Transformation Through Disorientation: A Narrative Approach to Perspective Change in Study Abroad Contexts

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by

Christy M. Cooper

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Author: Christy Marie Gazanian Cooper

This dissertation/thesis is hereby accepted and approved.

Signatures:
Examine Committee
Chair: Kathy D. Geller, Ph.D.
Members: W. Edward Bureau, Ph.D.
Jose' Chavez, Ed.D.
Portia Hopkins, Ph.D.

Academic Advisor: Andrea Shaw, M.A.

Department Head: Allen Grant, Ph.D.
Dedication

To the memory of Hripsime Gazanian—
Who crossed oceans before me,
and chose faith instead of fear.

To my parents—
Whose belief has propelled me to uncharted territories,
time and time again.

To my husband—
The smartest human I know,
Whose intelligence is surpassed only by his love, sacrifice, and kindness.

Thank you for loving me through this endeavor.
Acknowledgments

“Sometimes short stories are brought together like parcels in a basket. Sometimes they grow together like blossoms on a bush. Then, of course, they really belong to one another, because they have the same life in them.”
–Henry Van Dyke, (Introduction to the Blue Flower)

As is congruent with this study’s results, my doctoral journey would not have been what it was without the people who supported, and encouraged me along the way. This educational opportunity provided a platform through which authentic relationships could be forged in academic pursuit. Thank you to the amazing ladies of Cohort 10, for not only stimulating my mind, but pouring life into my soul.

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To my family and friends, thank you for surrounding me with support and love, and making this dream possible. To the participants in this study—stories are life, and it is no small thing that each of yours are now interwoven with mine—thank you.
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Abstract

Transformation Through Disorientation: A Narrative Approach to Perspective Change in Study Abroad Contexts

Christy M. Cooper, Ed.D.
Drexel University, June 2017
Chairperson: Kathy D. Geller

Participation in study abroad programs has more than tripled over the last quarter century. As more college students opt to study cross culturally, understanding this impact on student development is relevant. Disorientation through culture shock is a recognized common experience in study abroad programs; however, limited research is available on what perspective transformations emerge for students through this process. The purpose of this narrative study was to explore the perspective changes that may have occurred in the lives of Council of Christian Colleges and Universities students through their participation in the Oxford Programme for Undergraduate Studies.

This study explored the experiences of eight alumni from Azusa Pacific University, who studied abroad through the Oxford Programme for Undergraduate Studies (OPUS) between 2011-2015. The following research questions that guided this study were: What stories do participants share about their lived experiences during the Oxford Programme for Undergraduate Studies (OPUS) study abroad semester, and their transition home? How do the participants’ stories reflect disorientation from their study abroad experiences and their transitions home? How do these study abroad experiences affect participant perceptions of personal identity, spirituality, and academic pursuits? Data was gathered through interviews, researcher observations and artifacts, and analyzed for codes and themes.

The study’s findings revealed that self-realization occurred for participants through experiences of daily exploration, intellectual pursuit, and in the context of community. Furthermore, the results indicated that: the Oxford tutorial system promoted a process of transformative learning; the OPUS semester structure fostered identity development, leading to expressed confidence and a sense of belonging; spiritual development is a holistic and integrative process, and; the transition back to campus from Oxford was more difficult than the transition abroad. Recommendations include supporting students with a seminar during the semester following their return, and connection to faculty within their major for extended learning opportunities.
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Research

**Introduction to the Problem**

Late adolescence in the U.S. society is a period marked by an innovative and ingenious culture, one, according to Arnett (2000), that fosters an emergent generation of young adults seeking exploration as a means of identity formation. This exploration may surface in the lives of college students through study abroad participation that encourages key aspects of student development, including the spiritual search for meaning and purpose (Parks, 1986). Therefore, as study abroad programs in the United States have more than tripled over the last quarter century and become increasingly more popular for college students (Institute of International Education, 2015), understanding these developmental underpinnings is especially valuable when considering that cross-cultural experiences propel students into new environments where worldviews are further challenged or disoriented (Perry, Stoner, & Tarrant, 2012).

In 1960, Kalervo Oberg defined culture shock as being “precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse” (Oberg, 1960, p. 177). While the degree of culture shock experienced by individuals may differ, understanding this as a form of disorientation for college students may be foundational to recognizing the process of change that can occur through cross-cultural travel, particularly when considering the developmental identity quest that is already underway. One aspect of identity formation is the spiritual quest for discovery that is often highlighted through the seeking out of deeper relationships with self, others, and, oftentimes, a higher existence as well (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Love & Talbot,
Additionally, spiritual struggle is one facet of spiritual discovery that can be marked by loss, confusion about beliefs or purpose in life, depression, homesickness, and a disconnection between who one thinks they are supposed to be and who they are (Astin et al., 2011; Bryant & Astin, 2008; Ma, 2003; Parks, 1986; Rockenbach, Walker, & Luzader, 2012). Thus, the spiritual search, when paired with culture shock, may further promote experiences of loss and disorientation that could serve as catalysts for perspective change and transformation (Mezirow, 2000).

Furthermore, even while the need to understand identity development and culture shock as playing a significant role in cross-cultural travel is evident within the university environment, recent research in the field has responded with heavy emphasis on student outcomes relating to global awareness and competency (Paige & Fry 2009; Sutton & Rubin, 2010). While outcomes-based research of this kind is important, exploring the processes that result in those outcomes may prove equally important and may add to the larger aim of promoting global competency in the population of emerging adults.

**Statement of the Problem to Be Researched**

Disorientation through culture shock is a recognized common experience in study abroad programs; however, limited research is available on what perspective transformations emerge for college students through this process.

**Purpose and Significance of the Problem**

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this narrative study is to explore the perspective changes that may have occurred in the lives of Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) students through their participation in the Oxford Programme for Undergraduate Studies
Late adolescence is marked as a period of exploration and identity formation, and the study abroad experience is valuable to observe in the ongoing process of development in emerging adults. As cross-cultural travel commonly precipitates culture shock, understanding experiences of cultural disorientation may provide significant insight into spiritual-, academic-, and identity-related perspective transformations that emerged for participants through studying abroad.

**Significance of Problem**

Whereas many current studies focus on study abroad as a venue for measuring global competency, this study looked at the student perceptions of their own transformative experiences through the study abroad process. The former is more outcomes based, while the latter is more process based. As this research focused on the perspective change that occurs in students from Azusa Pacific University who are attending OPUS, located in Oxford, England, findings may provide actionable solutions for the CCCU audience.

Considering the Oxford study abroad experience through a lens of student development may offer insights into spiritual challenges that occur during these activities. Because culture shock promotes disorientation, and spiritual struggle is something that college students face both within and outside of religious institutions, exploring this facet of development may offer insights to CCCU institutions that will allow them to better support their students in matters of spiritual formation and identity (Astin et al., 2011; Bryan & Astin, 2008; Ma, 2003; Morgan, 2010).

Additionally, gaining insight into the academic impact that studying abroad at Oxford may have on student perspectives may be beneficial to CCCU institutions.
Students who participate in the OPUS program must be “well qualified” and ready to engage in an “intensive period of study under the guidance of Oxford tutors to the same standard and in the same manner as matriculated Oxford undergraduates” (Oxford Programme for Undergraduate Studies [OPUS], 2016, para. 1). As the central characteristics of this particular program are academic in nature, exploring the disorientation and perspective change that may occur through this academic experience may offer important insights for the Christian Liberal Arts model at Azusa Pacific University.

**Research Questions Focused on Solution Finding**

The following research questions guided the qualitative study:

1. What stories do participants share about their lived experiences during the Oxford Programme for Undergraduate Studies (OPUS) study abroad semester, and their transition home?

2. How do the participants’ stories reflect disorientation from their study abroad experiences and their transitions home?

3. How do these study abroad experiences affect participant perceptions of personal identity, spirituality, and academic pursuits?

**The Conceptual Framework**

**Researcher Stances and Experiential Base**

The researcher of this study believes there is meaning and truth attached to the stories that emerge from human experience, and giving a voice to that experience matters. The researcher is a social constructivist who values the subjective, varied meanings and perspectives that may emerge through participant experiences in the study abroad context.
(Creswell, 2013). She believes that meaning and understanding are gained through a process of student reflection and storytelling, which makes the narrative research methodology the most natural fit to this study.

In addition, the researcher maintains a mildly pragmatic stance from which she hoped awareness and practical change would come (Creswell, 2013). While participants may have shared their “subjective” experiences, the researcher believes multiple truths would emerge from these experiences that could inform practical changes.

The researcher’s stance is not divorced from her personal background or her experiences as a church youth volunteer, English major, high school English teacher, and, most recently, a supervisor to student teachers and adjunct professor in the English and Education departments at a small private Christian University in Northern California. In each experience, her love of stories and her pursuit of truth evolved, along with a deep-rooted desire to see human lives as stories that are constantly unfolding and changing.

One particular, significant experience that altered the researcher’s own spiritual identity and intellectual framework was her semester-long study abroad experience at Oxford University. She was challenged to engage with new ideas, new people, and new culture and retrospectively credits this experience as leading her to pursue post- undergraduate studies. Ultimately, she sees this experience as one that allowed her to grow personally, and one that gave her the desire to help others grow personally—a passion she hopes to lead with in the field of education.

In reflection of her own experiential base, the researcher personally connects with Mezirow’s Transformative learning theory (1991), specifically the “disorienting dilemma” phase. She is motivated to see how perceived experiences of disorientation
might be relevant to perspective changes in sojourners. Additionally, she desires to understand the *spiritual process* of college students seeking meaning through an unknown experience—one that substantiates the developmental process that most college students are already undergoing (Arnett, 2000; Astin et al., 2011; Bryant & Astin, 2008). Conclusively, the researcher hopes to learn how better to support processes of change through the stories that are told.

**Conceptual Framework**

A conceptual framework of this study was built from three streams of literature, each informing the researcher’s understanding of the transformative experience that may occur in college students who study abroad. The streams represented are: (a) transformative learning theory, (b) student development and spirituality, and (c) study abroad experiences. A graphic representation of the three streams of literature is contained in Figure 1.
Figure 1. A conceptual framework outlining the three research streams and core literature informing this study.

Transformative Learning theory. Transformative learning (TL) theory revolves around the reorientation of beliefs and perspectives about experiences, as expressed in Mezirow’s “10-phase” development theory (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22). While understanding Mezirow’s critical rational approach to TL is elemental to perspective transformation, extensions to his approach, such as the social emancipatory (Freire, 1970) and cultural spiritual (Tisdell, 2003) approaches, contribute to this study. This study particularly
focused on the impact of “The disorienting dilemma” in which a new experience challenges previously held beliefs, values or assumptions, or mental models (Argyris, 1982; Mezirow, 2000; Senge, 1992). The “disorienting dilemma” is considered in the context of study abroad experiences.

Additional key aspects of TL are discourse and the critical reflection of assumptions. Critically reflecting on personal assumptions and, furthermore, dialoguing with others promotes the learning process (Mezirow, 1998, 2000). Application of TL in higher education contexts can be more difficult because it requires a shift in the traditional classroom contexts, focusing more on dialogue, authentic relationships, and the professor as facilitator (Cranton, 2006; Moore, 2005; Taylor, 2009). Transformative learning that is applied in higher education requires support to be practiced effectively, and will be a lens through which student experience perspectives in OPUS will be considered.

**Student development and spirituality.** Emergent adulthood is marked as a period where those in their late teens and early 20s come to make central life-oriented decisions (Arnett, 2000). Student development theory (Chickering, McDowell, & Campagna, 1969) and spiritual development theory (Love & Talbot, 1999; Parks, 1986) in the lives of college students revolve around the similar quest of exploring issues of identity and finding meaning.

A focus of this stream of literature is the aspect of spiritual struggle that has been recognized as significant in student development (Astin et al., 2011; Bryant & Astin, 2008; Ma, 2003). The notion of spiritual struggle emerging from the seeking of an “ideal self” versus an “actual self” has been discussed by Rockenbach et al. (2012) and
intersects with Mezirow’s (2000) first phase in the transformative growth process known as the disorienting dilemma. Disorienting dilemmas challenge old frames of reference and are often incited by new environments or new ideas; hence, making traveling to another country through a study abroad experience a prime setting for spiritual struggle to occur as a process of student development.

**Study abroad experiences.** As international and study abroad programs have become popularized experiences over the last number of decades, research has indicated that increased global awareness and growth can be a beneficial result of college students studying abroad if reflection and active participation are part of the program experience (Bamber & Hankin, 2011; Cox, Murray, & Plante, 2014). However, to understand outcomes such as increased global competency and awareness, exploring the presence of culture shock and disorientation provides a view of the process toward the hoped for outcome (Oberg, 1954).

The “10-phase” process presented by Mezirow (1978, 2000) provides a strong backdrop from which to draw comparison between culture shock theories and research, as it depicts the process of a cross-cultural experience. These theories overlap with one another, as they rely on the element of disorientation as one that propels transformation and change.

**Definition of Terms**

**CCCU students**

Students who attend schools in the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities. Examples of these schools are Azusa Pacific University and
There are close to 120 member institutions (Council for Christian Colleges and Universities [CCCU], 2016a).

**Critical Reflection of Assumptions (CRA)**

The alteration of assumptions or frames of reference through a process of thinking; it can either be a “subjective refraining process” or “objective reframing process” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 23).

**Culture Shock**

Anxiety caused by the loss of familiar social norms and cues; it occurs upon entering new cultural situations and is experienced at varying degrees by individuals (Oberg, 1960).

**Disorienting Dilemma**

The challenging of previously held frames of reference, which occurs when entering a new environment (Mezirow, 2000).

**Emerging Adults**

People in their late teens or early 20s (Arnett, 2000).

**Frames of Reference**

“The structure of assumptions and expectations through which we filter sense impressions” . . . they are “meaning perspective[s]” and the lenses through which we view the world (Mezirow, 2000, p. 16).

**Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research approach that seeks to “understand and represent experiences through the stories individual(s) live and tell” (Creswell,

**OPUS**

The OPUS is located in Oxford England and orchestrates study for American students at Oxford University (OPUS, 2016).

**Spiritual Struggle**

Spiritual struggle “reflects intrapsychic concerns about matters of faith, purpose, and meaning in life” (Bryant & Astin 2008, p. 12).

**Transformative Learning (TL)**

Transformative learning is the process of making meaning out of experiences by critically reflecting on how one sees the world (Mezirow, 1978, 1991, 2000). Mezirow’s (1978) original work depicts this process through “10 phases” beginning with a disorienting dilemma.

**Assumptions and Limitations**

**Assumptions**

The researcher carried the following assumptions that informed her research design and needed to be managed through the research process. First, she assumed the participants who traveled through OPUS and participated in this study would have stories to tell about their experience in Oxford and during their return home. She also expected cultural disorientation would be present in the stories told in some form, due to the cross-cultural travel that took place. Additionally, given the grade point average requirement to participate in the program and the described rigor of OPUS, the researcher expected academic challenges to emerge through the stories told in this study (Azusa Pacific
University [APU], 2016a; OPUS, 2016). Finally, she assumed participants would encounter spiritual challenges through their experience in Oxford. Due to religious orientation CCCU institutions have, participants were likely to hold a foundational understanding of the Christian faith through their attendance at their CCCU institution (CCCU, 2016a). With that in mind, students who subscribe to Christian beliefs might have been challenged through cross-cultural travel to a more religiously plural environment.

Limitations

The limitations of this study revolve around the singular participant group perspective selected from one of 120 CCCU institutions, Azusa Pacific University in Southern California. This participant group represents a specific American university culture that is religiously affiliated and traveled abroad, interacting with another culture through a non-profit program in Oxford (OPUS). This OPUS group comes from an affiliation of schools whose motto is “To advance the cause of Christ-centered higher education and to help our institutions transform lives by faithfully relating scholarship and service to biblical truth” (CCCU, 2016a, para. 2), which may differentiate participants from Christian students, who, for example, might study abroad through a secular school. Additionally, as this study is qualitative and was conducted through a narrative inquiry format, eight participants were called upon for responses, resulting in possible generalizable study findings.

Summary

Many American college students elect to study abroad in foreign countries throughout their higher education. While in college, a search for identity, spirituality,
and meaning often marks student development. This quest often includes elements of spiritual struggle and aligns with the disorienting process that comes through culture shock and reverse culture shock of studying abroad. Through this journey, perspective transformation may occur if fostered with dialogue and reflection and supported with authentic relationships.

This study was conducted as a qualitative narrative inquiry. The sample of participants in this study came from a California CCCU institution, and participants had spent a semester abroad at Oxford University in England through the OPUS. Three streams of literature substantiate this study: (a) transformative learning theory, (b) student development and spirituality, and (c) study abroad experiences. These streams are discussed further in Chapter 2.
Cross-cultural study amongst college students has increased significantly over the last two decades, with institutional agendas focused heavily on promoting global competency in the lives of sojourners. While recent studies may focus on tracking these outcome-based results in the lives of student travelers, awareness of the internal impact and perceived perspective change may be equally beneficial. The lives of emergent adults are marked by the search for meaning and identity formation, and in this process of spiritual discovery, challenges are a common feature as beliefs are questioned. Similarly, crossing cultures may also promote a sense of disorientation and a challenging of beliefs. Therefore, understanding these possible challenges and the inner lives of emergent adults who travel abroad may be significant to understanding the development of emergent adults at large.

This narrative study explored the perspective changes that may have occurred in the lives of Council of Christian College and Universities (CCCU) students through their participation in the Oxford Programme for Undergraduate Studies (OPUS). As introduced in Chapter 1, the following three streams of literature provide a foundational framework to this research process: (a) transformative learning theory, (b) student development and spirituality, and (c) study abroad experiences.

The Literature Review

The literature review examines and analyzes three streams of theoretical and practice-based literature that contributes to the understanding of perspective change and
how it may correspond to the lived experiences and development of college students who study abroad. The three streams are: (a) transformative learning theory, which provides a theoretical and empirical basis for understanding the process of meaning making and perspective change; (b) student development and spirituality, which provides a theoretical and empirical understanding of emerging adults and their spiritual search for meaning and purpose; and (c) study abroad experiences, which provides a theoretical and research-based framework for understanding the nature of cross-cultural travel and the potential impact on student sojourners. A graphic representing the intersection of theories and depicting the potential sojourner process is offered in Figure 2. This literature review begins with an exploration of transformative learning theory, as understanding the process of perspective change is central to this study.

