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Building Bridges with Language and Culture in Russia (Fulbright-Hays Group Project Abroad): Focusing on Intercultural Sensitivity

ALLA KOuroVA, FLORIN M. MIHAI

1. Introduction
In our progressively globalized world, the need to build bridges between people of different languages and cultures has grown exponentially. The phrases GLOBALIZATION, GLOBAL CITIZEN, AND INCREASINGLY INTERCONNECTED WORLD are frequently present in public discourse (Kulturel-Konak, Konak, and D’Allegro 2017). Educators can potentially play a core role in bridging linguistic and cultural gaps between people, groups, and institutions. Closing these gaps was the main goal of the Building Bridges with Language and Culture in Russia project. The project was funded by the Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad (GPA) program, which aims to improve US intercultural relations, cultural diplomacy, and intercultural competence by exchanging persons, knowledge, and skills between countries. Through the program, competitively selected American students, scholars, teachers, professionals, scientists, and artists receive scholarships or grants to study, research, or teach. Building Bridges with Language and Culture in Russia was an immersive study abroad program at a major metropolitan university in the southeastern United States. It focused on Russia’s language, culture, history, politics, and global impact. The GPA in Russia offered participants, who were US high school and university instructors, the opportunity to travel to Russia for a month to engage in language and cultural exchanges. The GPA project participants were then able to use this cultural experience to design and develop curricula, instructional modules, or lesson plans that incorporated their newly acquired knowledge.

The goals of Building Bridges with Language and Culture in Russia were very similar to those of many short-term study abroad programs. The literature in the field shows that most study abroad programs seek to improve language skills and language awareness, foster a sense of personal responsibility, and develop intercultural competence and intercultural sensitivity, which manifests in the form of reduced ethnocentrism.
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(Anderson et al. 2006; Arzberger et al. 2010; Demetry and Vaz 2017). The purpose of the current study was to assess the effects of the short-term study abroad program Building Bridges with Language and Culture in Russia on the participants’ intercultural sensitivity.

2. Intercultural competence and intercultural sensitivity

Intercultural competence refers to one’s capacity to act and react in interculturally appropriate ways (Byram 1997; Bennett 2008, 2017; Lustig, Koester, and Halualani 2017) by using intercultural attitudes, knowledge, and skills (Rissanen, Kuusisto, and Kuusisto 2016; Nameni and Dowlatabadi 2019). According to Dervin and colleagues (2012), the development of intercultural competence is a contextual, never-ending, delicate, and unpredictable process. This development process should focus on context-specific encounters between people with various identities and cultural markers so that everyone’s positions and cultural interpretations will be addressed.

Intercultural sensitivity is fundamentally linked to one’s ability to identify and navigate important cultural differences. Chen and Starosta (1997) describe intercultural sensitivity as “an individual’s ability to develop a positive emotion towards understanding and appreciating cultural differences that promotes an appropriate and effective behavior in intercultural communication” (5). Consequently, an individual’s aspirations to understand and respect other cultures and their norms represent a central point of intercultural sensitivity. As Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman (2003) have stated, “Greater intercultural sensitivity is associated with greater potential for exercising intercultural competence” (422). Therefore, intercultural sensitivity is an important construct that is related to but separate from intercultural competence. Intercultural sensitivity contributes to the overall level of intercultural competence and is subsumed by it (Bennett 1986, 1993, 2008; Bhawuk and Brislin 1992; Chen and Starosta 1997, 2000; Peng 2006; Dong, Day, and Collaço 2008; Hammer 2015).

Bennett (1986, 1993; Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman 2003) has identified and described six stages of intercultural sensitivity in his Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). The first three stages relate to ethnocentrism, while the final three relate to ethnorelativism. Ethnocentrism emphasizes one’s own cultural worldview as the central reality, through which other cultures are experienced. On the other hand, ethnorelativism means that one’s own cultural worldview is understood and experienced as one among many valid possibilities (Bennett 1993).
According to Hammer and Bennett (1998), the three ethnocentric stages involve ways of avoiding cultural differences, while the three ethnorelative stages represent ways of seeking cultural differences.

In the first stage of intercultural sensitivity, denial, individuals do not consider cultural differences as being important at all. In the second stage, defense, people do perceive cultural differences, but label those differences negatively and experience them as a threat to their own culture’s value system. In the third stage of intercultural sensitivity, minimization, individuals attempt to avoid stereotypes and even appreciate differences in language and culture. However, they still consider their own cultural values as universal, rather than viewing those values as simply part of their ethnicity.

