

# **Cultivate Successful Participation and Outcomes in Study Abroad Experiences**

**Tips for Constructing/Improving Your Pre-Departure Course**

**Jan Brooks, Ed.M.**

**Sarai Coba, Doctoral Candidate**

**Department of Human Development and Family Studies  
College of Agricultural, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign**

# Study Abroad/Service Learning in South Africa

## Course Components:

**8 week Pre-Departure Course**

**3 Weeks Abroad**

**Tours / Volunteer Experiences Cape Town**



## **Pre-departure Course Topics**

**Cultural Diversity in South Africa  
History, Apartheid, Politics in South Africa  
Role of Youth in Liberation Struggle  
Black Consciousness  
Democratization and Children in South Africa  
Families in Crisis  
Health and Educational Policies and Practice  
Food Security and Community Gardens  
Service Learning with Respect and Empowerment**



# Purpose of Study Abroad Program

**Tools for success.... now and after graduation!**



Personal and academic growth

Appreciation for diversity

Independence

Higher order thinking and problem-solving skills

Global citizenship

Solidify early adulthood identity

# Objectives of the Pre-Departure Course

## Prepare Students for Success

1. View people, society, experiences through a new lens
2. Prepare students for interactions with local people
3. Offer information to be applied in new situations
4. Prepare students to problem-solve in diverse settings
5. Set personal learning goals
6. Develop leadership skills
7. Career preparation
8. Build sense of global competency & citizenship



# Evaluating our own Pre-Departure Course

## Methods

- **PRE/POST Online course survey**
  - **Interethnic Communication Apprehension Scale**
  - **Intercultural Communication Apprehension Scale**
  - **Intercultural Sensitivity Scale**
  - **Personal Social Values Scale**
  - **Community Service Self-Efficacy Scale**
  - **Munroe Multicultural Attitude Scale Questionnaire**
- **Two focus groups**
- **In-depth interviews**

# Preliminary Research Findings

## **Quantitative Findings**

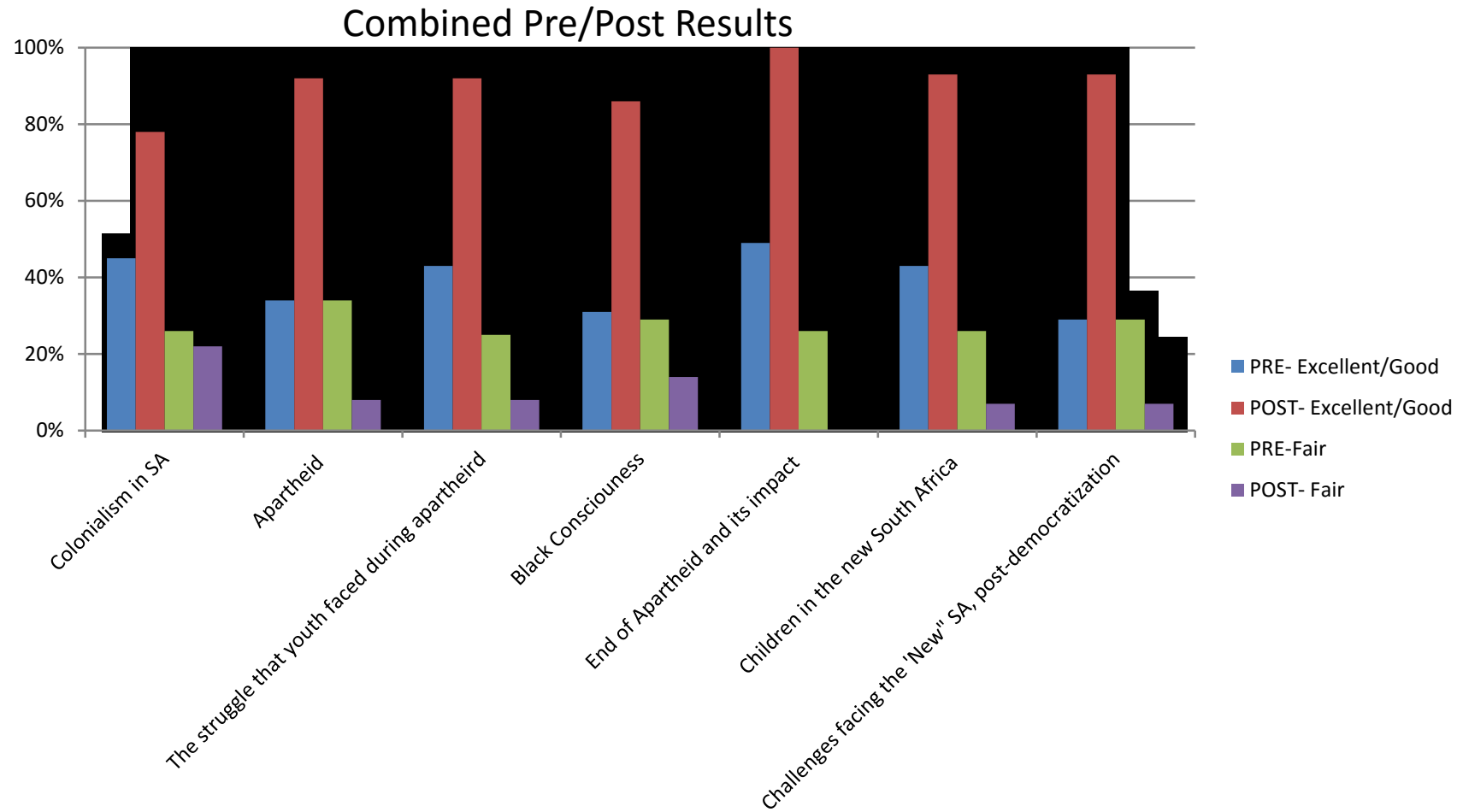
- Increase in positive beliefs and values on all intercultural scales