*Previously held Frames of Reference (FR)  
*Quest for Meaning  

*Possibilities of “Disorienting Dilemma” and alteration of FR  
*Possibilities of Spiritual Struggle  

*Possibilities for further disorientation  
*Possibilities for Spiritual Growth: Reflection, dialogue, & exp. learning  
*Possibilities of newly established FR

**Figure 2.** Graphic representation depicting the potential for sojourner process.
Transformative Learning Theory

Transformative learning theory is rooted in the idea that humans make meaning out of their experiences (Mezirow, 1978, 1991, 2000), and the meaning behind those experiences construct the lens through which an individual sees the world and interacts with the world. Transformation can be seen as an altered worldview (Fisher-Yoshida, Geller, & Shapiro, 2009), while Transformative learning “describe[s] the intrapsychic and/or behavioral process of a learner involved in a transformative experience—it is about what the learner does, feels, and experiences” (p. 7). Therefore, someone who undergoes a process of transformative learning could expect to see a shift in the lens through which they see and interact with the world.

This theory provides a foundational platform for the study at hand, as college students who are propelled into new environments abroad might naturally encounter more new experiences that could promote significant opportunities for the reconstruction of meaning perspectives. This stream of the literature review looks at the foundations of transformative learning theory, relevant elements of its theoretical evolution, and practice-based applications in higher education.

Foundations of transformative learning theory. In theory and practice, transformative learning theory has marked the human journey as one filled with deconstructing old ways of thinking and engaging in dialogue and critical reflection in order to reengage in new ways of thinking. Mezirow (1978, 1991, 2000) saw the human construction of knowledge as an ongoing process of meaning making that was a relevant part of the adult learning process. He explained, transformative learning theory in practice was “[f]ormulating more dependable beliefs about our experience, assessing
their contexts, seeking informed agreement on their meaning and justification, and making decisions on the resulting insights” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 4). He described the process of perspective transformation as something that may continually occur and evolve in an individual person.

While Mezirow’s (1978, 1991, 2000) work remains foundational to the growing body of research on transformative learning theory and can be known as the cognitive rational approach, the theory itself has continued to evolve. Three other major approaches include the depth psychology approach, the structural development approach, and the social emancipatory approach, which also stem out into further applications of research, such as cultural-spiritual approaches (Fisher-Yoshida et al., 2009, pp. 7-8). Though each approach to transformative learning theory is insightful to the possibilities of perspective change, this review mainly focuses on the foundational aspects of Mezirow’s cognitive rational approach (1978, 1991, 2000). In addition, Freire’s (1970) work is looked at briefly, as a significant contribution to both Mezirow’s theory and to the social emancipatory approach and as an opening into the cultural and spiritual approach discussed by Tisdell (2003)—each of which brings relevance to the study at hand.

The origins of transformative learning theory began through a publication whereby Mezirow (1978) described the process of learning to become critically aware of the meaning perspectives, or “cultural and psychological assumptions” that impact the way one sees themselves and the world, as central to adult development (p. 101). By becoming more aware of how these meaning perspectives influence personal patterns and
relationships, and critically processing through their impact on the self, perspective transformation might occur.

This notion of transformation was informed by an earlier study Mezirow (1975) conducted with a group of adult women reengaging in higher education and the workforce after having been away from it for an extended period of time. Over the course of conducting an initial study on 12 reentry programs attended by returning women students in various community college locations, Mezirow derived that crucial elements were involved in perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1991, 2000). The elements, as depicted in Table 1, are seen as the 10 key phases that contribute to transformative learning.
Table 1

*Mezirow’s Ten Phases of Transformative Learning*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Disorienting Dilemma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>A self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated similar change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Planning of a course of action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Provisional trying of new roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>A reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s perspective</td>
</tr>
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This 10-step process of perspective transformation emerged from analysis of the change the women underwent through the critical reflection of previous assumptions regarding themselves and their roles (Mezirow, 2000). Where previously women might have found themselves at home with children, they would have to reorient their view of themselves in this new context. Mezirow (1978) elaborated that reentry programs coming out of the women’s movement saw “[c]lasses emphasize self-exploration, sharing personal experiences, modeling by instructors who ‘begin again,’ exploring options in
careers and lifestyles, and planning a course of personal action” (p. 102). For women, the classroom environment could offer a new context for meaning perspectives to be formed.

Awareness through experience in new contexts and cultures might also bring further consciousness to the way one sees the world. Freire (1970) was one of the significant influences to Mezirow’s work through his discussion on “conscientization” and social action in education through work done in Brazil and Chile (Mezirow, 1978). Freire (1970) understood that to promote progress through action with the people of a given culture, understanding how they perceived the world was necessary:

Consistent with the liberating purpose of dialogical education, the object of the investigation is not persons (as if they were anatomical fragments), but rather the thought-language with which men and women refer to reality, the levels at which they perceive that reality, and their view of the world, in which their generative themes are found. (p. 97)

Freire used dialogue to promote change in the villages he worked with, and through that dialogue, villagers became aware of previously held beliefs and could then elect to act in new ways towards the problems they faced (Mezirow, 1978). This influence can be see in later evolutions of Mezirow’s theory, by himself and in applications by other scholars who see dialogue, action, and critical reflections as necessary parts of the transformative process—this can be known as “the social emancipatory approach” to transformative learning (Fisher-Yoshida et al., 2009, p. 8)

While both Freire (1970) and Mezirow (1978, 1991, 2000) rely on an awareness of perspectives through conscientization, critical reflection, dialogue, and action as central to transformation, Tisdell (2003) expanded the theory to include spirituality as valid ways to construct meaning:
Indeed, spirituality is one of the ways people construct knowledge and meaning. It works in consort with the affective, the rational or cognitive, and the unconscious and symbolic domains. To ignore it, particularly in how it relates to teaching for personal and social transformation, is to ignore an important aspect of human experience and an avenue of learning and meaning-making. (pp. 20-21)

While Mezirow’s work might have disregarded non-rational methods of knowing, such as calculable spiritual experiences, Tisdell (2003) depicted such occurrences as further avenues from which meaning perspectives might be critically considered and altered. Cranton and Taylor (2012) also affirmed that in the case of a spiritual approach “[t]he actual process involved in the construction of meaning may be different, but meaning is still constructed; it does not exist as an absolute truth outside of the self” (p. 8). Thus, it might be seen that spiritual experiences could lead to critical processes that cause perspective change.

In addition to the varying approaches to transformative learning theory, other influences have contributed to the language Mezirow originally used within the theory. While the concept of “conscientization” was gleaned from Freire’s (1970) work, Kuhn (1962) discussed the nature of normal-science and the paradigms that emerge for scientists through the process of scientific inquiry. Through this work, Mezirow gleaned terminology that was then incorporated into transformative learning theory, and Kitchenham (2008) related how each contribute to the formation of Mezirow’s view of perspective transformation:

[A] paradigm for electricity was formed through the combined efforts of these scientists because they shared a common set of problems and solutions (i.e. habits of mind or meaning perspective) and yet were able to pursue their own interests (i.e. meaning schemes) within that paradigm and came to share a common worldview (i.e. perspective transformation). (p.107)
The excerpt reveals that the scientists had common problems and solutions, which can be classified as “habits of mind” or “meaning perspective” (p. 16). However, they pursued their own interests, which could be classified as “meaning schemes” (p. 16). Kuhn’s language therefore lends itself as a model for the terminology that Mezirow would later use. In addition to Kuhn (1962) and Freire (1970), Habermas (1984) also contributed to the language of the theory through the domains of learning he discussed, which ultimately highlight self-reflection as a catalyst for perspective change (Mezirow, 2000).

Frames of reference. To further clarify Mezirow’s language and terminology, he noted that frames of reference are “the structure of assumptions and expectations through which we filter sense impressions;” they are “meaning perspective[s]” and the lenses through which we view the world (Mezirow, 2000, p. 16). Furthermore, Mezirow (2000) described that a frame of reference is made up of two parts: “a habit of mind and resulting points of view” (pp. 17-18). A habit of mind reflects the general assumptions held that “act as a filter for interpreting meaning of experience” and serve to inform a point of view, which are comprised of “meaning schemes-sets of immediate specific expectations, beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and judgments,” which affect our interpretation of life and our surroundings (pp. 17-18). It is these meaning structures, or frames of reference, that set the foundation for the individually held worldviews that substantiate the transformative learning process.

More specifically, Mezirow (2000) depicted different categories that the habits of mind may belong to or where the individually held worldviews may stem from. These categories include Sociolinguistic, Moral-Ethical, Epistemic, Philosophical,
Psychological, and Aesthetic. Each category has sub-categories attached to it. For example, Mezirow classified religious doctrine under the philosophical habit of mind umbrella and adherence to customs and social norms under the sociolinguistic habit of mind umbrella. Each possible category reflects the origins of individually held worldviews that may exist in the transformative learning process (Mezirow, 2000).

Relatedly, these frames of reference have been referred to as “assumptions” in work by Argyris (as cited in Roberts 1998), and “mental models” as popularized by Senge (1992). The notion of mental models are “deeply held internal images of how the world works” and set a precedence for the way individuals act and behave with other individuals (p. 5). In leadership settings, Argyris (1982) discussed that the nature in which decisions are often made brings miscommunication because one’s “espoused theories” differ from their “theories in use” (p. 11). All relate back to the idea of carrying certain assumptions, mental models, frames of reference or habits of mind, as Mezirow coined—in other words, the way that humans see the world or create pictures of the world and then operate from them.

**Critical reflection of assumptions.** An additional and substantial part of Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning is based on the application of the varying critical reflection of assumptions that one carries. Mezirow (2000) explained:

> We transform frames of reference--our own and those of others--by becoming critically reflective of their assumptions and aware of their context—the source, nature, and consequences of taken-for-granted beliefs. Assumptions on which habits of mind and related points of view are predicated may be epistemological, logical, ethical, psychological, ideological, social, cultural, economic, political, ecological, scientific, or spiritual, or may pertain to other aspects of experience. (p. 19)
Furthermore, he suggests that critical reflection regarding any of these habits of mind may occur through a “subjective refraining process” or an “objective reframing process” (Mezirow, 1998, 2000). The objective process—Critical Reflection of Assumptions (CRA)—revolves around pausing to reflect on how valid or true certain beliefs or feelings being communicated to you are or pausing to consider and examine the assumptions held towards figuring out a certain problem (Mezirow, 1998, 2000). The subjective process, Critical Self Reflection on Assumptions (CSRA), revolves around the “critical analysis of the psychological or cultural assumptions that are the specific reasons for one’s conceptual and psychological limitations, the constitutive processes or conditions of formation of one’s experience and beliefs” (Mezirow, 1998, p. 8; Mezirow, 2000, p. 23).

**Discourse.** Not only does transformative learning come through engaging in CRA and CSRA, but through participating in discourse as well (Mezirow, 1998, 2000). According to Mezirow (1998), discourse can be described as follows:

> The special function of dialogue devoted to presenting and assessing the validity of reasons by critically examining the widest possible range of evidence and arguments in the context of attempting to find understanding and agreement on the justification of beliefs. (p. 11)

This aspect of dialogue is especially central to transformative learning, as validity is constituted by the submission of individual critical reflection and revelation through dialogue with others, which in essence, substantiates it.

Mezirow (1991) articulated that he thought 30-year-olds would possess the higher-level thinking skills needed for perspective transformation. Merriam (2004) argued that to engage in this process of critical reflection and discourse, one needed to have a certain requisite of knowledge. Using Piaget’s fourth stage of development as a
starting place, Merriam (2004) asserted that something beyond this state is likely necessary. Regardless of Mezirow’s specific age-to-critical thinking association, many practical applications and studies on transformative learning have been done in the higher education classroom, ranging from the undergraduate to the graduate level.

**Transformative learning in higher education.** While transformative learning is well understood as a theoretical initiative, the process of putting it into practice has been found to be more difficult, especially in the classroom (Moore, 2005; Taylor, 2009). Taylor (2009), through a macro-analysis of existing research on transformative learning, concluded that important aspects of the application of transformative learning in the classroom include thought on how to promote the individual experience, group learning, dialogue, critical reflection, and the importance of forming authentic relationships. Cranton (2006) suggested that not only does student response become exceedingly important, but the acknowledgment that the educator must become a facilitator rather than one who just “transfers knowledge” is foundational to the application of transformative learning in the classroom (p. 104).

Moore (2005) asserted that not all environments may be transformative environments because so many factors are necessary for its application. In asking the question of whether or not higher education was “ready” for transformative learning, she highlighted that not all professors are educators trained in the complexities of creating this kind of environment. Additionally, Moore (2005) pointed out that the process of transformation is often characterized by aspects of “emotional upheaval” and “disorientation.”
A question this raises for academics is whether students are mentally and emotionally prepared for this type of learning and whether the academic institution (and professors) has the ability to foster and nurture these kinds of experiences. Students may need a great deal of support, especially if they are living away from home or are lacking a personal support network. (p. 86)

Thus, the application of transformative learning may depend on a given university’s level of commitment toward the holistic growth of its body of students, which becomes far more than a theoretical opinion.

One such application of transformative learning in higher education is described through engaging adult learners through cultural imagination. Tisdell and Tolliver (2009) expressed that imagination is key to the learning and teaching process, and can thus affect the meaning-making process when it comes to understanding culture. Tisdell used various creative strategies in her classes on diversity and equity to promote cultural imagination including storytelling, selecting significant cultural symbols, and analyzing a popular-culture movie. These activities were imparted in an effort to “tie the theoretical and cognitive world to their affective and experiential world and further anchor it in the symbolic world as it engages cultural imagination” (p. 94). One student created a mosaic on their garage door related to culture and gender in an effort to heal from a divorce; not only was this reflective measure an individual endeavor, but it also turned into a community endeavor as neighbors witnessed the expression of art. This example is just one that Tisdell and Tolliver (2009) provided, and emphasizes the possible transformative work possible when applied. In doing so, culturally relevant dialogue can promote transformation for both students and teachers, illuminating the notion that transformative learning is about every individual as well as the group involved.
Stevens-Long, Shapiro, and McClintock (2012) conducted a quantitative study looking at the cognitive, behavioral, and personal experiences of 59 doctoral students of a multi-disciplinary PhD program, up to five years after they had graduated. Through coding the data into the three categories of experience, results showed that the candidates saw themselves as having become more perceptive and able to think more critically in terms of their cognitive development; they saw themselves to be more personally confident and positive, carrying an expanded consciousness; and in terms of behavioral growth, participants saw themselves as being more communicative and identified themselves as continuous learners.

Transformative learning theory has evolved from the individual critical/rational approach that Mezirow initially formed to a theory that sees social, cultural, and spiritual experiences as formative to perspective change. Even with the theory’s evolution, Mezirow’s 10-phase transformative learning process remains relevant to current research practices in a variety of higher education contexts, particularly as perspective change is consistently seen through the fostering of critical thinking, dialogue, and reflective practices.

Student Development and Spirituality

To understand the possibilities for transformative learning within the study abroad experience, it is essential to understand foundational aspects of student development and the role of spirituality in that process. By understanding student development theory, the study abroad experience may be interpreted as a platform for journeying into the unknown, and may possibly serve as catalyst for disorientation and perspective change. This stream of literature looks at student development theory and the role of spiritual
development as a significant piece in the search for meaning and purpose. The areas of spiritual struggle, Christian faith, and connections to transformative learning are highlighted as relevant components in this study.

**Student development.** Understanding theories of student development in college students is foundational to understanding the implications for sending students on international and study abroad experiences. Chickering et al. (1969) conducted research on 13 small colleges representing a diverse set of institutions using the Omnibus personal inventory. They determined various “vectors of change,” which remain foundational to student development research. The vectors include “increased autonomy, increased emotional awareness and expressiveness, increased esthetic sensitivities and interests, decreased concern for material success” (p. 324). These findings highlight the personal development and changes that occur between the approximate ages of 16-17 and 25-30, and have guided additional research in the field.

Arnett (2000), building off previous foundational work of Erikson (1968), introduced a theory of Emerging Adulthood, which is centered around the 18-25-year-old and is characterized as follows:

[A] distinct period of the life course for young people in industrialized societies. It is a period characterized by change and exploration for most people, as they examine the life possibilities open to them and gradually arrive at more enduring choices in love, work, and worldviews. (p. 480)

What Arnett has highlighted is that in the last number of decades, there has existed a prolonged period of in-between from adolescence to adulthood, particularly in the industrialized world. While years separate the two studies, both Chickering et al. (1969) and Arnett (2000) acknowledged the search for meaning, identity, and emotional
growth that marks the span from late teens to early to mid-20s—leaving it vastly open for growth.

With this in mind, student development theory correlates with student affairs practice in an effort to determine how to best assist students in the exploration process. Nash (2009) utilized cross-over pedagogy with university faculty and students that “is based on developmental theory, interdisciplinary scholarship, constructivist philosophy, multiple intelligences theory, positive psychology, moral conversation, and storytelling” (p. 3). This mode of pedagogy focuses on the value of communication for the promotion of understanding between the differences in worldviews that exist amongst human lives. Nash’s practice of crossover pedagogy highlights similar aspects of transformative learning and growth and sees understanding diverse perspectives as viable to the development that occurs in the lives of college students, which also fits into the purposes and outcomes international and study abroad programs promote.

**Spirituality and religion defined.** While spirituality is a broad term with many meanings, for the scope of this study, Love and Talbot’s (1999) and Astin et al.’s (2011) work is used for the definitions they have provided through their comprehensive research efforts. Additionally, religiosity is discussed in relation to spirituality with a focus on Fowler’s (1981) stages of faith development in an effort to draw further understanding towards the researcher’s questions of interest with an intentional focus on the perspectives and religious views held by the member institutions of the CCCU.

Love and Talbot (1999) presented their research on spirituality and its importance and relevance to college students through asserting, “[b]y failing to address students’ spiritual development in practice and research we are ignoring an important aspect of
their development” (p. 362). While the presence of spiritual matters in academia previously assumed a more private role, their research sought to bring the discussion into a student development context. In their research process, they derived five aspects to define spiritual development:

1. Spiritual development involves an internal process of seeking personal authenticity, genuineness, and wholeness as an aspect of identity development.
2. Spiritual development involves the process of continually transcending one’s current locus of centricity.
3. Spiritual development involves developing a greater connectedness to self and others through relationships and union with community.
4. Spiritual development involves deriving meaning, purpose and direction in one’s life.
5. Spiritual development involves an increasing openness to exploring a relationship with an intangible and pervasive power or essence that exists beyond human existence and rational human knowing. (p. 367)

The above components further illustrate student development as a quest of discovery and meaning making with oneself and others and openness to the existence of something beyond oneself.