The fourth stage, acceptance, requires individuals to be able to shift perspective while still maintaining their commitments to their cultural values. This stage is reached when they accept multiple cultural worldviews as equal. The fifth stage of intercultural sensitivity, adaptation, may allow the individual to function in a bicultural capacity. In this stage, individuals are not only able to take the perspective of another culture but also to function successfully within that culture. In the sixth stage, integration, people can shift perspectives and frames of reference from one culture to another in a natural way. They become adept at evaluating any situation from multiple frames of reference. This sixth and final stage of the model requires both an in-depth knowledge of at least two cultures—one’s own and another—and an ability to move easily into the other cultural frame of reference.

3. Impact of language and culture programs on intercultural sensitivity

Research has explored the relationship between study abroad programs and intercultural sensitivity. Most studies comparing the growth in intercultural sensitivity between on-campus students and study abroad students have found a greater increase in the latter category (Williams 2005). However, to what degree students develop intercultural sensitivity while studying abroad depends on individual and contextual factors. Research has indicated that students’ prior exposure to and experiences with cultural differences might play an important role in their development of intercultural sensitivity (Pedersen 2010).

Jackson (2009) and Martinsen (2011) have examined study abroad programs’ influence on intercultural sensitivity. Jackson’s study of 13 Hong Kong students’ experience in Oxford, England found that while five students advanced to a higher level of intercultural sensitivity during the five-week
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study abroad, seven remained at the same level and one went down a level. However, all participants overestimated their own intercultural sensitivity. Because they believed “it was enough to just be themselves, they seemed blissfully unaware that some of their actions (e.g. communication style) might be impeding relationship-building across cultures” (S68). Martinsen studied a group of 45 students during a six-week study abroad program in Argentina and found a small improvement in their intercultural sensitivity as measured by the Inventory of Cross-cultural Sensitivity (ICCS) (Cushner 1986). Martinsen analyzed the relationships between this modest gain and factors such as the students’ motivations for attending the study abroad, the amount of language contact they experienced, their relationship with their host family, and their oral proficiency in the target language. The multiple regression analysis revealed that out of several factors, only language contact accounted for the variance (20%) in the scores on the ICCS. His analysis also showed that greater language contact was not always beneficial. He explained this threshold by suggesting that students needed time away from the target language and culture to reflect on their own cross-cultural encounters.

Bloom and Miranda (2015) conducted a mixed-methods study that examined 12 students’ development in intercultural sensitivity over the course of a four-week study-abroad program in Salamanca, Spain. Although the quantitative results did not indicate that students shifted dramatically in intercultural sensitivity over their month-long study abroad experience, an analysis of qualitative data indicated positive changes in the intercultural-sensitivity stages of acceptance, adaptation, and integration, as students felt they identified more with those stages after their study abroad experience than they had before.

Another study that focused on assessing study abroad students’ intercultural sensitivity was conducted by Tarchi, Surian, and Daiute (2019). Their study looked at the experiences of 32 US study abroad students and 28 Erasmus Mundus students, all studying in English-speaking programs in Italy. Data were collected using quantitative intercultural-sensitivity measures as well as oral narratives of critical incidents in the foreign culture. The analysis showed that, when narrating their cultural experiences, Erasmus Mundus students adopted an ethnorelative orientation more often than an ethnocentric one. On the other hand, US students employed a more ethnocentric orientation in their narratives. Most of the US students’ narratives fell into the minimization stage, as opposed to the Erasmus Mundus students’ narratives, which aligned with the acceptance stage.
These studies’ findings are congruent with findings from similar research studies: on the whole, short-term study abroad programs have the potential to increase intercultural sensitivity and intercultural competence. However, not all students who participate in those programs will automatically make such gains.

4. Research question
An important body of research has examined the development of intercultural sensitivity among study-abroad university students. However, relatively few studies have examined the role that short-term study abroad may play in the intercultural sensitivity of secondary or tertiary educators. The participants in the *Building Bridges with Language and Culture in Russia* program consisted of university faculty and K–12 teachers. The program developers’ explicit goal was to assist this demographic in globalizing their curricula; understanding the linguistic, cultural, and social realities of Russia; and creating a more inclusive environment in their classes through a deeper understanding of Russian society. Therefore, the research question of this study was as follows:

How did the short-term study-abroad program *Building Bridges with Language and Culture in Russia* influence the intercultural sensitivity of secondary and post-secondary educators?

