculum and results in quality graduates who meet the needs of the tourism industry (Anderson & Sanga, 2019). In this initiative, successful collaboration with strategic partners enabled the formation of a shared understanding of the expectations and learning objectives. Specifically, community partners helped to develop and shape the curriculum and field experiences based on their industry expertise and knowledge of local issues.

Conclusion

This paper described the development of an experiential education approach to international sustainable tourism education. The objective of this work was to present and evaluate an educational model that immersed predominately minority United States students and Mexican students in international experiential education opportunities and challenged them to think critically about the inherent tensions that exist between tourism growth and the health of the planet. Overall, this educational model proved to be successful in promoting student learning and effective in developing partnerships guided by experiential learning and Fair Trade Learning philosophies. The lessons learned from this project involved the importance of administrative support from the university, the significance of faculty engagement, and the importance of building quality relationships.

Given the current status of U.S. international relations and the dire issues facing the health of the planet, broadening tourism student's worldview through experiential learning is more important now, than ever. This is a time when our world needs more international exchange and experiential education, not less. As global citizens and educators, it is imperative we build channels to support international tourism education and facilitate multicultural development through experiential learning opportunities. During a period when governments are building walls between nations, this educational model highlights an opportunity to build bridges through effective collaboration and cooperation.

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