Relatedly, Astin et al. (2011) defined spirituality in the lives of college students in recollection of insights gained through a longitudinal study done over the course of four years in the following terms:

How students make meaning of their education and their lives, how they develop a sense of purpose, the value and belief dilemmas they experience, as well as the role of religion, the sacred, and the mystical in their lives. Spirituality also involves aspects of our students’ experience that are not easy to define, such as intuition, inspiration, creativity, and their sense of connectedness to others and the world. (p. 40)

Similar to Love and Talbot (1999), Astin et al. (2011) discussed spiritual development as a way to find purpose and make meaning. Additionally, Astin et al.’s (2011) findings and definition suggested that spiritual development encompassed religion
and hard-to-define experiences as well. However, both made clear in their definitions that spiritual development does not exclusively equate to religiosity.

Fowler (1981), on the other hand, developed a model for “faith development,” which did not specifically regard one particular religion, but was decidedly personal in nature and was distinguished through triangle form, focusing on relationships between “self, others, and an agreed-on belief system” (as cited in Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010, p. 197). Developed through interviews with 359 participants ranging from three years old to 84, and including a variety of religious backgrounds (nearly half being Protestant), Fowler developed six stages of faith.

**Prestage 1: Primal faith (undifferentiated faith):** Pre-linguistic; based on relationships with caretakers; inform first images of God

**Stage 1: Intuitive-projective faith:** Emerges around age of two; develops with language, words, pictures, and images from stories

**Stage 2: Mythical-literal faith:** During elementary school; ability to see others’ perspectives; narratives form belief system without reflection

**Stage 3: Synthetic-conventional faith:** Early adolescence; can evaluate ideas from different areas in life; find faith to be meaningful; not necessarily able to critically think about it

**Stage 4: Individuative-reflective faith (individuating-reflexive):** Often during young adulthood; (later writings indicate transition to occur between thirty and forty); meaning-making and beliefs are self-authored

**Stage 5: Conjunctive faith (paradoxical-consolidative):** Midlife and beyond; considers the difficulties of life; can hold their own beliefs while having greater acceptance of other traditions

**Stage 6: Universalizing faith:** Rare stage; connection with the “Spirit;” highlighted through a denial of self; being others’ focused. (pp. 198-199)

Astin et al. (2011) and Love and Talbot (1999) determined what spirituality was through broader qualities, and Astin et al. defined religiosity as a specific adherence to certain practices of faith and beliefs “concerning the origins of the world and the nature of the entity(ies) or being(s) that created and/or govern the world (p. 40). Meanwhile,
Fowler (1981) provided a model that accounts for the *process* of spiritual and faith development as it may pertain to these individual religious beliefs.

Parks (1986) further developed Fowler’s (1981) theory by projecting that the young adult quest for meaning would occur between Stages 3 and 4 of Fowler’s model (p. 207). In her more recent work, she described faith to be “the activity of seeking and discovering meaning in the most comprehensive dimensions of our experience” and outlined that Forms of Knowing, Forms of Dependence, and Forms of Community are central to this process (Parks, 2011, p. 10). She specified that these forms are seen in the lives of emergent adults through probing commitment, a fragile inner dependence, and the need for a mentoring community (Parks, 2011, pp. 98-99). Parks (2011) concluded that mentors are crucial for support “as emerging adults are beginning to think critically about self and the world” (p. 165). Understanding the stages and forms presented by Fowler (1981) and Parks (2011) provides insight into the spiritual developmental process occurring in young adults, which may help in understanding the possible religious orientations present in this study’s participant group.

*Christian spirituality and the CCCU.* While Astin et al.’s (2011) definitions regarding spirituality and religiosity certainly apply to college students at large, it is important to understand and acknowledge the beliefs of the CCCU, as the researcher’s questions focus on this particular participant group. The CCCU has 120 member institutions with additional affiliates both in the United States and abroad; its mission statement is “To advance the cause of Christ-centered higher education and to help our institutions transform lives by faithfully relating scholarship and service to biblical truth”
Therefore, the CCCU schools seek to foster an environment of transformation through the lens of Christian spirituality. Christian spirituality, while bearing a vast number of definitions as discussed by Ma (2003) in terms of “spiritual formation,” can further be detailed by aspects of “sanctification, devotion, religiosity, perfection, holiness, discipleship, spiritual development, spiritual growth, and Christian maturity” (p. 325). Christian spirituality appears to be defined as focused on finding meaning and purpose in accordance to Christ at its center.

Through previous research by Ma, it was realized that limited measures looked at “outcome-oriented” research regarding the college impact on spiritual formation in the realm of Christian campuses (Ma, 2003, p. 326). With this in mind, she created a measure to assess whether “Christian students perceive the Christian campus to have a positive influence, according to institutional goals” (Ma, 2003, p. 326). A four-page questionnaire was administered to students at 20 Christian colleges and universities, including 17 CCCU members and three Lutheran universities and represented denominations including “Assemblies of God, Baptist, Brethren, Church of Christ, Evangelical Free, Nazarene, Lutheran, and interdenominational traditions” (p. 327).

Participants were juniors and seniors at the aforementioned schools; 960 surveys were returned, and 943 were used for analysis. Results revealed both academic and non-academic measures that aided the spiritual formation of students. Students showed that positive academic influences on spiritual formation included “theology classes, professor’s impact in class, classes in their major, class interaction and class discussion” (Ma, 2003, p. 330). Non-academically, students showed that “peer relationships,
working through crises or traumas while at college, practicing personal spiritual disciplines, times of worship as a community, and the college environment as a whole” aided most influentially in their spiritual formation (Ma, 2003, p. 330). Results also showed that cultural diversity and awareness may be a concern for Christian institutions in general, as she highlights that students did not find them to be a strong part of influence to their spiritual formation, citing Astin’s 1993 study for a contrary comparison (Ma, 2003).

Holcomb and Nonneman (2004) enacted a study with theoretical basis in Fowler’s (1981) stages of faith development, which focused on the spiritual development in the lives of CCCU students as part of the Faithful Change project. Through 600 in-depth qualitative interviews and two quantitative survey measures (the Faithful Change Inventory, which combined already existing spiritual inventories; and the Big Five Inventory) 240 student participants were involved in a cross-sectional and longitudinal study. One hundred twenty freshmen were interviewed and then re-interviewed in each year during their college experience. The cross-sectional study was done with 60 seniors during the first year of the study (1998-1999) and compared with a new group of 60 seniors during the last year of the study (2001-2002) to determine what, if any, impact the interviewing process played in the role of participant spiritual development.

Preliminary data from the first year of the study indicated that most freshman participants entered college at Fowler’s Stage 2 and Stage 3, with a smaller group entering at the “3.5 transition” (between synthetic-conventional faith and individuative-reflective faith). Through the study, about half of the seniors left “functioning” at a 3.5 level or above. More significantly, those who scored higher were those who had at some
point experienced a crisis, defined as “a prolonged period of active engagement with, and exploration of, competing roles and ideologies” (Holcomb & Nonneman, 2004, p. 100). When dissected further, these crises were placed into three different groups: “(a) prolonged exposure to diverse ways of thinking (b) extensive multicultural exposure (c) and general emotional crisis” (Holcomb & Nonneman, 2004, p. 100).

The groups reveal a connection to the disorienting dilemma as referred to by Mezirow (2000) and substantiate the process likely to occur between Fowler’s Stages 3 and 4, marked by the reflection that comes from being exposed to a new experience and leads to a “self-authored” faith (Evans et al., 2010, p. 198). Morgan (2010), instructor and chaplain for the Abilene Christian University study abroad program in Oxford, validates further that the reflection process indicative of spiritual development and transformation may be marked by questions of disorientation. Such questions, presented by Walter Bruggemann, include: “‘Am I a Christian simply by accident of birth?’ ‘Where is God in my pain and loneliness?’ or even ‘Do I believe in God anymore?’” (p. 40). While these may seem like crucial questions of being amidst struggle and loss, they indicate the mark and posture of critical thinking that leads to transformation.

Parks (1986) also discusses the nature of active faith as one that sees the presence of suffering. Crediting her mentor Richard R. Niebuhr, she explained suffering through the metaphor of “shipwreck.”

When we must even question, let alone suffer the collapse of, our sense of self, world, and “God,” our whole being aches or is disoriented or is bewildered or feels empty—drained of those rich connections that create significance and delight and purpose. It may feel something like a shipwreck. To undergo shipwreck is to be threatened in a most total and primary way. Shipwreck is the coming apart of what has served as shelter and protection and has held and carried one where one wanted to go—the collapse of a structure that once promised trustworthiness. (Parks, 1986, p. 24)
Identifying spiritual struggle as part of the young adult development process may assist in understanding disorientation that occurs through cross-cultural travel.

**Spiritual struggle.** In looking at research conducted by Love and Talbot (1999), Ma (2003), Holcomb and Nonneman (2004), and Astin et al. (2011), spiritual struggle appears to be central to the discussion of spirituality and religiosity in college students. According to Bryant and Astin (2008), spiritual struggle is most generally linked to “difficult life circumstances” (p. 2). More specifically, Johnson and Hayes conducted a study with approximately 5,500 participants, representing 39 colleges and universities, finding that correlates of spiritual struggle arose around areas of “confusion about beliefs and values, loss of a relationship, sexual assault, homesickness, suicidal thoughts and feelings” (as cited in Bryant & Astin, 2008, p. 2). While these indicators cannot necessarily provide conclusive evidence that generally speaks for every single individual undergoing spiritual struggle, they do provide that perhaps the notion of “loss” is connected in many cases to spiritual struggle.

Through administering the CBSV (the same one discussed above by Astin et al. 2011), Bryant and Astin (2008), determined that Spiritual Struggle was “an independent and dependent measure in this study [that] represents a construct that reflects intrapsychic concerns about matters of faith, purpose, and meaning in life” (p. 12). Results revealed varying correlates of struggle to including minority religious groups as being more susceptible to struggle (Astin et al., 2008; Rockenbach et al., 2012). Results also revealed that environments that were Evangelical Christian, Roman Catholic, or other Christian-related schools were more likely to contain students who identified with
spiritual struggles. Furthermore, results showed that those who changed religion or operated out of quest behaviors, such as pondering the nature of good and evil may experience spiritual struggles as well (Astin et al., 2011).

In a 10-person phenomenological study, Rockenbach et al. (2012) found correlates of struggle that revolved around the tension college students felt with their “possible selves.” Using Higgins’ 1987 theory highlighting the three domains of self, Rockenbach et al. (2012) found that struggle and tension emerged from what students found to be their ideal selves and their actual selves. The struggle continued between students’ view of self and others they were around. These findings reveal the deep connection that spiritual struggle has in correlation to views of identity.

**Spirituality and transformative learning.** With consideration to the literature presented so far, it is evident that the streams of spirituality and transformative learning converge thematically in areas of value. Transformative learning theory offers a central importance to the individual being aware of assumptions or frames of reference, as well as the need to dialogue to promote growth. Similarly spiritual development in college students seems to be characterized strongly by dialogue, as shown through Ma’s 2003 study and also highlighted by spiritual struggle with a potential need for more support to this aspect of spiritual development in the lives of college students (Astin et al., 2011; Bryant & Astin, 2008; Ma, 2003). This aspect of spiritual struggle intersects with Mezirow’s (2000) notion of the “disorienting dilemma” as a challenge to old frames of reference and the need for a process often caused by new environments or new ideas.
Study Abroad Experiences

The number of U.S. college students who studied abroad prior to graduation in 2013-2014 tripled over the past two decades at 304,467 and shows a 5.2% increase over the previous year (Institute of International Education, 2015). Given the upward trend in study abroad travel, research representing this common experience may offer rich insight into understanding student development and identity formation as one venue of the young adult quest for meaning (Arnett, 2000; Chickering et al., 1969). Connections can be drawn between student development theory and the study abroad experience through understanding the theoretical and practical basis of culture adaptation and reentry adaptation, in addition to the positive and negative affects that sojourners encounter through their experience. This stream of literature covers the latter, while also reviewing applications of transformative learning in study abroad contexts.

Understanding cultural adjustment. While not the first to coin the term, Oberg (1954) established the concept of “culture shock” as a sickness stemming from anxiety, due to the loss of familiar cultural signs and symbols in one’s surroundings. He emphasized that after a “honeymoon stage” of indeterminate length, a “crisis in the disease” would occur, followed by two stages leading to complete adjustment (pp. 3-4). Lysgaard (1955) further developed discussion of the adjustment process through his post-return study with 200 Norwegian Fulbright travel grant participants sojourning to America by looking at the impact of time on the adjustment process. Results yielded that those who stayed in America less than six months and more than 18 months had “good” adjustments, while those who left sometime between six and eighteen months expressed the adjustment process as being “less well” (p. 49). Furthermore, Lysgaard (1955)
concluded, “[the data seemed] to give evidence of certain stages of adjustment, characterized by good initial adjustment, followed by an adjustment ‘crisis,’ after which good adjustment is again achieved” (p. 49).

Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) expanded the “U” adjustment process depicted by Lysgaard (1955) into a model that also included post-study abroad adjustment, known as the “W” curve. This model of adjustment was determined using previous data results from a 1956 interview and survey study with 400 American students in France, in addition to a 5,300 person study of American Fulbright & Smith-Mundt grantees who studied globally. Both studies substantiated that participation in a new culture caused many frustrations and dissonance for the individual in the new setting. This experience of “culture shock” (p. 38) represented the downward drive of the “U,” while the upward rise of the “U” indicated an emergence out of the “depression” into a new understanding and ability to grow and “restructure the problem” (p. 35).

The first “U” was seen as occurring while a sojourner was abroad (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Lysgaard, 1955), and the second “U” was depicted as occurring upon reentry. Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) identified that challenges occurred when sojourners reoriented themselves to the culture they were part of, and then had to readjust to their home culture. Particularly, those who had not “found themselves” prior to going abroad, were the ones who clung tightly to their new values for the security they had finally established (p. 40).

While the “U” and “W” curve models were used for multiple decades, more recent scholars have opposed the credibility of the formulaic curves (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001; Ward, Okura, Kennedy, & Kojima, 1998). In one longitudinal study
with 35 Japanese participants studying in New Zealand, Ward et al. (1998) utilized the Sociocultural Adjustment Scale (SCAS) and the Zung Self-Rating Depression Scale (ZSDS) four times throughout the 12-month study abroad stay as a means of tracking social adaptation and psychological adjustment in the participants (p. 282). While the findings showed adjustment to be challenging at the beginning of the experience, as time went on, challenges dissipated. However, only 28% of the original voluntary participant group took all four surveys, making it more challenging to distinguish consistency of results. Additionally, while Ward et al. (1998) sought to put the “U” curve on trial, nothing is mentioned about the reentry process, which would determine further insight regarding the social and psychological impact of the trip in participant lives.

Despite contrasting views over the precise timeframe that cultural adjustment and readjustment might occur, cultural disorientation and shock are seen to take place through the process of cross-cultural travel (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Lysgaard, 1955; Oberg, 1954; Ward et al., 1998). Recent studies indicate the varying degrees in which the study abroad experience can impact sojourners; both negative and positive impacts have been reviewed to inform this study.

**Personal and psychological impact.** Gaw (2000), Hunley (2010), and Wielkiewicz and Turkowski (2010) explored the impact of the reentry process and the varying struggles presented. In a cross-cohort study, Gaw used the Personal Problem Inventory (PPI) and the ReEntry Shock Scale (RSS) with 66 American undergraduate students from a West Coast university who had graduated from high schools overseas. They were asked questions about their perceived sense of reverse-culture shock in relation to receiving help for the representative items on the PPI (p. 89). Over 20 items
were listed on the PPI, including loneliness, anxiety, depression, alcohol problems, and shyness. Results of this study showed a variety of willingness to receive counseling for items on the PPI as marked by the survey; however, students who had higher scores on the RSS were less likely to actually go and receive help. Additionally, results showed that while issues such as depression and anxiety are prevalent amongst study abroad sojourners, academic and relational struggles may emerge as well.

In a correlational design, Wielkiewicz and Turkowski (2010) surveyed 669 American students from two private, single sex, Catholic institutions, which both had a high study abroad participant populous. Participants in this online survey identified themselves as being 70% Catholic and 90% from the upper Midwest (p. 652). Out of the 669 students surveyed, 239 had studied abroad, while 420 had not. The questions asked represented various factors, including: negative emotions, reentry shock, academic fatigue, and an additional section of “unclassified” items. Results from their study showed higher alcohol use, higher reentry shock scores (as opposed to those who may experience it simply from attending college), and general high skepticism towards American culture. While increased depression and anxiety were hypothesized to show up as higher amongst study abroad participants, they did not in Wielkiewicz and Turkowski’s study. However, this does not negate the fact that depression and anxiety are prevalent within the psychological development of college students during this time.

The psychological state of students is an important factor in the study abroad experience. Hunley (2010) considered the impact that loneliness and psychological distress have on students in relation to their experience. Two separate participant groups studied abroad at Loyola University’s Rome Center, in fall 2004 and spring 2007; 66 out
of 116 students were participants from the first group, and 46 out of 180 students were participants in the second group. Participants completed the Function of Students Abroad Questionnaire (FOSA), the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI), and Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale. The results of these measures showed that students who had “more psychological distress and more loneliness did demonstrate more levels of functioning while studying abroad, and this relationship was established at different time points in the semester” (p. 389). Inclusive recommendations suggest education on coping as a necessary measure for psychological support.

In considering the studies of Gaw (2000), Hunley (2010), and Wielkiewicz and Turkowski (2010), it is evident that many varying factors may influence students who participate in study abroad programs, revealing the presence of student struggle as one prominent factor throughout the study abroad experience, each presenting the need for further insight and discussion for future support.

**Global perspectives and learning outcomes.** While personal struggle is seen as one outcome of the study abroad experience, many more current studies focus on the prospect of creating global leaders and citizens out of student sojourners and positive learning outcomes. Two large-scale studies, the Georgia Learning Outcomes of Students Studying Abroad Research Initiative (GLOSSARI) (Sutton & Rubin, 2010) and Beyond Immediate Impact: Study Abroad for Global Engagement (SAGE) (Sutton & Rubin, 2009), are reviewed to further understand possible learning outcomes for this study.

The GLOSSARI (Sutton & Rubin, 2010) study, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, looked across 425 study abroad and exchange programs with a focus on learning outcomes. The results of this six-phase study showed that participants
demonstrated improved navigational skills, understanding of cultural context, academic performance, and higher graduation rates (especially amongst at risk students). Participants demonstrated a more integrative or intercultural knowledge that could be applied, compared to a more theoretical knowledge demonstrated by students on home campus.