5. Methods
5.1. *Building bridges with language and culture in Russia: program and participants*
Funded by the Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad (GPA), this program focused on Russia’s language, culture, history, and politics. The participants in the GPA in Russia and in this study included six university professors in the fields of modern languages, political science, English, English as a second/foreign language, and women’s and gender studies, and six high school teachers of history, literature, science, and Russian language. Additionally, the project director (also serving as principal investigator [PI]) and the co-principal investigator (co-PI) participated in the study and directed the study abroad. Both the project director and co-PI work at a large metropolitan university in the southeast United States. Participants’ ages ranged from 25 to 70. Of the complete study abroad group (n=14), 13 participants were Caucasian and one was African American. All participants spoke English, and three participants were native Russian speakers, with a fourth being near-native. In addition, two spoke Spanish,
one spoke Romanian, and one spoke Farsi. All participants of this program had traveled abroad prior to this project and had experience collaborating with other cultures. Along with the 4-week study abroad in Russia, the GPA program included the following elements: (1) a 16-hour pre-departure program, (2) an orientation program in Russia focusing on curriculum development in language, culture, history, political science, humanities, and other disciplines, and (3) an 8-hour follow-up program that included discussions among the participants, final project presentations, e-portfolios, teaching and learning modules, lesson plans, and other curricula.

The 16-hour pre-departure program was designed by the project director and co-PI. All participants attended the pre-departure sessions, which included the following: (1) program orientation, (2) Russian language instruction, and (3) Russian history overview. The participants also completed a pre-program Intercultural Sensitivity Survey developed by Zarnick (2010) and based on the Intercultural Sensitivity Index (Olsen and Kroeger 2001).

The in-country segment of the GPA in Russia required all participants to attend classes, seminars, and presentations hosted by the faculty of the Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation and Moscow City University. Participants took an active role in group discussions, research sessions, language-immersion exercises, cultural and educational visits, e-portfolio assignments, curriculum project development, image and artifact analyses, and other curriculum assignments.

Russian language and literature were presented in the context of culture, history, and politics. Across three weeks spent in Moscow and one week spent in St. Petersburg, participants attended 25 hours of instruction, focusing on language and culture. Professors from the host institutions conducted the formal presentations, and all lectures, seminars, and cultural visits were conducted in both English and Russian, since not all participants were fully proficient in Russian. Each cultural visit, which included urban and rural centers, was selected to support the thematic content of each week’s focus (e.g., Moscow, St. Petersburg, Russian art, Russian history, or women in Russian society). Moreover, throughout the in-country experience, the participants interviewed and consulted Russian teachers, students, administrators, government officials, and professors with the purpose of accessing their expertise in and opinions on the weekly themes. The university faculty and host institutions were available for consultation and research support, both during curriculum development abroad and upon returning home.
As part of the post-travel segment of the GPA in Russia, participants attended a workshop and reception. This 8-hour workshop included participating in a debriefing, completing the post-program intercultural-sensitivity survey, writing individual reports on final curriculum projects and learning modules, and meeting with an external evaluator. During the post-travel segment, participants received feedback from the PI and the co-PI on how accurately their individual curriculum projects reflected Russian language and culture. This feedback was important as those projects clearly demonstrated what participants had learned about Russia during the Building Bridges with Language and Culture in Russia study abroad program. As shown in Table 1, participants in the project made substantial improvements and additions to their curricula, addressing a wide range of topics related to Russia. Those curriculum enhancements, covering a wide range of subjects in language, literature, history, and art, could not have been done without a direct exposure to Russian language and culture.

Table 1. Participants’ curriculum projects.