## **Qualitative Findings**

- Course = critical to their historical perspectives and cultural/contextual understanding of the community in which they interacted

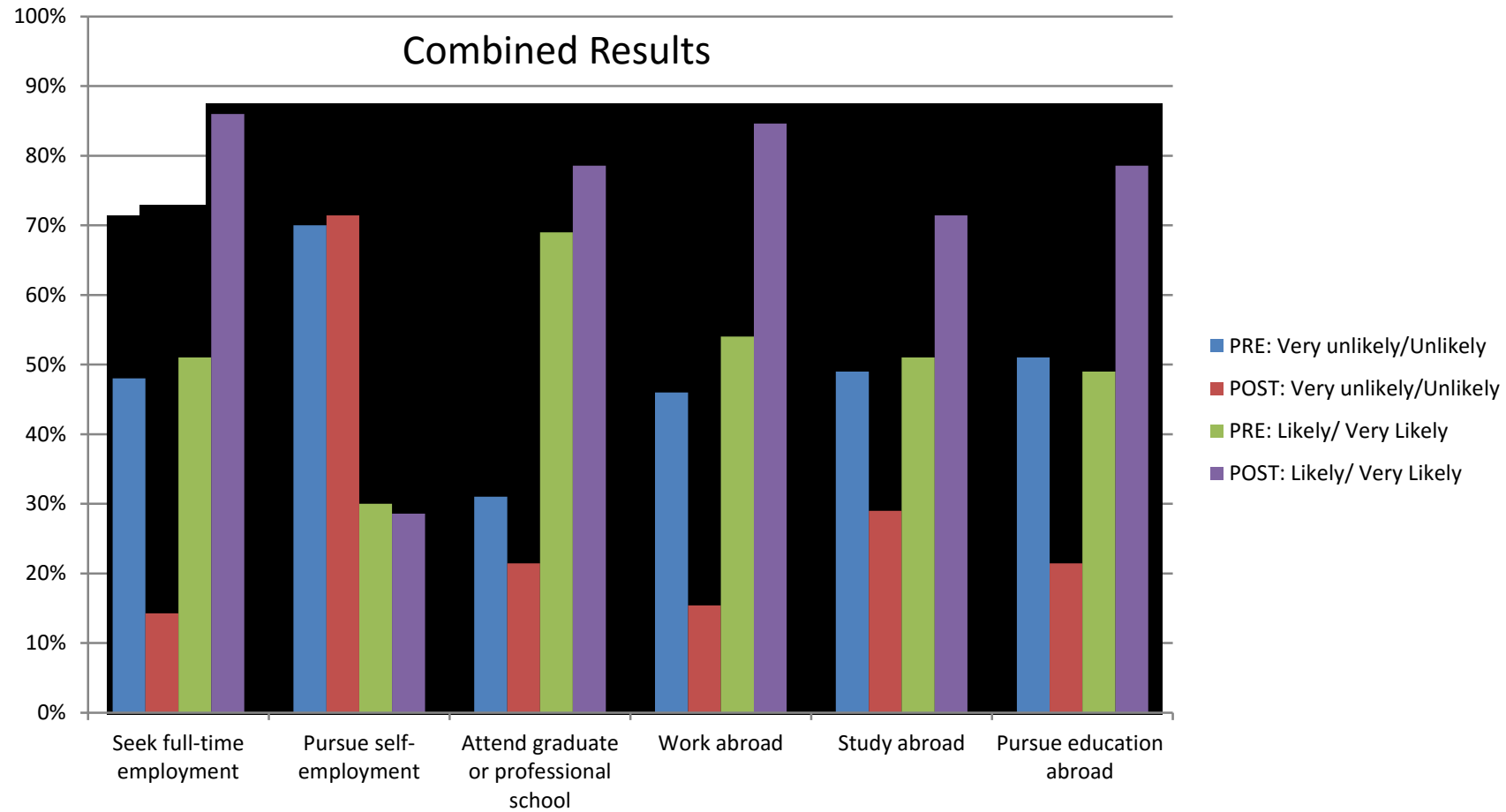
The pre-departure course provided students with the necessary tools to be fully immersed in a new environment.