The SAGE (Paige & Fry, 2009) study focused on long-term personal, professional, and global engagement outcomes through surveying more than 6,000 former study abroad participants from 22 U.S. colleges, universities, and education providers who attended programs between 1960 and 2005. The quantitative and qualitative findings showed that participants perceived their study abroad experience to be the most impactful undergraduate experience or life experience; it contributed to career changes, educational changes, and pursuits in graduate work. Over 50% of participants went on to pursue graduate studies. Furthermore, findings from SAGE (Paige & Fry, 2009) revealed that the depth of the program carried the most influence on global engagement. Depth was designated through particular aspects of one’s individual experience abroad, including: having had multiple study abroad opportunities, studying alongside nationals, working or interning abroad, and studying in a non-English speaking location or in a less common destination.

Relatedly, in a study using a two by two, pre-/post-test design, Tarrant, Rubin, and Stoner (2014) found, “it is a combination of location and academic focus that appears to yield the greatest increases in global citizenship scores” (p. 153). This study looked at four group combinations: students were either at home or studying abroad and enrolled in a sustainability course or a non-sustainability course. Those who were abroad and in the
experiential/field training sustainability course scored the highest on the global citizenship tests.

An additional experientially based approach was taken through a study done in the UK at Liverpool Hope University regarding how many undergraduate students participated in service learning locally. The focus was to teach citizenship education, and Bamber and Hankin (2011) promoted this through the notion of active participation:

The model of social action that attaches to active participation is enabling an academic component to surface in higher education, one that moves beyond learning about global citizenship towards a curriculum concerned to promote learning for global citizenship. (p. 191)

This approach brings theory to action, and the results seen by Bamber and Hankin (2011) suggest that students involved in local service learning often experience a shift in their perspective.

Bamber and Hankin (2011), SAGE (Paige & Fry, 2009) and Tarrant et al. (2014) conveyed that depth and design through experience aids global perspective. Each supports the idea set by Litterman-Aguilar and Gingerich “that education abroad can effectively prepare students as responsible global citizens if programs incorporate the principles of experiential education, notably action-oriented experiences that encourage reflection, critical analysis, and synthesis” (as cited in Tarrant et al., 2013, pp. 144, 146). This perspective holds reflection and experience as a valuable part of studying abroad, and in doing so, coincides with aspects of transformative learning.

**Connections to transformative learning.** The notion of promoting and creating global citizens through study abroad experiences yields results for transformative growth.
through perspective shifts. Perry et al. (2012) discussed the work of Mezirow’s 10 steps of transformative learning as they relate to short-term study abroad experiences:

Within study abroad experiences, exposure to new places, cultures, and learning environments where a students’ preconceived and established notions and beliefs are tested, may act as the catalyst or impetus for bring forth a transformative experience. (p. 682)

Furthermore, the authors discussed that beyond students being exposed to new experiences, or seeing things differently, critical reflection is necessary to bring transformation to the process.

Whether or not critical reflection is required for transformation has long been up for debate and discussion amongst transformative learning theorists who have tried to describe the differences between assimilation and transformation. Mezirow (1998) himself brought up the discussion in the context of Taylor’s 1994 opinion, which expressed critical reflection as not essential to transformation based on transformations seen in a group of people who moved to another country and came back differently. Merriam (2004) seemed to question the “mindless assimilation” that Mezirow acknowledged in his 2000 work, as a possibility for transformation, and asserted that she thinks Mezirow could close the gap in the discussion by simply “expanding the theory” to include affective dimensions as a part of the transformative process (p. 66).

In a qualitative application study, Root and Ngampornchai (2012) sought to discover the potential need for pre-departure and post-departure training, through the stories told in reflective essays by 18 students after returning home. Results suggested that the study abroad experience impacted the students, but did not necessarily improve levels of intercultural competence, revealing, “more guidance and knowledge about
intercultural communication will better help students analyze their own experiences” (p. 529). This finding regarding more training before leaving and after returning implies that there is deeper impact for student growth as global citizens from participating in a class on sustainability that informed the experiential learning they undertook. Connecting content to experience and providing opportunities for reflection seem to have promoted further opportunity for transformation.

Similarly, Fuller (2007) conducted an exploratory study in which intercultural sensitivity amongst graduate theological seminary students was being evaluated, using a mixed methods approach with 18 participants who represented a 10% sample of the current masters degree students, and the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI). Half the participant group had studied abroad at some point during their undergraduate or graduate degree program, and half had not. Results revealed that while the study abroad group scored slightly higher on the IDI (means of -.72 vs. -.86), there was no statistically significant difference. Fuller (2007) recommended, however, that if this program wanted to enhance and foster intercultural sensitivity within their program, every student should be required to have an immersion experience abroad, and undergo serious pre- and post-orientation training, paired with “meaningful learning goals,” supervision, and “the facilitation of reflection” (p. 328). Both Fuller (2007) and Root and Ngampornchai (2012) indicated that reflection and experiential learning is central to the intercultural competency, and both substantiate the need for more program support and training as identified by Lawerence and Paul (as cited in Ward et al., 2001).

Conclusively, study abroad experiences promote heightened opportunities for self-discovery and may result in personal challenges and new cultural competencies.
With acknowledgement to the cultural entry and reentry cycle, when more guidance and opportunity is provided to sojourners, there seems to be a stronger correlation to perceived personal change and increased global competency.

**Summary**

The three streams of study informing the researcher’s questions supply a firm foundation of understanding the student development that occurs in the lives of college students. Transformative learning theory, spirituality, and international and study abroad research each reveal a preponderance of evidence that informs the deep meaning seeking, exploration quest that occurs developmentally during the late teens and early 20s. In practice and application, it is clear that while questions and dilemmas are a typical part of the spiritual experience that occurs during this life season, transformation may occur when there are opportunities for reflection, dialogue, and experiential learning. The transformation experience is often solidified when coursework, reflection, and practice are thoughtfully aligned with one another.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this narrative study was to explore the perspective changes that may have occurred in the lives of CCCU students through their participation in the OPUS. Late adolescence is marked as a period of exploration and identity formation, and the study abroad experience is valuable to observe the ongoing process of development in emerging adults. As cross-cultural travel commonly precipitates culture shock, understanding experiences of cultural disorientation may provide significant insight into spiritual, academic, and identity-related perspective transformations that emerged for participants through studying abroad.

The following research questions were used as a guide in this study:

1. What stories do participants share about their lived experiences during the Oxford Programme for Undergraduate Studies (OPUS) study abroad semester, and their transition home?

2. To what extent do participants reflect disorientation from their study abroad experiences and their transitions home?

3. How do these study abroad experiences affect participant perceptions of personal identity, spirituality, and academic pursuits?

A narrative inquiry was used to understand the experiences of participants as told through their stories about studying abroad. This chapter provides detail about the research design and rationale, site and population, methods, and the ethical considerations for the study.
Research Design and Rationale

Narrative inquiry is the qualitative approach used to conduct this study to effectively “understand and represent experiences through the stories individual(s) live and tell” about their study abroad experience (Creswell, 2015, p. 508). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) developed a foundation in narrative inquiry that is built on the value of experiential knowledge. This understanding of knowledge is rooted in Deweyan philosophy; it is not seen as permanent or fixed, but as “a changing stream that is characterized by continuous interaction of human thought with our personal, social, and material environment” (Clandinin & Roziek, 2007, p. 39). By understanding the stories that participants will tell as fluid and active, meaning can be derived both from the original experience of studying abroad and through the process of telling and retelling that occurs after the experience. According to Clandinin (2013), not only is this process valuable for the storyteller, but for the researcher as well:

Narrative inquirers study the individual’s experience in the world, an experience that is storied both in the living and telling and that can be studied by listening, observing, living alongside an other, and writing and interpreting texts. Through the inquiry, we seek ways of enriching and transforming that experience for themselves and others. (p. 18)

This research design allows every person involved to bring meaning to the study.

A narrative inquiry approach is appropriate to this study, both in its alignment with the researcher’s philosophical stance of social constructivism and a purpose that is centered on perspective change. Through storytelling, the participants were able to reflect on their study abroad experience in Oxford and articulate the impact the experience had, through their own perceptions. This was an insightful meaning-making
process for the researcher and participants, while also providing insight to stakeholders at Azusa Pacific University.

**Site and Population**

**Population Description**

The population in this study included eight participants who attended the Oxford Programme for Undergraduate Studies (OPUS) through Azusa Pacific University (APU) and graduated from the university between 2011 and 2016. APU is a private institution located in Southern California, near Los Angeles, and a member of the Council of Christian Universities and Colleges. There were eight participants in this study: seven females and one male. All participants had to have a minimum cumulative grade point average of 3.4, or a minimum major grade point average of 3.6 to participate in OPUS through Azusa’s Center for Global Learning and Engagement (APU, 2016a).

Purposeful sampling was used to select APU as the CCCU institution from which to draw participants from in this study, with knowledge of their Oxford Semester. Once given access to contact information, convenience sampling was used to select willing participants. These participants represented a typical sample, as their stories highlight what it is like to study abroad in Oxford with OPUS from one CCCU institution in Southern California.

OPUS is one program in Oxford, England that provides students from the United States the opportunity to study at the renowned medieval university during their undergraduate experience. Participants who traveled through this program were qualified and supported to engage in the same rigorous tutorial model that matriculated undergraduates experience at Oxford University. Students had access to one of the many
colleges that comprise Oxford University and were given the status of Associate Student during the term they were visiting. Students had the opportunity to become involved in extracurricular activities and experience the rich history and culture of the surrounding setting (APU, 2016a; OPUS, 2016).

Site Description

Azusa Pacific University served as the site for this study. Participants in this study attended the university as undergraduate students and then applied to study abroad with OPUS through the Center for Global Learning and Engagement on campus.

APU’s Southern California campus is a private Christian liberal arts university northeast of Los Angeles, offering baccalaureate, masters, and doctoral programs. In the fall of 2015, the total number of students enrolled was 9,975; 5,558 were traditional undergraduate students (APU, 2016a). The university offers numerous programs for studying abroad through their Center for Global Learning and Engagement. The culture of this institution is centered on a Christian mission statement, which reads:

Azusa Pacific University is an evangelical Christian community of disciples and scholars who seek to advance the work of God in the world through academic excellence in liberal arts and professional programs of higher education that encourage students to develop a Christian perspective of truth and life. (APU, 2016b)

While participants may represent different religious backgrounds and denominations, understanding the university’s perspective is pertinent to the data collected in this study.

Site Access

To gain site access with Azusa Pacific University, the researcher contacted their Center for Global Learning and Engagement and filled out a research request form. The Center granted the researcher access to their e-mail database, which was used to contact
possible participants. The Center provided a letter of permission to fulfill the IRB requirements of Drexel University.

**Research Methods**

**Description of Each Method Used**

Narrative inquiry relies on a researcher-participant collaboration from which meaning can be drawn from experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). A three-dimensional understanding of narrative inquiry gives shape to the process: (a) temporality—understanding storytelling as fluid in time; “points inquirers toward the past, present, and future of people, place, things, and events under study;” (b) sociality—understanding that “cultural, social, institutional, and familial narratives” inform participant experience; the researcher is part of that experience; and (c) place—understanding that physical place is connected to the narrative experience (Clandinin, 2013, pp. 39-41). Each dimension is reflected on through the methods used in this study.

Data were collected through a process of interviews for each participant, artifact collection, and a researcher journal.

**Interviews.** Narrative inquiry requires the living and telling, retelling, and reliving of stories in the lives of participants (Creswell, 2015). In this study, interviews were used as the main source of data collection between the researcher and participants. This process was enriched through the exploration of the three research questions guiding the study. Abma (1999) asserted:

People tell each other stories to find out how they should act in certain situations, how they relate to others, and what their identity and role is. In telling stories, actors are involved in the act of generating value, judging the worth of their lives and social practices. (p. 171)
The very process of conducting interviews added to the narrative process.

**Instrument description.** Eight participants engaged in multiple interviews, lasting approximately 45 to 90 minutes each. Interviews were conducted face to face, and virtually through Skype as appropriate. The first interview was semi-structured, using the interview protocol as a guide to understanding participant perspectives related to studying abroad in Oxford (see Appendix A). The researcher then transcribed the interviews and analyzed artifacts presented by the participants. She began to “restory” the collected data, drawing out relevant themes across participant interviews that guided prompts for a second interview (Creswell, 2013). The second interview was also semi-structured, with slight variances in prompts per individual participant (see Appendix B). The researcher guided participants through aspects of the follow-up prompts, and participants were able to elaborate on researcher interpretations of initial stories as desired. While third interviews were not needed, the interviewer was available to participants and communicated with them to confirm information when needed.

**Participant selection.** Participants in this study were selected through a convenience sample. The researcher had access to the OPUS alumni e-mails through APU’s Center for Global Learning and Engagement. All potential participants were notified of the following criteria prior to being selected: (a) attended OPUS while studying at APU, (b) graduated from APU during the last five years (2011-2016), (c) willing to participate in two to three interviews within eight weeks time, and (d) willing to share artifacts (blogs, journal entries, & photographs). Participants who agreed to the criteria were selected until numbers were met.
**Identification and invitation.** All potential participants, alumni who attended OPUS and graduated from APU between 2011 and 2016, were e-mailed and invited to participate in this study (see Appendix C). The researcher accepted the first eight participants who responded to the invitation and agreed to the study specifications. She notified them by e-mail and asked to schedule a telephone call with them. General information regarding the year participants studied abroad and graduated were collected and documented. In addition, possible interview times were gathered; the interviewer corresponded with participants until interview dates and times were confirmed.

**Data collection.** Each interview was recorded with two devices to ensure no data were lost—virtual interviews were recorded using Skype’s call recorder. After the recordings were transcribed, data were uploaded onto a hard drive and stored in the researcher’s locked file cabinet. Additional spreadsheets, artifacts, and restorying manuscripts were kept in this cabinet when not being used by participants in interviews. Privacy was maintained through the use of pseudonyms for each participant.

**Researcher journal.** A journal was kept by the researcher during each interview that was conducted and throughout the duration of the study.

**Instrument description.** Observations about the time and place of the interview were recorded, in addition to non-verbal cues or gestures using a template. During the data collection process, the researcher also recorded her personal reflections to be reviewed when transcribing and restorying each interview.

**Participant selection.** Journal notes were recorded for every participant in the study. Participants were notified about the use of the researcher journal and gave signed consent prior to agreeing to participate in the study.
Identification and invitation. Participants were informed about the researcher journal prior to participation in the study. The researcher also reminded participants that she was taking written notes at the beginning of each interview.

Data collection. Notes were taken in the researcher’s journal and then analyzed and incorporated into the restorying process. Because narrative inquiry is a collaborative process, insights gained from the observations and researcher journal reflections contributed to discussions during the subsequent interviews.

Artifact Collection.

Instrument description. Participants were invited to bring artifacts to the one-on-one interviews to add to the stories they told. Artifacts such as written journal entries and photographs were encouraged, in addition to digital artifacts such as personal blog sites that are online. After each interview, with the permission of each participant, the researcher took any physical artifacts and the necessary URLs for any digital artifacts and analyzed and incorporated them into the restorying process.

Participant selection. All participants were notified of the request for artifacts in the initial e-mail asking for potential participants. When contacted by phone, and during the first interview, the researcher asked participants to detail what kind of artifacts they had. Blogs and journal entries dating from the time participants studied abroad provided rich insight into the three dimensions discussed by Clandinin (2013).

Identification and invitation. Artifacts were listed as a criterion for participation in the study. Participants were informed through the initial e-mail sent out prior to the study. Once selected, participants were invited to bring artifacts to the first one-on-one interview, or to provide any links for intangible artifacts.
**Data collection.** After the artifacts were discussed at the first interview, the researcher photographed any physical artifacts to be further analyzed. She printed and catalogued them in a folder to be stored in the researcher’s file cabinet. Digital artifacts, such as personal blog postings, were also printed and catalogued alongside the photographs of the physical artifacts. The researcher recorded notes of analysis in her journal and incorporated them into the restorying process.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

All field text data from the interviews, artifacts, and the researcher journal were collected and organized. After the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed, and the researcher began a process of narrative data analysis. Throughout the data analysis process, she drew from three suggested approaches by Reissman (2008): (a) Thematic—content is the main focus; (b) Structural—language, rhetoric, and “story” elements; and (c) Dialogic—what is produced between the participant and researcher. The researcher used in vivo, descriptive, and emotion coding to highlight words and phrases that emerged through the story content (Saldana, 2013); this approach focused on the thematic elements and emotions that came through the participant stories. In this stage of analysis, the researcher also analyzed the data for the three dimensions of narrative structure—considering the significance of temporality, sociality, and place for each participant (Clandinin, 2013). Next, the researcher used a structural approach to “restorying” the content; scattered pieces of narrative for each individual participant were considered in a chronological sequence to depict key elements of plot (Creswell, 2015). Finally, the researcher applied the dialogic approach by sharing the process of restorying with each participant through a multi-tiered interview process.
**Stages of Data Collection**

Stage one began when the researcher sent out e-mails to all potential participants who were alumni of OPUS through APU. Those who showed interest in participating in the study received a response e-mail and the opportunity to set up a phone conversation from which preliminary data were collected. Participants were selected during this stage, and all necessary consent forms were signed and returned to the researcher.

Stage two took approximately 12 weeks; initial interviews, artifacts, and researcher journal data were collected during this time, followed by secondary interviews with each participant. After initial interviews were transcribed, a process of initial analysis and restorying took place, from which the researcher drew themes that guided prompts for secondary interviews. Following this initial process of analysis, the researcher conducted secondary interviews with each participant; they were recorded and transcribed. All interviews in this study were transcribed using an electronic software service and carefully reviewed by the researcher for accuracy. Recordings were downloaded to a secure hard drive and stored in a locked cabinet for security.