| Participant 1 | • Developed a course on advanced Russian language and culture, including videos from the Russian part of the program.  
• Redesigned two courses on Russian language and culture.  
| Participant 2 | • Developed three modules on Russia: Russia’s Grassroots Activism (1980s), Soviet Union War Machine and Women’s Roles (1940s), and The Women’s Liberation Movement in Russia (1860–1930).  
• Developed a new online graduate class titled Global Women in Crisis and redesigned a course titled Global and Transnational Feminism. |
| Participant 3 | Created five modules focusing on Russian language and culture to incorporate in an applied linguistics class: Russian Language and Culture Focus #1: Introduction to Russian; Russian Language and Culture Focus #2: Russian Morphology; Russian Language and Culture Focus #3: Russian Phonetics/Phonology; Russian Language and Culture Focus #4: Russian Grammar; and Russian Language and Culture Focus #5: Russian Culture. |
| Participant 4 | Developed a curriculum proposal for a course on Pushkin’s *EvgeniiOnegin*. |
| Participant 5 | Developed a new course: Art in Russia.  
Developed lesson plans for a course on communicative language-intensive Russian for summer STARTALK.  
Created a workshop for professors of Russian 20th-century art. |
| Participant 6 | Developed a digital repository for the Fulbright-Hays GPA as an open educational resource containing media from the project. |
| Participant 7 | Redesigned a course on the government and politics of Russia by including new instructional modules based on the study of the origins, institutions, and functioning of the Russian political system, including the lingering influence of the old order on domestic and foreign policy. |
| Participant 8 | Created a course titled Mind Map—Deepening Knowledge with Literary Text Using “The Grasshopper” by Anton Chekhov. |
| Participant 9 | Developed a new history class for high school, History of the Americas, based on the materials covered in Russia (a unit on Russian perspectives in the Cold War).
|              | Incorporated three lessons at the Model UN into lesson plans for high school students, covering the following topics: (1) can a ruler be both enlightened and absolute?, (2) the story and significance of Peter the Great and his rule, and (3) what does legal code reveal about enlightened despotism in the 18th century? |
| Participant 10 | Helped a university organize an exchange program with students from Russia. |
| Participant 11 | Developed a new course, Continental European Fiction. This course examines Russian literature in translation and what it means to be Russian, touching on the political and environmental effects of world war, the way gender and race affect society, the importance of diversity, and the nature of good and evil. |
| Participant 12 | Developed a new course, Russian and American Academic Preparation and Educational Theories and Practices. The course compares Russian and American pedagogical theories, research writing, and school systems. |
| Participant 13 | Developed a new high school–level course, Textual Analysis Film: Integration of Russian Films in Cultural Context. 
|              | Promoted the adoption of Russian language as one of the IB group choices, together with Spanish and Latin, to be implemented (2019–2020) at the high school level. |
| Participant 14 | Developed Russian-based instructional modules for an introductory course in political science. |
6. Data-collection instruments
Two instruments were used for data collection in this study. The first one was a quantitative survey designed to assess participants’ self-reported perceptions of their own intercultural sensitivity, both prior to attending the short-term study abroad program and following the program. The 48-item Intercultural Sensitivity Survey (ISS) developed by Zarnick (2010) was based on the Intercultural Sensitivity Index developed by Olsen and Kroeger (2001). The ISS provides information about respondents’ intercultural sensitivity and their ability to identify and experience relevant cultural differences. All survey items asked respondents to select an answer on a scale of 1–5. The scale includes the following five options: (1) never describes me, (2) seldom describes me, (3) describes me some of the time, (4) describes me well, and (5) describes me extremely well. The data reported in this article come from questions 1–24, as those survey questions relate directly to the research question of this study. Questions 25–48 evaluate substantive knowledge, perceptual understanding, and intercultural communication, which are important constructs but are not directly related to the research question of this study.

The second instrument, qualitative in nature, was a journal. The journal contained four entries that were collected by the end of each week in the program. The journal entries contained the participants’ observations regarding daily life, classes, lectures, tours, and meetings with educators and students. Participants were prompted to write about three things they learned, three things they did not expect, and three things they had questions about.