# PRE) Please rate your knowledge in each of the following:





# After taking the pre-departure course and thinking about your experience in Cape Town, how likely are you to do each of the following after graduating?



# Positive student feedback on existing course

- **Appreciated historical/cultural information**
- **Felt competent in interactions with local people**
- **Enjoyed community immersion and felt prepared**
- **Appreciated mix of lecture, discussion, current events, guests, film**
- **Historical tourism and community interactions were more meaningful due to having background information from the course**
- **Commented positively on historical time line assignment**
- **Appreciated safety and packing tips**
- **Felt that course and trip were well-planned**

# Improvements planned for our next course

- Include former trip participants in safety orientation and packing advice.
- Add additional activity for student group to build relationships pre-departure.
- Add an additional guest speaker from the host culture.
- Greater emphasis on current social constructs.
- Continue to devote significant amount of time to historical context/information.
- Specific content on cultural differences: our views of others, others' views of us.
- Require students to set specific learning goal prior to the trip.

## **Can we effectively support and shorten the initial adjustment period, and pave the way for successful immersion?**

- **Sense of time..... New foods..... Transportation.....**
- **Expected interactions..... Learning a new money system.....**
- **Safety issues..... What to bring, how to pack....**
- **Understanding new communities..... Respecting social norms.....**
- **History of this new society..... Current social challenges.....**
- **Current events..... Changing values.....**