Stage three was a continual process of data analysis. After data were analyzed and restoried between the first and second interviews, the researcher used various methods of data analysis and remained open to participants for collaboration and discussion as necessary.
Table 2

_Data Collection Timeline_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Committee review and approval</td>
<td>June 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRB Approval</td>
<td>July 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews and transcriptions</td>
<td>August 2016-December 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of Data</td>
<td>January 2017-March 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drafting of Chapters 4 and 5</td>
<td>March 2017-May 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissertation Revisions &amp; Celebration</td>
<td>May 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation</td>
<td>June 2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Ethical Considerations_

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was acquired through Drexel University, with a letter granting permission to alumni student information from Azusa Pacific University. Through the IRB process, respect for persons, beneficence, and justice was sought for all involved (Creswell, 2015). Additionally, participants were protected through a statement of informed consent. Once participants agreed to be part of the study, they were sent a consent form by e-mail, which outlined the nature of the study and additional criteria necessary. Before signing, participants were made aware of the potential costs that could emerge through this study. The consent form was reviewed orally with each participant, and was signed and returned to the researcher prior to the beginning of the first interview.
Due to the nature of narrative inquiry, sensitive topics may be touched upon through the series of conversations around perspective change. Participants were respected in the process of this study through a plan that allowed for open and continual communication. The researcher found this to be ethical and honoring of each participant, maintaining both authenticity and consistency in the story being told, while also ensuring that the voice being used was intended by the participant (Creswell, 2015). Through this effort a “relational ethic” with participants was pursued (Johnson & Christensen, 2014, p. 432). While distortion or fake data often arise as an ethical dilemma in narrative study research, this study was conducted with the intent to tell the truth while protecting the participants.
Chapter 4: Findings, Results & Interpretations

**Introduction**

The purpose of this narrative study was to explore the perspective changes that have occurred in the lives of Council of Christian Colleges and University (CCCU) students through their participation in the Oxford Programme for Undergraduate Studies (OPUS). Late adolescence is marked as a period of exploration and identity formation, and the study abroad experience is a valuable experience to observe in the context of the ongoing process of development in emerging adults. As cross-cultural travel commonly precipitates culture shock, understanding experiences of cultural disorientation may provide significant insight into spiritual, academic, and identity-related perspective transformations that emerged for these CCCU students through studying abroad.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the proposed qualitative study:

1. What stories do participants share about their lived experiences during the Oxford Programme for Undergraduate Studies (OPUS) study abroad semester, and their transition home?
2. How do the participants’ stories reflect disorientation from their study abroad experiences and their transitions home?
3. How do these study abroad experiences affect participant perceptions of personal identity, spirituality, and academic pursuits?
Participant Overview

Eight alumni from Azusa Pacific University who attended the OPUS semester between fall 2011 and fall 2015 participated in this narrative study. Six out of eight participants traveled abroad in Oxford during their senior year, and two participants traveled abroad during their junior year. All participants graduated from Azusa Pacific University between May 2013 and May 2016. Of the eight individuals who participated in the OPUS semester, five had studied abroad or away on other APU semester trips; two of the additional three had some experience with international travel, while the remaining participant moved to the mainland from Hawaii as a transfer student at APU during her junior year. Table 3 provides participant information on (a) pseudonym, (b) gender, (c) year of OPUS semester, (d) year in college when abroad, (e) year of graduation from APU, and (f) previous experience away/abroad.
### Table 3

**Demographic Data of Study Participants: Azusa Pacific Alumni who studied with OPUS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>OPUS Semester</th>
<th>Year in College</th>
<th>Year of Graduation from APU</th>
<th>Previous Experience Away/Abroad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chase</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Fall 2014</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>May 2015</td>
<td>Includes: Kenya; APU High Sierra; APU South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daisy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Fall 2011</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>May 2013</td>
<td>Includes: International mission trips- Israel, China; England; transferred from New York Pratt Institute to APU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Spring 2014</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>December 2014</td>
<td>Includes: APU High Sierra; Born in Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazel</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Fall 2014</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>May 2015</td>
<td>Includes: APU High Sierra; APU South Africa; Ireland; grew up in Hawaii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heather</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Fall 2015</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>May 2016</td>
<td>Includes: grew up in Hawaii, transferred to APU as a junior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karlie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Fall 2014</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>December 2015</td>
<td>Includes: mission trip in Spain, visited Sweden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layla</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Fall 2012</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>May 2013</td>
<td>Includes: APU High Sierra; Philippines to visit Dad; Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Fall 2015</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>May 2016</td>
<td>Includes: APU High Sierra; missions work in Mexico</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings

The findings presented in this chapter depict the culmination of this research study, which was conducted through a narrative lens. Four themes and fourteen sub-themes emerged through the data collection process, which included 16 semi-structured interviews—two with each participant—artifact collection, and researcher field notes. The first three emergent themes from this study are: (a) exploration and the daily landscape, (b) intellectual pursuit and the academic landscape, and (c) relational life and the communal landscape—each of which contributes integrative elements into a fourth theme of (d) self realization: inner conflict through external experience. Each theme contains multiple sub-themes, illustrated in Figure 3 and detailed through this chapter. It should be noted that while the emergent themes are organized within specified landscapes, the stories told convey data that may be seen to overlap across the organized bounds, ultimately indicating the holistic nature of a participant’s experience in Oxford. Thus, the selected data are organized to best represent findings within a given landscape.
Exploration and the Daily Landscape

Participants told stories about their experience in Oxford as one in which the exploration of the surrounding landscape played a significant role. Central to the daily landscape was an acknowledgment of the time and space that participants had due to the unstructured nature of Oxford’s academic tutorial system. Participant stories also highlighted experiences of solitude and excursions to prominent sites both in and outside of Oxford, while ultimately conveying self-realizations of confidence and independence attached to those explorations.

Time and routine. Four out of eight participants directly articulated that there was no typical day in Oxford, and multiple participants emphasized the role of time as...
significant to their experiences. Layla communicated memories of going to the Corner Market on Wednesdays: “[B]ecause tutorials were only twice a week we had so much free time to explore the city and really just get to know the people of Oxford and just the culture there.” Karlie similarly expressed that “I think just in general, the way that tutorials are set up, you do have a lot of free time. You choose how to spend your time.”

While Layla and Karlie emphasized the freedom of choice with how to spend time given the program’s structure, Chase expressed that the program itself “had almost zero impact on my life at all” due to the lack of a program, which he contrasted to other APU trips such as Yosemite and South Africa.

There's hardly a program, though, that's kind of of why that's kind of interesting, because the program is “show up, here's where you live, go to these classes once a week.” That's it. That's the program. That's about it. Everything else is up to you. If you want to make friends, it's up to you. If you want to travel, that's up to you. If you want to get involved on campus, that's up to you. (Chase)

Despite varying perceptions on the OPUS program structure, all eight participants directly or indirectly relayed the notion of having the flexibility to craft their own schedules. Though participants hesitated to come up with a “typical day” within the expression of stories revolving around their life in Oxford, the examples below convey participant involvement in broad-based routine activities: meals, study, and extracurricular activities.

I feel like everyday was a little bit different. A typical day would be... I rowed. There usually would be a 5:30 rowing session. I'd come back for a while. I'd probably do some reading for one of my courses. Have lunch. Then I'd go to the Bodleian in the afternoon and pull out the books I needed and study. Then try and write as much as I could. Depending on how close I was to the tutorial, if I was just there until late evening, or I'd meet up with some friends and we'd go to a pub, or go explore a different area. (Karlie)
My college is actually right next to Turl Street Kitchen so after me and my friends would get coffee I would just go to the library. I usually liked to hang at the Bod, but I remember I didn't like the old Bod. I liked going underneath and walking through. It was just more modern, so they had like couches there and I had this one couch I'd always go to. I went to a really small college, so I went to Jesus College. The library there was really small, so I'd always have to go to the Bod to get books for my tutorials, which was all right because the Bod was usually where more students were anyways and it was longer. You don't feel as bad because there's fluorescent lighting at the bottom so can't really tell what time it is when you're there for 12 hours. That's what I would do in the mornings. I would wake up really late though. I'd wake up really late, so I'd have breakfast. This would be like a lunch and then an afternoon coffee and then go study.

(Layla)

I'd probably start at the morning, with basketball practice . . . Then, typically I would go back to my flat, probably hang out for a bit, do homework. I would meet with my tutors, normally in midday or afternoon . . . Afterwards, I, depending on what tutor I saw, there was a gym with a pool, and everything that I was a part of, so I might have gone there. I had a bike, so I biked everywhere. I would have biked back home. Had some dinner. Then, I would usually go over to my friend Jenai's house, who was in my program, and we spent a lot of time together. I would go there for the evening and we would figure out something fun to do in the downtown core area. That's probably my most typical day. (Emma)

Solitude. Within the variations of participants’ elected daily and weekly schedules, the theme of solitude also emerged. Participants consistently discussed the significance of the time they spent alone. For some, solitude was spent embracing the enjoyment of Oxford’s natural sites and surroundings; for others, it was a space for stress relief; and for still others, alone time was a place for spiritual exploration.

Layla and Chase conveyed that the highlights of their time in Oxford were moments spent alone walking and being present in their surroundings:

I always remember this one day when I was just walking by myself, because there's a lot of alone time at Oxford I think too. You don't really have your family there, and time difference, you don't really have any friends other than your OPUS friends but sometimes they're not around. I would always take the time when I'm walking on the cobble roads of such an old city. I'm so blessed to be here kind of. I remember that being one of the highlights, at least for me, just remembering back on something that's not this was a really fun thing I did, or this
is something that was just so awesome. Just being there in the moment, being aware that not a lot of people get to experience this. (Layla)

Close to where I lived there was a meadow and there’s a whole river that runs along it. I would go on these walks on my own. I’d walk along the river at the sunset. Those are always highlights. I spent most of my time pretty introverted in Oxford. (Chase)

In addition to experiencing solitude as enjoyment in the natural sights in Oxford, participants expressed having times of solitude outdoors as a time to relieve stress.

Heather conveyed:

[I definitely] didn't walk away from those tutorials always feeling super smart, but because that was in Oxford, the tutor, I'm not sure if we met at her office or her home—it was off Botley near the river, so the river bike path that goes from Botley to Abbington, that was the fastest way home. I would leave this tutorial on the Lord of the Rings possibly completely confused, sometimes happy with how the tutorial had gone, on one of the most beautiful walks in the area for like 45 minutes. So it was a very keeping things in balance of the interaction between, emotionally as well, the interaction between, "These are all the things that I'm doing and this is the place that I'm experiencing." It was a sort of really neat intersection there.

Similarly, Karlie articulated that one method of coping with the stress from the academic demands of the program:

[W]as a lot of bike riding and quiet time when I would be walking. I think that was helpful, just peaceful. Like I was saying, the breaks in between were forced on you because you didn't have a choice where sometimes when you're taking public transportation it's a lot more that busy commute feel, so because I had the bike or because I was walking, I feel like that helped with just the balance.

Sophie, along with Karlie, expressed choosing solitude as maintenance for her spiritual life:

I think something I learned spiritually about myself was that I really do need a daily centering on God, preferably in the morning before I do the rest of my day. I think that really sets a great precedent for the rest of the day, just centering on what's important.
Emma conveyed that spiritual connectedness came as a result of time spent by herself:

There was this sweet, and I didn’t discover it soon enough, there was a sweet train that ran right along [the Thames River] for a bit. A kilometer or two at least, then it came out into another part of the city. That little stretch there was so cool. Near the end of the semester, it wasn’t raining as much, so I could run a lot more. Those were always really cool experiences, just being somewhere so different and so historical. I don’t know just so culturally rich compared to the suburbs I run through in Toronto and stuff, you know? Those were times when I really felt close to God, or at least in communication with him.

**Excursions and travel.** Another factor of participants having agency in the daily landscape of their Oxford experience was seen through the local adventures and extended travels they took within the semester. Subsequently, within the realm of these travel opportunities, participants delivered anecdotes that relayed a sense connectedness to their surroundings, themselves, and something greater than themselves.

Multiple participants told stories about taking excursions to areas surrounding Oxford. Karlie, Sophie, and Heather each described days when they went exploring for a day with friends:

We had seen these signs for a little town fair. We thought it was that day. We were just exploring, kind of going out more into the country. The fair was supposed to be happening the next day. We were having to talk to people in the area to figure that out. We actually ended up meeting a lot of people that way, and little families. It was very cute. Then we wandered into this field and there was blackberries everywhere. We ended up picking blackberries for a couple of hours. It was beautiful in the sun. We got to have some good conversation. Then just kind of go off on our own, keep picking. Then we got back that night. We made a pie. The next day we went back. We had made friends with all the families. They welcomed us back into this village, little fair thing. It was so fun to be like, "We're part of this fair." Because they recognized us now. Yeah. It was totally by accident that we stumbled on to it in the first place, but then having them welcome us back was really fun. (Karlie)

On the first weekend, I think, me and a couple other people decided to look for C.S. Lewis' gravestone, and one of them had looked up where it was in
Headington, but we didn't know really our way around Oxford at all yet, so we sort of just set out and walked. It was a long time. We just walked there from our flats on Abingdon Road, but we found the church, and the gravestone, and so we sort of had a solemn sort of moment looking at it. Then we went into the church and just sat down and sort of took it in. What I hadn't realized is I had sat right next to the seat where there was a plaque that said 'this is where C.S. Lewis sat and worshiped, which I didn't notice until when we were leaving. It was just kind of, I don't know if magical is too funny of a word to use there, but I didn't know there was a plaque there, I just happened to sit there and there it was. (Sophie)

When I went to Stonehenge, it kind of felt like being connected to this deep, rich history. It felt like, for lack of a better way of putting it, of kind of like clicking into like, "Oh, I'm part of a much bigger story that has been going on for a very long time." That's true of everyone, everywhere, but that place really drove home the idea that I am part of a very big story, and I'm important to it . . . I'm not just a part of a story, but to some extent, I am the plot at the moment. That I'm my own sort of plotline . . . Rather than feeling less significant, it gave a lot more significance to my life journey, but also just to being there. It felt like, "I didn't just stumble into someone else's bigger story. Oh, I'm supposed to be here right now doing this." (Heather)

Other participants, including Daisy and Chase, also noted traveling to other countries, such as during a travel break between a pre-term seminar course and the start of tutorials. Daisy recounted hiking a mountain in Ireland with a friend:

I had still been really struggling [with depression] the first couple weeks we were there. Just my emotional time to get my mood up and try not to be discouraged, and tired. Make myself fun and do things. We decided to go on this hike and we thought it was a really little hike, but it was not . . . We got half-way through the hike and we were just starving, and we were like, "Oh my goodness." . . . We got up to this certain point and it was the highest point of the mountain. We looked down and we saw the whole valley. There was two lakes, it was kind of misty. I just remember feeling a huge weight lifted off of me, like I was all of a sudden there was peace. I felt a lot of peace and it felt . . . It's sort of abstract, but it felt like a really spiritual moment for me, like it was just a moment of healing, and happiness.

Chase reflected on his travels right before, during, and after the academic term, in addition to previous travels:

[Traveling] will definitely always make the world feel smaller because I can meet all these different people from all these different parts of the world, and, like I
say, we can get along in a couple of hours. It broke down tons of barriers. It's always different. The other times I've been abroad, they've mainly been mission work type things. That's still your part of a group. I've even gone on my own, and even that's different because you're an American in a Third World country. You're in slums and there's just this huge division. Even though you can get close, socially it was different to meet these people traveling around and hitchhike around together. It was just different. I think it made the world feel smaller because I could relate to all these different people and make friends with them. It doesn't make Portugal or Iran or Turkey feel that far away or that different anymore. Now, if I think about these places, I personally know someone there. I know what they're like. I know how much we have in common.

In addition to participants feeling a sense of connectedness to their surroundings, Karlie, Sophie, Daisy, and Hazel conveyed feelings of independence and confidence when reflecting on their travel experiences. Karlie compared her Oxford experience to former experiences and explained that “[t]his time it was much more like we had to plan everything, and there was no safety net.”

I think I'm more confident in my ability to navigate around places because a lot of . . . In the beginning it was a lot of just me and my friends trying to find out where places are. When I went to Paris, I just went with one other person and we were able to figure out the whole metro system and get to where we needed to go and it all worked out fine. I think that's some that, without my parents there, initially kind of freaked me out, the idea of like, "Man, there's no one to help me out, really, at least people that I know." Because you're kind of forced into that independent environment, I really feel more confident in my traveling ability, flying by myself, some of those more basic stuff like that I think really will make a difference later down the line when I'm . . . Whatever other traveling I do.

(Sophie)

[I]t taught me . . . you can travel by yourself and you don't need to depend on people. It's not as scary as you thought it was. Three of us were going to Italy and we drove to London, stayed over night or caught the bus, and then were on the train to the airport. I realized I had forgot my passport back at Oxford like an idiot. They got on the plane and I went back to Oxford, got my passport, went back to the airport, caught the next flight out, and then just found them in Rome somewhere . . . I really have like confidence in my ability to . . . use the resources that are given to me or that are available . . . which has been helpful in the career I have now with a non-profit, which is very much networking with different resources for the community and what people need. (Hazel)
In this section, participants articulated stories about their experiences through exploration of the daily landscape. The three sub-findings that emerged were time and routine, solitude, and excursions and travel. The finding of intellectual pursuit and the academic landscape is discussed next.

**Intellectual Pursuit and the Academic Landscape**

Participants told stories in which a pursuit for knowledge occurred through an intellectual landscape marked by academic rigor evidenced in critical thinking and argumentation, the reframing of beliefs through deeply vested interactions with literature and theory, embracing what it means to have a “respected mind,” and movement towards academic autonomy.

**Rigor in critical thinking and argumentation.** All participants discussed the intense intellectual rigor they experienced through the Oxford Semester. Many told stories about becoming aware of improvements they could make in their writing and being challenged to critically think while in dialogue with their tutors about the academic arguments they were making. Additionally, others described being challenged to support their arguments and beliefs beyond tutorial sessions in the casual dialogue they had with fellow scholars and friends.

Emma reflected on her initial feelings of being overwhelmed with the academic rigor of the tutorial system:

At first I felt very overwhelmed, just because it was a very new and foreign and a different way of doing things. I couldn't really, I normally give it about 80 percent, and I do fine. I realized I couldn't do that. Realizing that was a little bit overwhelming, but once I got in the groove of it, and came to love the style and how it was done, I felt super fulfilled and enriched and challenged. It was a very positive experience by halfway through, or a few weeks in.
Sophie described her engagement with the literary content she was studying in Oxford as “the most intense English work [she] had ever done.” She continued:

It was the deepest I had ever gone into a specific text. Each week I felt like my tutors really pushed me to do more in-depth, closer reading which was great because, not that many people didn't do that, but I think just the nature of the classes that I had taken, because they were more survey style, allowed for sort of more of a broad analysis than really intense focusing on this one specific passage or the use of one particular symbol. That was mostly what my work in Oxford was, was looking at specific images and things and how their re-occurrence shaped the story and things like that. Because it was so intense, I feel like it gave me a deeper appreciation for the study of literature in general.