7. Data analysis
7.1. Quantitative data analysis
Out of 14 participants, 11 completed both the pre-departure and post-departure surveys. The descriptive statistics for questions 1–24 are listed in Table 2. The collected data were not normally distributed based on the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests of normality, so a dependent t-test method of comparing the pre- and post-departure results was not appropriate. Instead, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test was employed as non-parametric, as it does not assume normality in the data. The significance values are also listed in Table 2.
Table 2. Intercultural sensitivity pre- and post-survey results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Pre-Test Descriptive Statistics</th>
<th>Post-Test Descriptive Statistics</th>
<th>Significance Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. I think that cultural diversity really only exists in other places.</td>
<td>Mean: 1.45 SD: 1.21 Minimum: 1 Maximum: 5</td>
<td>Mean: 1.54 SD: 1.21 Minimum: 1 Maximum: 5</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I feel most comfortable living and working in a community where people look and act like me.</td>
<td>Mean: 1.63 SD: .80 Minimum: 1 Maximum: 3</td>
<td>Mean: 1.90 SD: 1.30 Minimum: 1 Maximum: 4</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I have intentionally sought to live in a racially or culturally distinct community.</td>
<td>Mean: 3.72 SD: 1 Minimum: 2 Maximum: 5</td>
<td>Mean: 3 SD: 1.4 Minimum: 1 Maximum: 5</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I am surrounded by culturally diverse people, and feel like my cultural values are threatened.</td>
<td>Mean: 1.54 SD: 1.21 Minimum: 1 Maximum: 5</td>
<td>Mean: 1.09 SD: .30 Minimum: 1 Maximum: 2</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I sometimes find myself thinking derogatory things about people who look or act differently from me.</td>
<td>Mean: 1.81 SD: 1.16 Minimum: 1 Maximum: 5</td>
<td>Mean: 1.45 SD: .52 Minimum: 1 Maximum: 2</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Pre-Test Descriptive Statistics</td>
<td>Post-Test Descriptive Statistics</td>
<td>Significance Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| 7. I believe that aid to developing countries should be targeted to those efforts that help these countries evolve toward the types of social, economic, and political systems that exist in the United States. | Mean: 2.36  
SD: 1.36  
Minimum: 1  
Maximum: 5 | Mean: 2.18  
SD: 1.25  
Minimum: 1  
Maximum: 5 | .15 |
| 8. I believe that certain groups of people are very troublesome and do not deserve to be treated well.                                                                                                       | Mean: 1.63  
SD: 1.28  
Minimum: 1  
Maximum: 5 | Mean: 1.54  
SD: 1.21  
Minimum: 1  
Maximum: 5 | .56 |
| 9. I have lived for at least 2 years in another country and believe that American society should embrace the values of this culture in order to address the problems of contemporary American society.                  | Mean: 2.18  
SD: 1.72  
Minimum: 1  
Maximum: 5 | Mean: 2.09  
SD: 1.44  
Minimum: 1  
Maximum: 5 | .78 |
| 10. I understand that differences exist but believe that we should focus on similarities. We are all human.                                                                                             | Mean: 4.09  
SD: 1.22  
Minimum: 2  
Maximum: 5 | Mean: 3.90  
SD: 1.70  
Minimum: 1  
Maximum: 5 | .68 |
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Significance Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 11. I think that most human behavior can be understood as manifestations of instinctual behavior like territoriality and sex. | Mean: 2.09  
SD: 1.04  
Minimum: 1  
Maximum: 4 | Mean: 2.27  
SD: 1.27  
Minimum: 1  
Maximum: 4 | .72 |
| 12. I think that all human beings are subject to the same historical forces, economic and political laws, or psychological principles. These principles are invariable across cultures. | Mean: 2.72  
SD: 1.67  
Minimum: 1  
Maximum: 5 | Mean: 2.72  
SD: 1.61  
Minimum: 1  
Maximum: 5 | 1 |
| 13. I believe that physical displays of human emotions are universally recognizable: A smile is a smile wherever you go. | Mean: 2.81  
SD: 1.40  
Minimum: 1  
Maximum: 5 | Mean: 2.63  
SD: 1.28  
Minimum: 1  
Maximum: 5 | .48 |
| 14. I acknowledge and respect cultural difference. Cultural diversity is a preferable human condition. | Mean: 4.72  
SD: .64  
Minimum: 3  
Maximum: 5 | Mean: 4.72  
SD: .46  
Minimum: 4  
Maximum: 5 | 1 |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15. I believe that verbal and nonverbal behavior varies across cultures and that all forms of such behavior are worthy of respect.</td>
<td>Mean: 4.27 SD: 1.34 Minimum: 1 Maximum: 5</td>
<td>Mean: 4.72 SD: .46 Minimum: 4 Maximum: 5</td>
<td>.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. I think that cultural variations in behavior spring from different worldview assumptions.</td>
<td>Mean: 4.27 SD: .78 Minimum: 3 Maximum: 5</td>
<td>Mean: 4.45 SD: .68 Minimum: 3 Maximum: 5</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. I believe that my worldview is one of many equally valid worldviews.</td>
<td>Mean: 4.45 SD: .52 Minimum: 4 Maximum: 5</td>
<td>Mean: 4.45 SD: .93 Minimum: 2 Maximum: 5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. I have added to my own cultural skills new verbal and nonverbal communication skills that are appropriate in another culture.</td>
<td>Mean: 4 SD: .89 Minimum: 3 Maximum: 5</td>
<td>Mean: 4.27 SD: .90 Minimum: 3 Maximum: 5</td>
<td>.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. I believe that culture is a process. One does not have culture: one engages in culture.</td>
<td>Mean: 4.18 SD: .75 Minimum: 3 Maximum: 5</td>
<td>Mean: 3.81 SD: 1.32 Minimum: 1 Maximum: 5</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
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<tr>
<td>20. I am able to temporarily give up my own worldview to participate in another worldview.</td>
<td>Mean: 4.45 SD: .68 Minimum: 3 Maximum: 5</td>
<td>Mean: 4.27 SD: 1 Minimum: 2 Maximum: 5</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. I have two or more cultural frames of reference, and I feel positive about cultural differences.</td>
<td>Mean: 4.72 SD: .64 Minimum: 3 Maximum: 5</td>
<td>Mean: 4.54 SD: 1.21 Minimum: 1 Maximum: 5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. I feel culturally marginal or on the periphery of two or more cultures.</td>
<td>Mean: 2.90 SD: 1.30 Minimum: 1 Maximum: 5</td>
<td>Mean: 3.09 SD: 1.22 Minimum: 1 Maximum: 5</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. I am able to analyze and evaluate situations from one or more chosen cultural perspectives.</td>
<td>Mean: 4.63 SD: .50 Minimum: 4 Maximum: 5</td>
<td>Mean: 4.27 SD: .90 Minimum: 2 Maximum: 5</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. When faced with a choice about how I am going to respond to a given situation, I am able to shift between two or more cultural perspectives and consciously make a choice to act from one of these cultural contexts.</td>
<td>Mean: 4.27 SD: 1 Minimum: 2 Maximum: 5</td>
<td>Mean: 4.36 SD: .67 Minimum: 3 Maximum: 5</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The data in Table 2 revealed that there were not any significant differences between pre- and post-survey results. However, the survey data did pinpoint each participant’s place on the intercultural-sensitivity continuum. Zarnick (2010) assigned the survey questions to the six stages of intercultural sensitivity as follows: denial (questions 1–4), defense (questions 5–9), minimization (questions 10–13), acceptance (questions 14–17), adaptation (questions 18–21), and integration (questions 22–24). Figure 1 illustrates the pre- and post–study abroad means for each of the six stages of intercultural sensitivity.