**Yes we can – with a well-designed pre-departure course!**

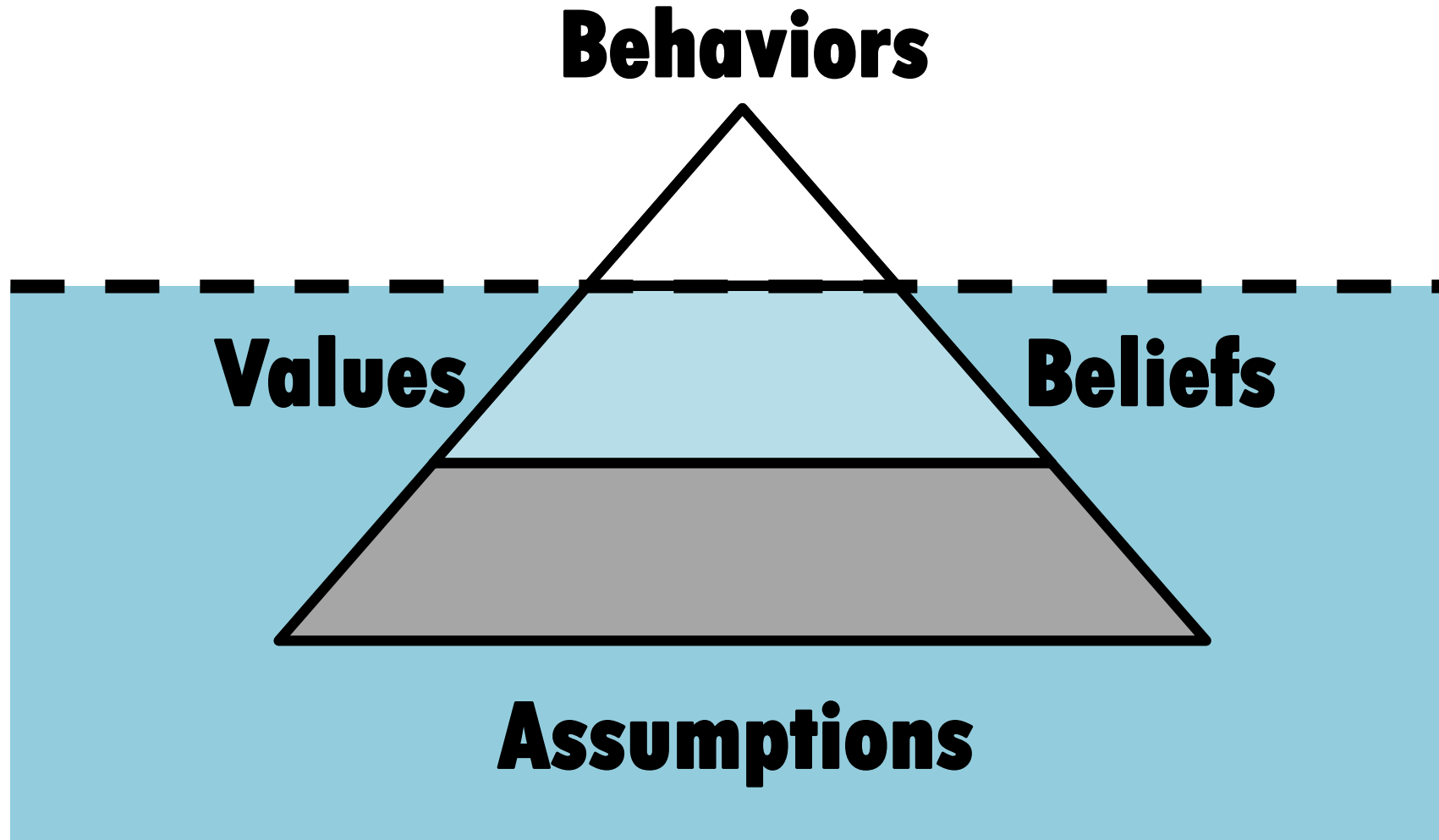
# What information do **your** students need?

- For adjustment to your study abroad destination?
- For appropriate interactions?
- To set learning goals for themselves?
- For maximized learning?
- To incorporate new ideas and values into their own self-identity?

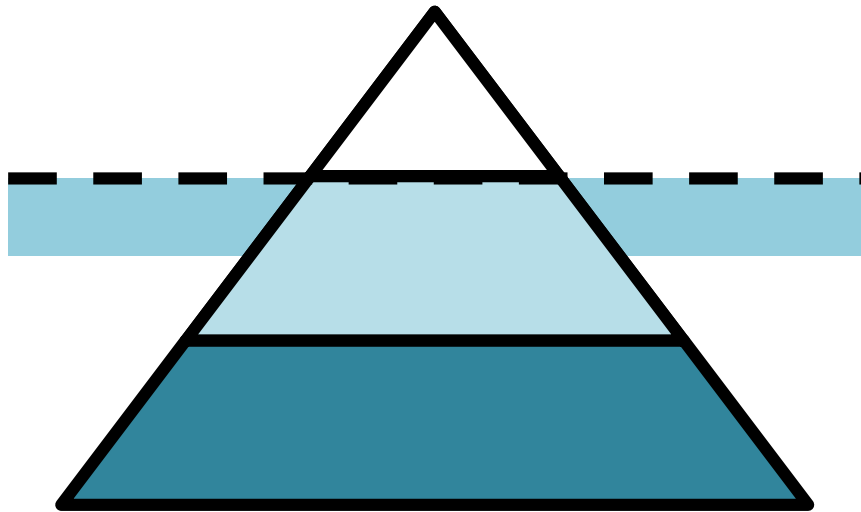
# **Ideas for course construction or improvement**