Layla and Chase both described being challenged by their tutors to strengthen their writing:

To actually make a statement rather than saying, "well it would probably be this," which in law school they make you do that anyways but I think when I went to Oxford I didn't really have as strong of a voice when it came to my writing or even arguments and stuff. At Oxford, I really think that when the tutors you give them your writing and then they break it all down. "Do you really mean this when you say that, or what do you mean by that?" The tutors always told me "You have a better understanding and grasp of the materials than what you have in writing." I'm like, "That's true.” It's probably because I didn't spend enough time on it writing it fully. (Layla)

I think it showed me I'm a really bad writer. It just made me realize how much more I could do academically. It didn't teach me very . . . Well, that's not true. Yeah, it didn't teach me very much, but I learned a lot. It's just the way that they do their tutorial system. Your tutors aren't really teachers to you. They just tell you what to do. You show up, and then they tell you how you're wrong. Then, you've got to prove yourself a little bit. That's kind of the style. It just really showed me that there's a lot of growth I could have as a scholar, specifically in writing and just the way I think. I still think about it today when I approach writing. I think about how my tutor would be so unimpressed with what I just wrote. I'm like, "How can I make it better?" Because that's how it was. (Chase)

Hazel extended the notion of being challenged to support her arguments in relation to her beliefs surrounding faith:

I think Oxford definitely challenges what you believe in a good way. That really makes you step back and look at what you believe because you have to be able to
articulate it. It was a very relevant discussion people have in Oxford there is a large population of atheists or non-Christians or people who don’t really understand why someone would have that sort of faith. Which kind of makes you articulate what you believe in and why you believe in it. So in that way, I think I agree that I’m still growing in that area. Yeah, it definitely gives you confidence and also humbles you. Humble confidence, if you will. (Hazel)

**Reframing beliefs through literature.** As an extension to their intellectual engagement with critical thinking and argumentation, participants also told stories about connecting with literature, theory, and philosophy in such a way that the reframing of beliefs began to occur. Layla, for example, described an altered understanding of *truth* through her study of the law. She highlighted that her tutors “convoluted [her] idea [that] there's one truth, especially with law.” She continued:

If you're a law abiding citizen then you're technically good, but then who creates the laws? Just people. You can go either way on most issues and that's something that I had to confront. There's not going to be one right answer but there are going to be answers that are stronger because you have research, more basis to say that.

Heather and Daisy made connections to their spiritual lives through pieces of literature they were studying. Heather described confronting an internal question of “What kind of spiritual life do I insist on having?” while reading for an assignment:

I realized that I had been sort of getting caught up in academic spirituality, where I was thinking a lot about God, but not wanting to have a conversation. Which I guess is like the spiritual equivalent of Facebook stalking. So there was at one point, I kind of realized like, "I've not been letting God talk," which means I've not been letting God be God . . . It was a big shift for me, because that wasn't something that I had . . . It was something I'd been vaguely aware of, but hadn't been willing to address . . . It was actually when I was working on homework, because I was reading *The Screwtape Letters* [C.S. Lewis], so for me, it was one of those Oxford moments where everything in life is sort of integrated together. Because I was reading it for school, I wasn't reading it for fun. I was trying to take notes and see what's behind the curtain in this book, and what's comic about doing all this stuff, that deep down, it had this really important spiritual impact as well.
Relatedly, while Heather was seen reframing her beliefs about God through the literature she was studying, Daisy interpreted the literature she was reading through the lens of her beliefs. She recounted a tutorial session in which she discussed highlighting a biblical metaphor in Alice and Wonderland.

Everyone always talks about the Queen of Hearts. They always don't really acknowledge the King of Hearts because he's the quieter voice, but he's there. . . She's covering up the roses with red and I was talking about the symbolism, how it looks like the queen is condemning everyone with sin and she's painting the roses red. Then she's just like she's going to kill everyone. She's going to chop off everyone's head. Then she is the loudest, but then the king is above her and he ends up reading this letter, which commands that everyone be pardoned. It was like when I read it, I had this awesome image of Jesus pardoning everyone and being the king that steps in, in just a quiet way, just being like, "You can all go. You're okay."

Similarly, Chase and Hazel expressed being challenged in their theological beliefs and responding to those challenges through the lens of philosophy they were studying. Chase was heavily immersed in the texts of Kierkegaard throughout the semester and described how Kierkegaard’s discussion of humans as spiritual beings resonated with the questions about faith he was asking.

I think it was a time period where I was struggling mentally with some of these questions of like, the more you learn about history, the more you learn about literature, the more you learn about philosophy, the more you learn about theology, the more you learn about all these sorts of things, they're just all these hurdles and challenges to go through when you're trying to reconcile a certain belief system that you have with these facts and realities that you learn about things. If you never explore these things, you can live in . . . Call it ignorance, call it whatever, where you're just happy with your beliefs and your faith as they are, but once you study these other disciplines, you're forced to challenge those ideas, and every step of it is like a hurdle, and it's a challenge that you have to rework . . . Change your perspective a little bit.

In Kierkegaard, I saw a way of reconciling the two that didn't just . . . It didn't just reconcile them, but it made so much sense and it related to me so much . . . With Kierkegaard, for whatever reason, the way he described, kind of like what I was talking about, self consciousness and the role that has, the role that anxiety has, the role between faith and reason, and just the way all those things
work together, the way he wrote them spoke the most to me and I resonated with the most, that's kind of how I see it as well.

I guess one of the ways it impacted me that has never changed is it makes me actively see all people the way he did, which I'd never thought about that way, maybe I was someone who never took that step where it was like I have my beliefs, they have their beliefs. I disagree with their beliefs based on mine, but there's really no grounds for any real . . . I can't disprove your faith, you don't disprove my faith, therefore we're just people with faiths.

Hazel described seeing Nicomachean ethics as a basis for reframing her questions about faith and substantiating her beliefs in light of others’ lack of religious practices and beliefs.

I came to a point where I was just like I don't know if I really need this whole religion thing. Then the time I took off religion I realized that it's a place where I found happiness. It was so interesting, because at the time I was studying Nicomachean ethics for Aristotle. Happiness is the big top dog of his moral ethics and virtue ethics. That's where we're trying to get to is this ultimate happiness . . . Yes. I was just like wait this is where I find happiness and maybe it doesn't matter that these people don't need it. When I'm engaged with my faith that's where I find the most fulfillment and I am most happy. That's why I do it, and then from there I'm just like in that there must be some truth if I feel like such contentment in it. Right now I'm in that process.

A respected mind. One consistent aspect that emerged across participant stories within the intellectual pursuit was an acknowledgment of learning what it meant to have “a respected mind” (Heather). Through the scholar-tutor interactions that took place, participants described experiencing feelings of validation and respect.

Karlie relayed that though “[she] was expecting to come into kind of a hostile environment academically. [She] was pretty worried about that . . . [she] felt like it was kind of the opposite, where it was pretty nurturing.” Heather, Sophie, and Daisy further elaborated upon the idea of being intellectually nurtured and respected through their tutorial experiences. Heather described her experience as “a positive disorientation:”

It took me a little bit of time to realize that my tutors were treating me as equals with less expertise. Which is sort of what you get in a master's program, so it was
great preparation for that. But just sort of walk into a tutorial and be able to read your paper and have someone kind of talk about it, and then to engage and be like . . . Essentially saying, in kinder terms, "I think you're wrong" to someone with a Ph.D. Then just talk it through and then to be like, "I think you're correct. Yeah, I think that you've made an excellent point" or something like that. It's like, you don't get to do that very often in the States. That was really interesting, to kind of get the first taste of what it's like to have a respected mind. Then to be able to use the information later that I have a respected mind by these people, I can take things . . . I can take that knowledge, and know that if someone is not willing to hear my ideas out, it's either because I don't have the authority to speak to them, or because they're not willing to listen, and neither of those things are reflections on whether or not I'm having a good thought.

Sophie also expressed feeling validated in her pursuit of scholarship as well:

I also really felt like I was validated as a scholar in Oxford and that was huge . . . They took my arguments seriously and treated them, I would think, how they would treat any other scholarly work they were looking at. I think there was a part of me that felt, initially, that they were going to treat me . . . I don't know. I'm just a college student from America. I'm not even . . . They could have treated me not at the level that they were at because I wasn't at the level they were. I feel like they really made me feel like I am, treated me like a scholar and that the work I was doing was worthwhile. I think having that happen in a place as prestigious as Oxford is what really made me feel like, yeah, I can do this if I really wanted to, if I really kept doing the grad school and stuff. I really feel like I can do academics for the rest of my life because I felt if those people are taking me seriously then I should be taken seriously in terms of how I analyze literature and things.

That made me want to do that for other people, in terms of with the writing center and also now with the tutoring that I do. I think making sure that people feel that students don't feel inferior in any way to the teacher. Inevitably some of that is there because there's a difference in education level but I think the way my tutors treated me is the way that I would want to treat, if I have students or in whatever capacity that looks like.

Daisy reflected on a specific conversation with her tutor, in response to the Alice in Wonderland piece she had written, where she felt she had impacted him:

There is this one conversation we had that always sticks with me because I felt like what I had written really hit him. He looked super affected. He was like, "I've never thought about it that way before" . . . When I said it, he was like, "Nobody's ever said that to me before." He got really excited. Then we started on this tangent. Not tangent, this strain of looking at spiritual experiences in childhood in the rest of the literature that we read. It was really, really cool. Every essay we wrote went into more and more. He was really enthusiastic about
it, which was exciting to me because I thought it was really. To me, those things always stand out. That symbolism stands out when I see them in literature.

**Academic autonomy.** The final sub-theme that emerged through participants’ intellectual pursuits was the development of academic autonomy. This autonomy was seen as a bi-product of problem solving and accepting failures, feelings of growth and confidence, and the development of plans for the future told through individual participant stories.

Both Hazel and Sophie described experiences when they had to confront challenges and feelings of failure within their academic experiences and respond with the ability to problem solve.

It's like if you've ever done performances, or singing, or plays, or talent shows, or anything like that when you know you did bad, or you didn't do well, and you leave and you just . . . or even sports if you didn't play well. You leave and you're like, "That sucked." It was like that feeling which it's not lasting, but it's like you know and you have friends there who are like, "Oh no you were fine." You're like, "No I wasn't." Just that feeling when you left the tutorial, but then there was next week that you could improve . . . I know there was one time when my computer crashed the night before, and I had to redo the whole paper that night. I didn't say anything when I went to the tutorial, because I was like whatever it is what it is. I was like this is going to be terrible and he's going to hate it. It wasn't good. I guess you do feel like shoot I just want you to think I'm good at things.

(My primary tutorial was Women in Shakespeare, and I worked really hard on that essay and I felt really good about it, but because of that, I didn't spend as much time on my secondary tutorial one. What I had planned to do was to wake up earlier in the morning and finish it, and then go to my tutorial, but I ended up oversleeping. Which had really bad consequences because not only did I not finish the essay, I also was late to the tutorial.

I had a great Shakespeare tutorial, but then I had a terrible Lewis and Tolkien one and I kept apologizing profusely and saying that I promise it won't be like this again. I just made a mistake, and my tutor, although she was very stern, took my word and said, okay, well just don't do that again, and I'm grading you on the whole tutorial . . . Not how you start out, but how you end, at the end of the term. That was a really big comfort for me, and I definitely did not have any mishaps like that after that point. I think what was really hard for me was getting
over the fact that I had a bad mark on my record. I think that was more of an ego thing than anything else, because even though I knew that by the end of the term that I could make up for it, I still knew that I would have that unfinished essay. It made me realize that there's still part of me that kind of puts academics as a way to value myself, or I found like value in myself. I realized that's really not what how I want to feel, how I should feel. That really my value comes from God. (Sophie)

An additional facet of academic autonomy seen through the intellectual pursuit was an awareness of emerging confidence described by participants. Heather described a newfound confidence attached to her learning in response to the exhaustive workload she had when she returned to APU.

School [APU] felt very easy at first. I didn't feel like any of my classes were hard. Even by the end, when I was crazy busy with all the papers and stuff, it felt like, "Oh, this is manageable." Which is not what you should be saying when you had the particular schedule I had the semester I graduated . . . Or that I would see something that was just like this big impossible goal, and I'd be like, "Well, I can probably do that." Oxford felt like one of those things where it's like, "If you can do Oxford, you can do anything." It's sort of the academic equivalent of, "If you can make it in New York, you can make it anywhere." It felt like the academic version of that. If you can make it at Oxford, you can make it anywhere. So it was just really cool. (Heather)

Karlie and Hazel each described a confidence and sense of autonomy attached to their learning, which extended beyond themselves towards the development of others.

I think it showed me that I could do a lot more than I thought I could previously. It also gave me a confidence of "yeah, I can do this even though it's a lot." I felt like I had been pushed and made it out and did well with it. That was exciting. I think also it made me really excited, because I felt like I was in charge of how I was learning. I got to pick the books or the path that I felt was interesting. Even if they gave me suggestions, they're like then figure out where this leads and you take it from there. I really liked having that self-directed idea. (Karlie)

Karlie further illustrated the extent of this learning anecdotally through her pursuit of an unavailable text.

There was one book that I looked up that I'm not going to . . . I think it was on T.S. Elliot maybe, that I looked up, and the library didn't have it. I felt like I
needed it. I wrote them and kind of made a petition for it, and so they were able to get it and everything. It wouldn't be in time for me, but for the next student who used it. It was kind of cool to... Even if Bodleian didn't have it, but researching the idea of okay, what might be helpful for figuring out the topic.

Furthermore, Hazel described developing academic confidence in crafting philosophical arguments and elaborated that this craft is a tool meant to simplify concepts for everyone to understand.

Academically, [I was] more confident in my own ideas and my ability to support my own ideas. Knowing I can do the research, a lot of research, in a short amount of time if I have to and giving you that drive, like wanting to learn as much as possible, because I want to be able to have well-formed arguments. It gave me a passion to learn as much as I possibly can about everything and anything. Just dreaming big... I learned that the more academic you sound isn't necessarily the best thing... philosophy while it's great to have this lofty language and talk with prestige and use big words and use philosophers from every era, really modern, ancient, and bring all they're work together and name drop all the time, but philosophy is meant for everyone to understand.

This confidence and autonomy for learning, as seen through the participant stories, extended beyond their reflections of the Oxford semester and into their future academic and career pursuits. Emma, Layla, Heather, and Karlie each reflected on how the academic experience in Oxford prepared them for, or lead them towards, graduate school.

It was the best academic experience of my life. For sure. Writing, two essays, I had two classes, yeah, I had two tutors and then whatever APU, some kind APU class. Those two, oh, my gosh, one essay a week for each of them. Unreal. Meet with them once a week. Go over my essay, get assigned a new essay, spend an entire week actually reading books in libraries and stuff, not just Google. Insane. Yeah. It grew me, nothing like anything else academically. I mean, it definitely helped. I knew I wanted to get my masters, but it definitely helped prepare me for it. (Emma)

Academically, it definitely prepared me for law school. I had to write 2,000-word essays every week and on topics that were pretty difficult. I don't think that my topics were easy. Even I thought Roman and Greek Mythology would be easy
but then it was read the Iliad in a week. I was like, okay so I did it and it was like 700 pages.

I didn't know how to structure my essays as well as I could have, which now being in law school I write—I actually have a paper due next week—it's a research paper. It's similar how you have to really figure out what you want to say and what arguments you want to make, be logical, and also have the research to back you up. . . . I think that's something that I learned at Oxford. I was a good writer but I was a very fluffy writer. When I went to Oxford they basically would cut my essays down to half by just make it more concise and a little bit more persuasive. I think that that helped me with law school and it will always be something, having a voice and having a strong sense of conviction over the things that you express whether that's in writing or through an oral argument. (Layla)

Heather described how the academic rigor and course advising inadvertently lead her to enter the Master’s program in English at APU.

It was so much work. Because most papers, I would say, were between 10-20 pages per week. The expectation on what that paper would look like were very high. There was no rough draft process. There was usually like people in the house exchanging papers to help with proofreading, but there wasn't like a "You turn in a rough draft, and then a second draft in the future." . . . The biggest thing I did academically was while I was there, I found out APU wasn't offering Shakespeare in the spring. I'd done all my academic advising. So I sent a strongly worded e-mail back to my advisor that basically said, "I met with the chair. I'm meeting with you. I met with all the advisors we're supposed to meet with. They all said I wouldn't have to worry about Shakespeare. It'd be offered in the spring, and I don't have to take it here. . . . So what it led to is, he sent me back a . . . The chairs agreed that . . . "Do an independent study in Shakespeare with you, but you could also track into the master's program to get your literary criticism credit. We have a class that we would be willing to have count for your undergrad and graduate if you're interested in the master's program. (Heather)

Furthermore, Karlie and Hazel expressed having experiences in Oxford that contributed to specific career experiences:

People recognize the name Oxford, and so on a resume, that's actually something that's helped in the past, and one of the reasons why I was able to intern with the California Research Bureau. Just having that name recognition, because a lot of people don't know what APU is, but a lot of people do know what Oxford is. I find it interesting. It's like, "Yeah, it was just a study abroad," but they still are like, "Oh interesting. Tell me more about it. Just the name recognition. . . . It made me more interested in looking into doing a higher degree. Before that, I hadn't really thought of doing either master's or a PhD. Being taught by tutors
who were either in a PhD program or were just finishing, it was cool to hear about their experiences and be like, "Oh, I really respect you. I think that's fascinating, what you're learning." Yeah, I think it changed my perspective of what I might want to do in the future.

Conversely, while Chase described the impact of his academic experience at Oxford as positive on the whole, he also conveyed that it was a “reality check,” causing him to rethink his future career path away from academia.

[Academic life] was probably one of the more redeeming aspects of it. One tutorial in particular I took, it was on the philosophy of Kierkegaard, I absolutely loved that one. It taught me a lot. My other one, less taught me topically, and more just taught me that I'm not a very good writer, and it taught me how hard . . . Because at that time I was contemplating, like should I be doing academics career wise and stuff, and it really taught me that it's really tough in that you got to be really good. It's not that it made me think I couldn't do it, but it was a reality check.

It's a big reality check when you go to Azusa Pacific and you're used to four years of their grading, their teaching, their everything, and then you come to Oxford and you have a PhD student, like a doctoral student in Oxford who's reviewing your papers. They just tear you apart and all of a sudden you're thinking, "I would have gotten an A on this at home, what's happening?" So it really . . . kind of a reality check. Pushed me a lot. But yes, I think that my primary tutorial taught me a lot about how much growth and improvement I'd have to have if I wanted to do academics.

Having gained confidence and experiences that moved participants towards academic autonomy, multiple individuals expressed having to adjust to a less independent learning experience back at APU; Sophie and Karlie discussed these challenges:

School is a lot different. I think I hadn't realized . . . I think most things that most of me and my friends said was that everything seems so big in comparison to Oxford, when you're going from a one-on-one session with your tutor to a class of . . . Even the smaller end of the classes. Fifteen still felt really big in comparison. I guess that made me, again, appreciate the really individualized experience that I had, academically, at Oxford. I love working with professors and talking to them and having a relationship with them so Oxford is that times a thousand, or whatever, because it was just you and the tutor. I really liked that system and I think, coming back, it was a little bit harder to adjust to normal APU. (Sophie)
I noticed when I came back to the States, that was one of the first things that was really frustrating is because you'd be sitting in a class, and a professor would be talking at you. It's like well I could read this on my own. I could figure it out. That was actually frustrating to come back and realize I really enjoyed that kind of self directed study, even though at the time, it seemed much harder . . . I felt like the professors could push us a lot harder. My view of school was like, "Hey, we're paying a lot to be pushed. I wish you would push us harder." I think it was partially because I knew that I could be pushed more. (Karlie)

This section discussed the intellectual pursuits in which participants engaged within Oxford’s academic landscape: experiences of academic rigor and critical thinking, the reframing of beliefs, and realizations of having a respected mind drove students towards gains of confidence and autonomy in terms of pursuing future careers and academics. The next section dissect participant experiences related to relationships and community life.