![Intercultural Sensitivity Stages]

Figure 1. Intercultural-sensitivity stages: pre- and post-departure survey data

When considering the three stages assigned to ethnocentrism—denial, defense, and minimization—there was little change in average scores pre- and post–study abroad. Participants scored an average of 2.18 on the pre-departure survey and 2.01 post-departure for the denial stage. For the defense and minimization stages, respondents averaged scores of 1.90 and 2.93 (pre-departure) 1.67 and 2.88 (post-departure) respectively. These overall decreasing means suggest that the study abroad experience had little negative impact on participants’ intercultural-sensitivity levels within the ethnocentric stages, while the lowness of these means could be attributed to the previous life and travel experiences of the participants. Moreover, since participants were people from large, metropolitan environments, they likely experienced cultural differences regularly and thus reported low ratings in the denial, defense, and minimization stages. Therefore, participants were fairly comfortable towards and accepting of diversity, as all three stages of ethnocentrism averaged below 3: “describes me some of the time.”
For the three stages of ethnorelativism—acceptance, adaptation, and integration—participants rated high on both pre- and post-study abroad survey results. Of particular interest were the averages recorded for acceptance (pre-departure 4.40 and post-departure 4.59) and adaptation (pre-departure 4.34 and post-departure 4.22). Both stages had an average higher than 4: “describes me well.” Based on the descriptive statistics illustrated in Figure 1, the participants were in between the acceptance and adaptation stages, which means that they were making very good progress towards becoming interculturally sensitive. Additionally, it seems like quite a few of the participants were learning to connect with unfamiliar cultures while maintaining their own cultural perspectives. Even though the pre and post means for the integration stage were not as high as the means recorded for the acceptance and adaptation stages, they ranked higher than any of the three ethnocentric stages of denial, defense, and minimization did. The pre and post means for the integration stage were 3.93 and 3.90 respectively, closer to a 4: “describes me well” than a 3: “describes me some of the time.”