- **Include history of the destination society**
- **Area of study content**
- **Skype with an expert at your destination or invite a local expert guest speaker**
- **Provide information on how you might help/harm, and engage students in developing ideas to protect and empower those you plan to work with**
- **Current events**
- **Include safety orientation, tips for packing, tips for comfortable immersion in the new community**
- **Set up your expectations for the students' behavior and interactions with others**
- **Include academic readings, historical fiction or books by authors from your destination, and films**
- **Engage students in setting a learning goal for themselves**
- **Prepare students for respectful cultural immersion.....**

# Iceberg Analogy of Culture



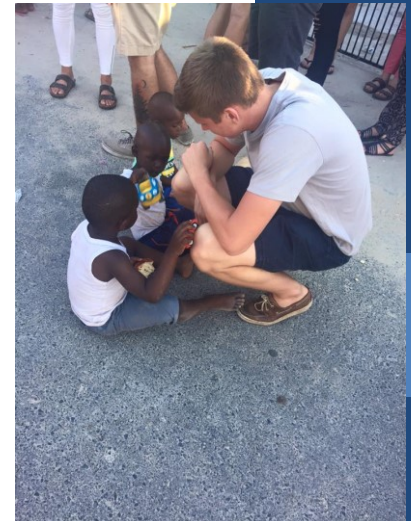
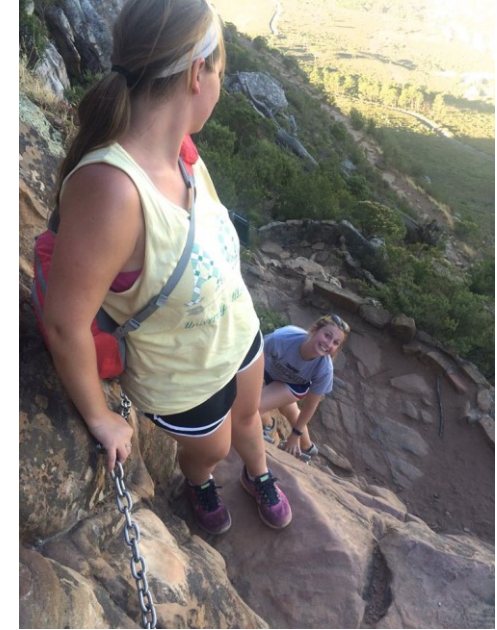
**Where would you place these  
12 aspects of culture, above  
or below the waterline?  
Why?**



- Views on equality
- Clothing
- Food
- Religious beliefs
- Eye contact
- Attitudes toward sexuality
- Personal distance
- Notions of modesty
- Methods of worship
- Mindset about animals
- Gestures
- Relationship w/ nature



# Students in Action... Prepared for Success!



# Desired Outcomes of Course and Trip

- “Unpack” feelings, thoughts, experiences, area studies content, in ways that exhibit growth, understanding, and maturity.
- Articulate important aspects of increased global understanding gained on the trip in job interviews and grad school applications, and in sharing experiences with family and friends.
- Gain ability to recognize bias, and seek more global, culturally accepting and understanding interactions in future professional and personal relationships.



# Consider a Post Study Abroad Course

**Post Course Description:** The goals of this course include offering a forum in which students are encouraged to express the impact and implications of global travel on their lives and process their experiences abroad as applications for career goals, as well as informing a deeper understanding of bias and (mis)representation in media concerning the host country....



**Thanks for empowering  
your students' learning  
opportunities abroad!**

**Jan Brooks**

**[dickson@Illinois.edu](mailto:dickson@Illinois.edu)**

**Sarai Coba**

**[scobaro2@Illinois.edu](mailto:scobaro2@Illinois.edu)**