Relational Life and the Communal Landscape

Participants told stories beyond the intellectual landscape, highlighting aspects of their relational lives and the communal landscapes central to their lives during the Oxford semester. These stories included reflections on their community and relational experiences before leaving for Oxford, during their time in Oxford, and upon their return from Oxford.

Relationships back home. While all participants discussed building relationships and participating in community with new people abroad during the Oxford semester, multiple participants reflected on the relationships they left at home. In addition, some discussed staying connected while being away.

Leaving community. Daisy, Layla, Chase, and Heather reflected on their previous community situations at APU and with family before leaving for Oxford. Daisy
and Layla reflected on the challenges in their community life at APU, prior to leaving for Oxford:

When I came home from New York, I was really depressed. I didn't really want to come home, but I had been just really suffering and really struggling with depression, and just not being able to eat, and sleeping all day. When I came home, APU was really hard... the roommates I had were very happy, very bubbly people who liked to talk a lot. It was really difficult to be depressed in that environment because they didn't really understand and they weren't super compassionate. They weren't judgmental about how long I would sleep or my lack of attention to things. (Daisy)

She further reflected:

I think one of the things that lead to my depression before I left was that I just had a series of bad relationships, where people were... They were kind of emotionally abusive and so I struggled a lot with that. (Daisy)

I feel like at APU you kind of get your friend group and you latch on to them. I never had a friend group, per say. I had really good friends and I'm more of a one on one person anyways so to have to conform to so many... I felt like there were so many rules at APU. I'm just like, "Oh, you have to say hi to people you can't just walk past them because then you're rude." Weird things. I don't know, I still remember my sister was just like... Always having to be bubbly. I feel like everyone was always like, "Oh, you have to be so happy all the time." Maybe that's why I liked Oxford because people were very not always so happy they were just kind of like they are. (Layla)

Chase described leaving many positive on-campus opportunities within the APU community in exchange for going abroad:

I almost didn't go on this semester. It was a toss up. I was an RA my junior year. I reapplied. I was going to be an RA. They also wanted me to work in the study abroad office as a global engagement mentor. I had these on-campus things that would have been good, internships. I was about to graduate. On the one hand, there was that option, and on the other hand, I could forget all of it and spend a semester traveling Europe. (Chase)

In addition to reflecting on community situations at APU, others reflected on leaving their relationships with family; Heather reflected on her family life back at home in contrast to the community she built in Oxford.
It was earth-shatteringly painful, the last month of being [in Oxford], to realize that I had to be around my dad's family again. Because he, when I was a child, he was someone psychologically and verbally and emotionally abusive for about 10 years. That has kind of resolved itself. But this kind of fear base, we don't leave our hometown. My dad's whole family lives in Glendora... There are things that I never would have known about myself had I stayed around my family. People who lived with me who hadn't known me for years, for like 5 minutes, were like, "Oh, this is a thing that you do." And I'm like, "G--damn it. Since when? When have I done that?" And they're like, "You do that 100% of the time."

**Staying connected.** In addition to reflecting on community life at APU and family relationships before going abroad, multiple participants highlighted their continued communication with friends and family at home while away.

As a method of response and comfort to the challenge of being in a new place, Layla would “Skyp[e] home.” She expressed, “I have a sister and I’m very close to her. I talk to her everyday. I had an iPad and I would message her all the time and Skype her. Only when I had Wifi.”

Similarly, Karlie relayed, “I Skyped probably every week with my parents at least. Getting to check in with them was really nice. That helped a lot. It was a good recap for me to be like, "I'm doing well." Karlie also expressed:

My grandmother died last semester, so being away was hard. My mom and I had some really good talks about her faith and just how, like especially how my mom was kind of having to rely on God through that. Me getting to talk to her through that, especially being like distance and out of the situation, but still being a part of that, I think was really good. It made me look into the Bible more and just take time to pray and do that.

Chase also recounted that on a typical day, he “would probably Skype” the person he was dating or “a family member.” He further described the challenges of being away from these relationships while abroad.
I left early August and I had to be at Oxford in early September. Those first few weeks of traveling . . . I was having lots of great experiences, but wishing, "I wish my girlfriend was here. I wish my best friend was here. I wish so-and-so was here." That was kind of difficult. I guess I got over it, but understanding that there was a situation and then hoping, "I'll be home soon, and then we'll do this again some time," my friends and I or whoever . . . I don't know if anything about where I traveled to had anything to do with it, but just being apart for that long. Yeah, I think so. I think it made me a bit close with my parents. My girlfriend who I was dating, we broke up by the end of the semester, so I guess that affected that relationship.

**Relationships and community in Oxford.** Participants communicated building relationships and experiencing community through a variety of avenues while in Oxford, outside of the connections maintained with friends and family at home. These avenues included relationships with housemates—both from APU and other schools with students enrolled in OPUS, as well as relationships forged through extracurricular engagement.

*Housemates.* Housemates, neighbors, and living situations in general were expressed as significant to participant communal landscapes in Oxford. Sophie and Heather discussed coming together almost nightly for dinner in their respective households:

I really loved the people that I lived with in my flat. We got along really well, and although most of our days were spent separately doing our own studying and things, I felt like we always kind of ended up back at the house around the same dinner time and would make meals around the same time. I think then we were able to share in each other's days, whether that be good things or sufferings, but I think all of their willingness to share in each other's struggles and things made it a really healthy environment to live in, in contrast to all of the solo stuff that you did, like your own tutorials, and your own essays and things. I had a really good living experience which made a big difference I think. (Sophie)

We ate dinner together basically every night, at least six nights a week. So there was a lot of sitting around at the dinner table telling stories about our day or whatever, adding quotes to the wall, which was really interesting for me because my family didn't actually eat dinner together. That was a very surprisingly important thing to me. (Heather)
Karlie discussed having neighbors next door as a benefit for her mental and emotional health:

For mental and emotional health, I think it really helped having the two girls next door who I was able to go through the program with, and getting to complain all together was actually really nice. It was really helpful to see everyone else is going through the exact same thing. Sometimes just seeing other people had it worse than you made it check your own self-pity, or whatever and be like, "It's okay what you're going through. Everyone is going through this."

Conversely, Heather recalled the difficulties associated with assisting a housemate who “had a psychotic break” and ended up leaving the program abroad.

That was a week and a half of hell . . . it was mostly a weekend of us finding out the effectiveness of certain parts of the [OPUS] program director . . . We were both comfortable enough with mental illness and knew enough about what to do that it was kind of left up to us. On the one hand, that was a bonding experience. On the other hand, it kind of colored a lot of the rest of Oxford. It was kind of like recovering from seeing how far mental illness can take someone.

Hazel and Layla reflected on the nature of living with both a mix of APU and non-APU students in the OPUS program. Hazel described spending weekly time with her APU cohort for a faith discussion, in contrast to her living situation, which was not limited to APU students.

We met once a week with our APU team and during that time we'd have . . . We were reading Screwtape letters and so we had that kind of faith-based discussion and like a debrief and we'd have to write a little essay on kind of like what we learned that day or inter-sponsor prompt that our leader . . . Our leader for that gave us. It was helpful in those situations, but I think it was interesting being in Oxford outside kind of the APU bubble, but you were still an APU student, but you kind of lived with like a mix. Like people from a Christian college and people from not Christian colleges, so that was helpful to live them because you got different views.

Layla, also reflected on and compared her relationships with housemates from APU and other schools.
Like my flat mates they're all really good friends of mine still; the ones from APU. It was just really interesting because I had three people who were not from APU in my flat. . . I remember a fight that I had with one of my flatmates. . . I had just grilled into him and I kind of made him look stupid in front of a lot of people. That wasn't my intention it's just that was just me being strong and coming back at something that was wrong that he did. He stole my bike light and it was dangerous. I made him feel bad about it. I just remember he was very unhappy but he apologized afterwards for doing. He definitely stormed out of the room and there was a ton of people there. We just laughed at him but it was bad. I think that from that I just remember that's something that I did when I was there, if somebody said something bad about me I would confront them and be even more upfront. Kind of more aggressive than I would originally be.

Karlie and Daisy also communicated some of the challenges they faced within their respective households:

Yeah, all my housemates were fine, but some of them definitely were pretty heavy drinkers and smokers. That wasn't something, coming from APU, that I had really encountered before, at least in my own house. Learning how to deal with that and being kind to them, but still not wanting that in the house. There was that fine line of loving them but also not wanting that to happen in the house. It never became a confrontation thing, but it was definitely something that I might just . . . If they were doing that, I might not participate in that setting or whatever. That was a little difficult. (Karlie)

Daisy recounted a story about her relationship with her roommate and best friend, also from APU:

One thing that was really difficult is that . . . Well, like I had told you, I had started dating someone while I was there . . . it was not on my agenda. I wasn't like, "I want to go there and date some British guy." . . . my best friend who was my roommate . . . was upset about it and upset about how often I was gone. It's APU. She went to the leaders and was like, "She's spending all this time with a guy." It was a really difficult time because I had to meet with them and go to tea, and it was very awkward. It was upsetting because I think [she] was my comfort zone away from home, because we were really close, and then it felt in that moment like we were not really super close, like she kind of turned me in and made me have this awkward tea, and was upset with me.

**Extracurricular engagement.** Participants discussed that, in addition to living with a mix of both APU and non-APU students, a variety of relationships and
communities were significant to them through their engagement in extracurricular activities. Furthermore, within the context of these activities, participants expressed awareness of cultural differences in relation to their experiences. Multiple participants indicated involvement in faith-related communities:

I went to a church there with some of the APU students. I wouldn't go every week. I remember especially the students who were in my flat would be like "You guys are so close. What makes you guys like that?" It's just this is a fellowship. We come together and we have fun but we don't have fun that way you guys have fun. One of the people who was in OPUS from APU he brought his guitar so we would have worship every Thursday morning. (Layla)

I think I saw a lot of Christians living in community and supporting each other, which is funny, because I feel like that's a buzz word at APU, but it's kind of mocked almost now. To go over and see that in Oxford, and it wasn't something that they necessarily talked about, but that's how they acted. They were very intentional about getting together, just as a group of Christians, and it didn't necessarily have to be anything like . . . It wasn't like a prayer group or anything. It was just time together. I think that really kind of taught me the value of as a Christian, living life with others, who hold your same values. (Karlie)

I went to like three different churches, but there was one that we went to most often and it was very different from at home. I'm just used to Southern California Evangelical or pretty outgoing, and sort of just crazy. Like someone will walk up to you and be like, "Hi", and hug you. It's definitely different culture, but I felt a lot more comfortable because I'm kind of an introvert, and I don't really like strangers coming [up], and hugging me. I felt happy about the fact that we could go and then we could sort of pick, and choose. Like maybe we'll foster one or two people, but we didn't actually feel bombarded. It's the social aspect of it. (Daisy)

What was great is at New College, the chaplain there invited students . . . I think I just got some email that said, "All students are welcome to join her in her office for lunch on Fridays," and so I went and there was only maybe two other students and then other members of the clergy. She served us lunch and we read some Psalms and talked about them and I loved it so I went pretty consistently for the rest of the term. That was great, not only because I met some great people as a result but it was a great time to take a break from all the heavy academics that I was doing and start to relax in the soothing nature that the psalms bring and then to discuss it in that setting, as well, was great. (Sophie)
Others expressed participating in community life through joining their college athletic teams and university clubs. Emma related the significance of her experience with the Oxford women’s “two tier basketball team:”

[When I think about my experience, basketball was a huge part of how awesome it was. I just felt so immersed in Oxford, in a school sense. Not the city, but I was an Oxford student, 100 percent, you know? We had our uniforms, and we were a team. We had a presence on campus. It was just, I mean, sports, team sports, was such a huge part of my high school life. Probably the biggest part of my high school life. Being able to experience that again was . . . I would have given my right arm to be on the team at APU, but I just wasn't good enough. The athletes were just so good. It was great to be part of such a talented school, but I wasn't strong enough in one particular sport to make a team, right? That's one thing I really missed out on, having come from that being such a big part of my high school life. To get that again in Oxford, I could have stayed, I wish I could have been there the whole year, you know, and done the whole thing, just because it was so fun and refreshing to have that as part of my life again.

She further expressed:

That was a huge part of it, for me, doing that. There was no one else APU or considered it, or whatever. It was kind of uniquely mine. I had some friends from APU that would come and watch the games. I don't know. It was part of my experience, and it forced me to get to know all these crazy awesome girls from all over the world, that I wouldn't have the opportunity otherwise. (Emma)

Chase and Karlie were both involved in rowing with their colleges. Chase relayed, “I was in the crew . . . so I would get up early a couple days a week, I think, and go bike down to the river so I could, you know, row with my college.”

I think it was really good because it helps me to get to know some of the girls that were in my college. That was nice. One thing I felt at the beginning was that I didn't feel very welcomed. Then at the end, I realized that I think they were just a less expressive group. When they were saying goodbye, you could tell that they are really sad, and kind of made a big show about saying goodbye and like being, "We're going to miss you." And, "Oh darn, I can't believe we only had you for one term." I think my impression at the beginning was I didn't feel very accepted into the group. I felt like I really stuck out. I don't think that's how they actually interpreted me. I also had fun with it, because it made me feel like I was more a part of the college. I felt like I belonged, which was cool. (Karlie)
Sophie reflected on her experience playing clarinet in the orchestra with fellow Oxford students:

I ended up being in an orchestra . . . That was a new experience, and then being with all of the other Oxford students. There were some study abroad students in there as well, but the majority of them were traditional Oxford students . . . The people, at least in my immediate section area where I was sitting, I got to know some of them pretty well, at least in the amount of time that we had. They were great, and it was a really good playing instrumental community. That was fun. I did that once a week, I think, once term started. Then, there was a final concert at the end of the term, which some of my APU friends came to see, which was really cool. That was nice as well. I think being able to do that was a great way to do something that used my mind in a different way and that broke up the monotony of reading and writing and reading and writing.

While connecting with fellow students through consistent organized extracurricular activities was a common occurrence for participants, participants also highlighted the newness of singular experiences as a form of seeking the culture of community as well. Hazel recalled attending events at the Oxford Union:

We all got to be part of the Oxford Union and they would have different events. Like different speakers and different events. They had a formal one night and we all dressed up and got to meet a whole bunch of different students that are going to colleges across the board in the university. Just made friends and networked and that was a great time. And then there's speakers, I got to see Morgan Freeman and [Ian McKellan], he was Gandalf in the movies. Yeah, it was really cool. The speech was like, wow, this is amazing, and kind of seeing them out of the context of their acting career. Just how wise they are, like wow you guys are real intelligent people.

Additionally, Layla reflected that “the biggest part of Oxford was the people I met and the experiences that we all had together.” She specifically highlighted the significance of having new experiences with her boyfriend whom she met while abroad:

When we were at Oxford because we did so much together in such a short period of time. We traveled to Barcelona together, we traveled to Italy together in the span of like three months. We were able to really spend a lot of time with each other because tutorials were only two times a week. On the other times we went to the Oxford Law Society ball in London, which was so much fun. They rented
out the London Aquarium. We got to be the only people on the London Eye and we were drinking champagne. That was where the champagne reception was. It was like any other prom would be so it wasn't even that expensive but we were able to dress up and mingle with the other Oxford students. I think that was the one thing that I really enjoyed about having him there, that I had my OPUS group and he had his own group of friends. He actually works with one of his friends from Oxford still to this day. It's weird how everything comes full circle.

Emma and Chase also highlighted experiencing a sense of community through the hospitality and kindness showed to them when they had a need. Emma recounted being struck with a terrible pain in her foot:

I called my parents in Toronto, as if they were going to do something, and I explained the situation. I wasn't crying, but I was freaking out because [I] couldn't walk, it was so weird, and my parents, so helpless, they told me to call . . . our program leader in Oxford, so I did, and it was super awkward, because I barely knew him. I explained it. He came and picked me up from where I was and drove me to the hospital, which is like way, way, way on the opposite side of the city . . . Anyway, I took a bus back home and some guys in my program stopped by with a baseball they had written get well soon, or something, because no one knew the story, they just knew that I was at a hospital. It was sweet. I still have the baseball. It was cute.

Chase recalled his time spent during travel breaks before, during, and after the semester in Oxford, and the hospitality of strangers who took him in:

You spent four days with so-and-so, then, you part ways. Then, you'd be in a new city, and you'd meet new people, and the same thing would essentially happen. I had some people take care of me really well. I had some people give me gifts. I had some people feed me the whole time. They'd give me amazing places. I had a whole room to myself, a bed to myself. They'd just take care of me really, really well . . . There were a lot of those situations. One guy I stayed with in Istanbul, he kicked me out. Then, another guy in Istanbul just took me in right away. There was a guy from Germany there and a guy from Iran, I think. Two guys from Iran were there. It was like that the whole time. There were just constantly new people. We could have these conversations. I'd learn about where they're from, their perspectives.

Through the community and relational life that participants experienced during the Oxford semester, participants recognized cultural differences. Sophie, Karlie, and
Emma observed the presence of alcohol within their experiences in the Oxford community:

I really appreciated that there was a different view of alcohol and it wasn't like this scary thing, but instead it was just this, like I don't drink, but it was much more of like just a collegial atmosphere about it, as opposed to let's go get [drunk] type thing. It's very interesting to watch American students who had that perspective, and not that some Oxford students didn't, but I enjoyed that a lot. (Karlie)

I thought their drinking culture was really interesting. I personally don't drink, but I went with some of the people in my flat to different pubs and things just to see what it was like. It was interesting how drinking was prevalent but not getting drunk. People are fully functioning and still seem like having really intelligent conversations, but alcohol is usually involved, which I thought was just really interesting. I went to St. Aldates church for one of their college events, and at that event they served alcohol, which that was funny to me too. I thought, oh man, my church would never do that back here. (Sophie)

There was this bar that we went to . . . on one of our, maybe in our first week there, definitely on our first week there, because they had Hookah . . . We just tried it and it was totally empty, but it was also 7pm, or whatever, but we did it anyway it was called, Thirst, and it got super, super crazy by eleven, or whatever. Anyway, because it was just us and the bartenders we totally hit it off with the bartenders. That became our go to spot.