The analysis of the quantitative data revealed that the four-week experience in Russia did not produce a statistically significant change in participants’ intercultural-sensitivity levels after the study abroad program. The pre-departure score analysis showed that the highest overall averages within the stages of the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) were the acceptance and adaptation stages. Post-departure survey means showed participants at the same stages as they were in the pre-departure survey, with a slight increase for acceptance (from 4.4 to 4.59) and a slight, albeit not statistically significant, decrease for adaptation (from 4.34 to 4.22). The fact that participants’ scores did not significantly change within each stage may suggest the short-term study abroad experience had not advanced the participants’ intercultural-sensitivity levels; alternatively, it could be claimed that the experience solidified participants’ ethnorelative stages. The study abroad did not decrease the reported means for those stages and did not cause participants to regress on the DMIS continuum, as is sometimes the case with individual study abroad experiences (Jackson 2009).

7.2. Qualitative data analysis
The participants’ journal entries fit into three main themes: visible aspects of cultural diversity, participants’ interactions with native Russians, and participants’ views of ethnorelativism. Responses in all three categories demonstrated increasing intercultural sensitivity, especially for the stages of acceptance and adaptation.
7.2.1. Visible aspects of cultural diversity

In several journal entries, participants remarked on Russia’s visible cultural diversity, created by people of differing cultures intermingling in their day-to-day lives. For example, this participant illustrated their appreciation for cultural differences when describing visible aspects of St. Petersburg in the following entry:

One of the things that surprised me is the visible diversity of the city of St. Petersburg, a veritable metropolis that rivals any European capital. The first thing that I have noticed is the fact that you can find people from all over Russia and the former Soviet republics in the streets of St. Petersburg. Also, I could hear not only Russian spoken in the streets, but other languages as well. In addition, all corners of Russia as well as the former Soviet republics were represented in the diversity of eateries and restaurants. In addition to absolutely fantastic restaurants, I could spot Siberian and Uzbek places during our walks on Nevskii Prospect, arguably the most beautiful boulevard in St. Petersburg and perhaps the entire Russian Federation.

Another participant related a dance show to regional differences and how those differences influence aspects of Russian life: “I was completely blown away by the Russian National Dance Show Kostroma. It gave such a comprehensive view of the various regions of this vast country and spanned the centuries as well. I think I even liked this better than Swan Lake. What really surprised me though, was during the café scene I actually recognized one of the songs. It was the song we learned to sing in our language class!”

Another participant used a cultural artifact to thoughtfully connect Russian literature to the daily life of Russian people:

During one of our trips, we were fortunate to see one of the newer metro stops, Dostoyevskaya, which had Dostoyevsky as its central figure. The metro station described scenes from his literary works, and presented them in a modern way. The station was new but the subject matter was from the literary past, which showed such a strong link between the past and the present, with an impact on future generations. I’d say that this is another cultural characteristic of Russia: we, as Russians, are in the present, looking forward to the future, but we will never forget the past.

Lastly, one participant identified other aspects of diversity when they wrote about visible aspects of medicine in Russia: “What I did find interesting in Russia is that some medicine, which you can find at the pharmacy, has braille. I have never seen this in use and think this is an
extremely important function. It is extremely difficult and dangerous for blind people to take medication or buy and not know what it is unless someone tells them. The use of braille gives these people more autonomy.”

7.2.2. Interactions with native Russians
Many journal entries illustrated how participants adapted their language and behavior during their interactions with native Russians. Here is a participant who adapted their language use in a practical situation that any visitor might encounter: “Today I went to the store by myself to try to troubleshoot an error with the mobile hotspot I recently bought, and none of the women behind the counter spoke English. I was so proud of myself for struggling through it and leaving with the issue resolved.”

One journal entry showed the participant’s appreciation for life in various settings in Russia and offered a glimpse at everyday life in another culture: “I expressed an interest in learning more about the ‘typical’ Russian lifestyle outside of the big city. While it was brief and quite limited, our trip to the Golden Rings cities gave us a glimpse into the smaller towns and villages. In Vladimir, I was drawn to a local woman sitting outside a gift shop making a lace doily by hand, and I found myself trying to capture her spirit in video. She was genuinely warm and happy and greeted everyone that passed by as though they were old friends.” Another entry reported on a chance encounter with a Russian couple: “We were in an elevator in the hotel and a Russian couple asked us where we were from. They were so happy to hear that we were from the US and so happy that we loved Russia. They wished us a great stay in their country and you could feel the sincere warmth of their words. I’ve met so many excited people on this trip that have left an indelible mark on me. I will forever remember them.”

7.2.3. Views of ethnorelativism
One participant strongly supported early foreign-language learning in Russian schools, which is not the current norm in the United States. They wrote, “Russia’s education system definitely has a few advantages over the United States’ system because they start teaching foreign languages in primary school. I hope to be able to advocate for more and higher quality foreign language in the US education system at primary, secondary, and post-secondary institutions.” Because the participant does not consider the US-based norm universal, this is an excellent example of acceptance, the ethnorelative stage of intercultural sensitivity that regards multiple cultural worldviews as equal. Another participant, who has been an educator for
more than 25 years, provided additional evidence of ethnocentrism when discussing the potential negative influences of ethnocentrism. This participant noted that “American and Eurocentric cultural stereotypes and prejudices, especially notions of cultural superiority, are major hindrances for Americans learning Russian. This is particularly detrimental when combined with frequent low levels of personal, professional and national humility.”

Another participant acknowledged the importance of Russian literature in shaping the Russian culture and people. Perhaps this is yet another example of the ethnorelative stage of adaptation, where this participant is demonstrating the ability to take the perspective of another culture:

It is difficult for non-Russians to understand the meaning and unparalleled significance of Pushkin in all areas of historical and contemporary Russian life. Other nations have great writers, poets and artists. I can think of none who so animate a nation’s national life and self-identity as Pushkin animates Russian life and identity. To understand Pushkin is to understand a large and important part of the Russian people. My first inkling of Pushkin’s power came as an undergraduate studying Russian language and literature. Decades later, I continue to marvel not only at Pushkin’s art but also at his influence on a nation.

Overall, in many journal entries, participants overwhelmingly appreciated the willingness of the Russian faculty, staff, and presenters to collaborate with them and to establish bridges between Russia and the United States. As one participant stated, “They all have acknowledged the difficult current political climate but emphasized the idea that it was very important to build bridges between the two countries and cultures at the personal and institutional levels.”

8. Limitations
Regarding some limitations of the current study on short-term study abroad programs, a control group is necessary in order to apply quantitative methods to the research. These methods also require controlling for other learner variables. Second, the participants were well-traveled educators, some of whom were immigrants to the United States, who had already been exposed to multiple cultures. Therefore, nationality and exposure to other cultures should be investigated further to determine if they have any predictive ability towards gains in intercultural sensitivity. Another limitation is related to the survey administration. Only two surveys were
administered in this study; however, a third survey should be administered months after the study abroad to ensure that the experience is properly internalized (Medina-Lopez-Portillo 2004). Finally, additional research instruments such as self-reports and developmental interviews need to be employed to refine triangulation. For example, in a developmental interview, participants are required to recount specific situations they experienced, explain the cultural differences they encountered, and elaborate on the mediation strategies they used in response to those differences (Hammer 2012). This study and future studies would benefit from hiring an interviewer familiar with the DMIS to administer multiple developmental interviews to the study’s participants.

9. Conclusions
The focus of the GPA in Russia’s short-term curriculum development project was to understand the role and realities of Russia in a global society by studying its culture, language, history, and politics. The instructional modules and new courses that participants developed as part of this project incorporated their research and collaborative work from the study abroad in Russia. Essential to this curriculum-development process was the construct of intercultural sensitivity, which was measured through quantitative and qualitative instruments. Even though participants’ intercultural-sensitivity indices did not dramatically increase from a quantitative perspective, neither did they dramatically decrease. Moreover, when educators utilize course content that promotes developing cross-cultural understanding (as participants did in their curriculum projects), students may, in turn, increase in their own intercultural-sensitivity levels (Drewelow 2013). The participants remained at the acceptance and adaptation stages after the study abroad experiences, as demonstrated by their post-departure means for the two stages (4.59 and 4.22 respectively).

In terms of increasing intercultural sensitivity, future research is needed to see whether the limited results that are typically reported for short-term study abroad programs are due to the duration of the program or the design of the program. According to Bloom and Miranda (2015), short-term programs could prove more effective through a carefully designed curriculum that is implemented prior to, during, and following participants’ experience abroad. The model presented in this study, where participants completed pre-departure, in-country, and post-departure activities designed to support their intercultural development, could potentially offer a blueprint for other study abroad programs that encourage educators to integrate intercultural sensitivity into their curriculum and teaching.
References