The first thing that I think of when thinking about cultural differences is how hard my peers party during the middle of the week. I never even try to keep up with them. This bar I was telling you about, Tuesday night, insane. The level of drunkenness people would get, I knew some of them, or I'd seen them on campus, or whatever. School is hard. I don't know how they did it. I've heard that before, work, hard, play, hard kind of thing. Even the pros would talk about it. It keeps you sane, or whatever. That was super different than what I was used to. (Emma)

Hazel and Layla recognized how their experiences with faith and religion as part of their upbringing differed from others they encountered:

We were walking and getting kabobs and there was my friend and some guy, I think, from Oxford. They were just talking about faith and religion. I didn't really engage, but they were just going back and forth. Which I was very impressed they stayed very calm. They were like, "Okay you believe in this. What do you think about this? Why do you think that," and all this kind of stuff. I didn't really engage that much, but just listening to it. I think what stood out the
most is it's so easy to live without religion. You can be religious and some people don't even think about it their whole lives. They don't grow up religious and then it's just fine. It never really comes into contact with them. Growing up with that background I already have it ingrained in me somewhere that there's higher thing.

Then listening to the conversation I was like wow you could totally live without any idea of this and just be fine. I think for a while I almost wanted to see what it was like. At some point I was questioning everything, which I think is a huge part of faith and faith journey anyway, is doubting a lot of things, but just questioning. The basic things people question like, "Is God listening when you pray? Did Jesus really do all these things? Would it matter if he didn't even exist?" What is our calling that people say, or when people say, "God spoke to me" what does that even mean and all these things. (Hazel)

I've never questioned my faith. When I went there it was always "Why do you believe this? What's your basis? What's the research that proves it?" . . . I think it was very hard at one point because people were always telling you "You're so religious. You guys are so Christian." What does that mean? I was like, "I don't know. You say it in a bad connotation like 'you Christians.'" Maybe I don't want to be known as a Christian. I remember for a while I was like I don't know if I believe. I do believe but I can't answer the questions that you're asking me. Like why do I believe that God created the earth or if it was evolution? I don't know why. If it was the big bang that's not questions that I ask to sleep at night. Those are things that I just accept that somehow God did it because he can do it. That's just having faith. (Layla)

In addition to recognition of cultural differences related to faith and alcohol use while in Oxford, Hazel and Sophie reflected on their cultural identities as Americans.

Hazel expressed:

The other thing would probably be people knowing that you're American. Sometimes like when you don't want to stand out, you really don't want to open your mouth because as soon as you speak everyone's going to know you're not from there.

I think something that threw me off is that people immediately thought we were from America based off of our accent. I sat next to an Irish student on a bus to London, and all I said was, I think I said, "It's really warm in here." . . . Then he said, "Where in the states are you from." Like he didn't even ask. I could have been from Canada, theoretically, based off that one sentence I said, but no, he went "Where in the United States," so I said California . . . I think it was interesting just how quickly I think I was aware of not being British, if that makes sense . . . then also because I am Hispanic, I felt like people didn't know what I
was in terms of ethnicity because I think the closest thing besides maybe Spain Spanish, I think my skin tone was closest to maybe Indian . . . I think I was more aware of the fact that I was . . . I'm not super dark-skinned, but I just felt like I was a lot darker than the standard British person. I was like, I wonder what people think I am? (Sophie)

**Impact of community life.** In addition to telling stories that captured the essence of their community life with friends and family prior to leaving, and while in Oxford, participants told stories reflecting on the impact of their community experiences once they returned home from their time abroad. Karlie, Sophie, Layla, and Daisy each reflect on the relationships they built in Oxford with sentimental response:

[Oxford] helped me to build a group of people. I transferred in my junior year. Every year, I kind of had a different situation. I really appreciated having that group of people for that time there. Then I was able to stay friends with some of that group from my last time at APU. Kind of having that transition of comfort was really good, good process. (Karlie)

I think, too, we'll see how, friendships wise, how this works out. It's always hard. I think I've become comfortable with the idea of having friends for a season . . . I think the way I've been able to deal with that is just being fully present in the moment and knowing that this time might be all you have with that person and that will always be a part of your experience. I think because of those experiences, I'm more willing to . . . Just maybe go into deeper friendships quicker, possibly, I think than I was before . . . I think I'm more comfortable with being vulnerable with other people than I was before because I've seen the value in how that brings you closer together and how that can help other people through sharing your struggles. It really helps you, as well. (Sophie)

Right after I got back I remember being like "These people suck I want to go back to Oxford." Just because I think you get so used to that way of life, and it's not a sustainable way of life because you're doing something new everything weekend; you are learning in such an intense capacity; and it's just you cannot do it over. Which is funny because I went to go visit my boyfriend a few months after and I was like "Oh Oxford's going to be amazing." It was just a place, a place like any other. I think what really makes Oxford such a great experience is the people you're with, the things you get to do with them. Getting over that culture shock and learning new things, learning new things about yourself and how you interact with others. (Layla)
We got used to being in a really small family environment. Coming home it was hard to watch it dissolve. It disappears pretty quickly. Looking for that community again where you feel safe and not really finding it is a little . . . You know it's going to happen, but it's always a little sad. It's like camp, you know, when you come home from camp.

I was really particularly affected by the relationship that I had when I was there which didn't end badly. It obviously ended because I came home . . . it was really significant because I had felt really unlovable and this was just a healthy relationship. He was just a very kind, considerate person who took good care of me, took me to the doctor when I was sick, and stayed up with me when I was having a panic attack, and just little things that hadn't happened for me in a long time. In that way, I think I came home expecting more out of life in general and more out of myself, and really wanting to go to the library all the time. (Daisy)

In contrast, Chase reflected with sentiment on the relationships he left at home before leaving.

[This study abroad trip] was very different, this one was almost more just independent, selfish almost, in a way, where I was just pursuing adventures I wanted to have, see places I wanted to see. It really didn't involve anyone else, just people I met as I went. All those things I think informed my mental and emotional health in a way that was unhealthy given what I was processing. It's not that those things were necessarily unhealthy, I think it made me realize though, "Oh, yeah, I have all these dreams and things I want to see and experience and explore," but it made me question like is it really worth it if I'm not going to be sharing it with people? Is it really worth it if I'm leaving certain people behind? It was maybe the first time where I had things and relationships at home that were so appealing that it made traveling not as appealing, because in the past that's all I ever wanted to do. Every opportunity I got, I tried to travel. It was always great, but this was the first time that I went on a trip and I just felt like something was missing, I was missing people, all that kind of stuff.

This section described the relational and communal landscape that impacted participants before they left, while they were in Oxford, in addition to their reflections upon returning home. The following section synthesizes the moments of self-realization participants had across all three of the previously mentioned landscapes.
Self-Realization: Inner Conflict Through External Experience

The aforementioned findings captured the lived experiences of participants in Oxford through the stories they told about their engagement in the landscapes of exploration, intellectual pursuit, and community life. Participants communicated moments of self-realization across each of these findings, from which emerged an additional finding—self-realization: inner conflict vs. external experience. Through the experiences participants had in their external environment—exploring news places, an intense and rich academic load, living in a new community setting—moments of inner conflicts emerged. These conflicts contributed to self-realizations, or perspective shifts for participants, captured by stories of loss and gain, faith and doubt, tensions related to values and finding a sense of belonging.

**Chase.** The stories Chase told conveyed inner conflicts centered around values and beliefs, as seen across each landscape. He questioned the former value he placed on travel: “Is it really worth it if I'm leaving certain people behind? It was maybe the first time where I had things and relationships at home that were so appealing that it made traveling not as appealing.” He further highlighted experiencing loss, as he and his girlfriend “broke up by the end of the semester.” In contrast, he highlighted gaining new perspective about those he met through his travels around Europe, having spent time with travelers from Iran, Germany, and beyond, and experiencing their generosity—“We could have these conversations. I'd learn about where they're from, their perspectives.”

In addition, Chase indicated that his tutorials were a “reality check” in terms of pursuing “academics career wise,” showing him “that there's a lot of growth I could have as a scholar, specifically in writing and just the way I think.” He also communicated that
he was “struggling mentally” with questions associated to “hurdles and challenges to go through when you're trying to reconcile a certain belief system.” While he expressed these challenges within his intellectual pursuit, he also expressed gaining clarity through his study of Kierkegaard:

The role between faith and reason, and just the way all those things work together, the way he wrote them spoke the most to me and I resonated with the most, that's kind of how I see it as well.

These questions indicated a conflict of questioning beliefs that appeared to be mitigated through the academic process.

Daisy. Daisy expressed that coming into the Oxford semester she was “still . . . really struggling [with depression].” She had admitted to dealing with the loss of leaving school in New York to come home to APU, which was challenging in terms of finding an embracing community—“It was really difficult to be depressed in that environment because they didn't really understand and they weren't super compassionate.”

Through her time away, she experienced a sense of freedom through exploration and gain through a positive relationship with her boyfriend, as well as validation academically. While reflecting on journeying up a mountain in Ireland she articulated: “I felt a lot of peace . . . It's sort of abstract, but it felt like a really spiritual moment for me, like it was just a moment of healing, and happiness.” Additionally, she acknowledged, “I had felt really unlovable and this was just a healthy relationship . . . I think I came home expecting more out of life in general and more out of myself.” Having previously mentioned involvement in “emotionally abusive relationships” prior to leaving, Daisy’s conflict of not feeling lovable was altered while in Oxford.
**Emma.** Emma communicated her experience in Oxford with consistent passion for exploration and new experiences, highlighting her runs as “so culturally rich compared to the suburbs I run through in Toronto.” She conveyed a sense of excitement and gratitude while discovering what the world could offer her within the Oxford community. While there were few explicit hints of deep inner conflict throughout the stories she told, her reflection on what basketball meant to her revealed a former loss she had experienced:

I would have given my right arm to be on the team at APU, but I just wasn't good enough . . . That's one thing I really missed out on . . . To get that again in Oxford I could have stayed, I wish I could have been there the whole year, you know, and done the whole thing, just because it was so fun and refreshing to have that as part of my life again.

Emma’s experience with basketball in Oxford revealed an identity loss that she experienced through having formerly been an athlete in high school and not being able to play in college. This loss can be seen in contrast to the positive gain received from being part of a team in Oxford.

**Hazel.** During Hazel’s time in Oxford, she experienced a conflict of beliefs through her intellectual pursuit of philosophy and through the casual dialogue she had while in community, “I came to a point where I was just like I don't know if I really need this whole religion thing. Then the time I took off religion I realized that it's a place where I found happiness.” Through the questioning of her beliefs, Hazel showed the ability to reframe her thinking about her faith through the context of her philosophical study. Additionally, Hazel embraced her intellectual pursuit as one that gave her a framework from which to communicate the importance of philosophical ideas to others in meaningful ways they can understand:
I learned that the more academic you sound isn't necessarily the best thing... The simplest philosophies are usually the best ones, so I usually try to make arguments that had a lot behind it but were very simple and try to make it easy for someone who's never heard philosophy in their life to understand.

This passion and approach to philosophy extended into her current career with Americorps, where she assists inner-city elementary and middle school students in the Northwest.

**Heather.** Heather told stories that communicated her quest for belonging and acceptance in contrast to the conflicts she expressed having with her family. Her exploration of the environment in England proved meaningful to her sense of belonging; while at Stonehenge she reflected, “I'm not just a part of a story, but to some extent, I am the plot at the moment. That I'm my own sort of plotline... Rather than feeling less significant, it gave a lot more significance to life journey.”

In addition, Heather articulated feeling known by her roommates, highlighting that “sitting around at the dinner table telling stories about our day... was a very surprisingly important thing to me.” She further communicated having a breakthrough moment in her relationship with God while reading for homework: “I was thinking a lot about God, but not wanting to have a conversation. Which I guess is like the spiritual equivalent of Facebook stalking.” This realization, in addition to that of having a “respected mind” captured her positive experience with the academic life in Oxford. Across the landscapes of her experience in Oxford, Heather expressed growth in her sense of belonging and acceptance.

**Karlie.** Karlie communicated experiencing a conflict related to values she held about drinking and smoking within her living situation: “all my housemates were fine,
but some of them definitely were pretty heavy drinkers and smokers. . . . Learning how to deal with that and being kind to them, but still not wanting that in the house.” In contrast, she highlighted the significance of being part of a church community where she observed Christians who held her same values and demonstrated their faith through their actions.

In addition, she expressed being challenged in a healthy way academically, “I felt like I had been pushed and made it out and did well with it. That was exciting . . . because I felt like I was in charge of how I was learning.” Karlie’s confidence in getting to pursue her chosen direction for learning presented additional conflict once back at APU. She explained, “I felt like after being at Oxford, coming back to APU, I felt like the professors could push us a lot harder . . . I think it was partially because I knew that I could be pushed more.” Furthermore, these changes in perspective towards academic life prompted her to think about pursuing graduate study in the future.

**Layla.** Layla expressed experiencing conflict related to her beliefs in light of how others perceived her. This experience occurred both in the tutorial setting as well as in her communal experiences. In an academic setting, she expressed that her tutors challenged her to support her arguments with strong reasoning:

> You can go either way on most issues and that's something that I had to confront. There's not going to be one right answer but there are going to be answers that are stronger because you have research, more basis to say that.

She reflected that through her time abroad, she felt more prepared for law school and that it helped her in “having a voice and having a strong sense of conviction over the things that you express whether that's in writing or through an oral argument.”
This tension also translated into the relationships she had with those she interacted with who were not from APU in Oxford. Having to engage with people who consistently questioned her faith with a seemingly negative connotation caused her to ponder: “Maybe I don't want to be known as a Christian. I remember for a while I was like I don't know if I believe. I do believe but I can't answer the questions that you're asking me.” Through her academic study as well as in community life, Layla embraced an inner conflict of having a voice and being able to support her arguments with evidence—applying this to her Christian faith was one of the areas where this tension existed for her.

**Sophie.** Sophie told stories that conveyed her sincere love of literature and learning and her vulnerability in her pursuit for authentic community. She expressed that a core inner conflict she faced when bringing an unfinished essay to her first tutorial was a question of her worth and value in relation to her academic success.

I think what was really hard for me was getting over the fact that I had a bad mark on my record . . . Part of me wanted to redo it at the end of the tutorial, . . . she said, don't feel like you have to because I sort of have disregarded that at his point. I realized that if I had redone it, I think it would mostly just be for my ego, to say, oh no, that didn't happen, I'm still a really good student.

This incident, along with the format of tutorials not being on grades but on progress, helped her “focus on the truth of what [she] was learning versus thinking about “oh, this will get me an A.”

Along with her pursuit of truth within the academic landscape, Sophie highlighted the value of sharing in conflict within her living environment—“I think all of their willingness to share in each other's struggles and things made it a really healthy
environment to live in.” Sophie’s attitude toward conflict and struggle can be seen across both the community and academic landscapes in which she participated.

**Summary**

The findings that emerged from this study indicated that eight participants who studied abroad in Oxford told stories highlighting significant experiences across three landscapes: (a) exploration and the daily landscape, (b) intellectual pursuit and the academic landscape, and (c) relationships and the communal landscape. Within each of these landscapes, participant stories revealed personal conflicts that arose through external experiences with the places they explored, the academic content and conversations they pursued, and people the people with whom they connected. These conflicts provided a platform for perspective shifts to begin to occur, leading to a fourth culminating theme of (d) self-realization: inner conflicts through external experience.

**Results and Interpretations**

Four results emerged from the four findings and their subsequent sub-themes in this study. This section expands on the results and interprets meaning through drawing on relevant literature from Chapter 2 and beyond. The results that emerged are: (a) The Oxford tutorial system promoted a process of transformative learning through its emphasis on critical thinking, dialogue, and reflection; (b) The OPUS semester structure fostered identity development through an independent environment and communal living, which in many cases led to expressed confidence and agency and a sense of belonging and connectedness for APU students; (c) Spiritual development was an integrative and holistic process for participants—occurring through individual exploration and intellectual pursuit and within the context of community; and (d) The transition back to
APU from Oxford was more difficult than the transition from APU to Oxford for many participants.

**Result One: The Oxford tutorial system promoted a process of transformative learning through its emphasis on critical thinking, dialogue, and reflection.**

Participants referred to their academic experience in Oxford as one filled with rigor and the requisite ability to clearly support their assertions. With the tutorial model constructed around extensive reading and writing, and weekly one-on-one dialogue with a tutor, the ability to critically reflect on content to understand meaning is built into Oxford’s academic system, authenticating Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning (1978, 1991, 2000).

Multiple participants discussed engaging in a facilitated process of learning in which they were taught to question and think about their thinking and writing (Chase, Layla, Hazel). This approach corresponds with studies by Cranton (2006) who emphasized the importance of an educator as facilitator when practicing transformative learning and Taylor (2009) who indicated the importance of emphasizing individual experiences in learning, along with dialogue, critical reflection, and authentic relationships.

More explicitly, the way participants described their engagement with the literary and philosophical content they were studying further illuminated connection with transformative learning theory. For example, Mezirow’s (1998, 2000) “objective reframing process”—an application of critical reflection of assumptions (CRA) within the theory he presented focuses on reflecting on the validity of beliefs or feelings and looking at the assumptions behind a certain problem (p. 19). Layla’s reflection on truth through
her study of the law, Hazel’s questioning of truth and religion through her study with Nicomachean ethics, and Chase’s process of understanding “the role of anxiety, the role between faith and reason” through the study of Kierkegaard, substantiate Mezirow’s approach to critical reflection in Oxford’s academic environment.

In addition, the spiritual connections Heather and Daisy reflected upon through their academic engagement with literature, affirm Tisdell’s (2003) expansion of Mezirow’s transformative learning theory, suggesting that “spirituality is one of the ways people construct knowledge and meaning” (p. 20). While reading, Daisy analyzed Alice in Wonderland seeing “an image of Jesus pardoning everyone”—connecting religious meaning to her academic process. Additionally, through reading, Heather asked herself “what kind of spiritual life does she insist on having?”, which “caused a big shift.” Both the objective and spiritual approaches to critically reflecting on content corroborate with elements of the transformative learning process. Furthermore, application of this transformative learning extended beyond the academic experiences in Oxford and can be seen through stories of self-realization across each landscape as recounted by participants.

**Result Two: The OPUS semester structure fostered identity development through an independent environment and communal living, which in many cases led to expressed confidence and agency and a sense of belonging and connectedness for APU students.**

A majority of the participants in this study expressed that they gained confidence and a sense of belonging and illustrated acts of agency in the stories they told about their time in Oxford. These instances provide current validity to the “vectors of change” discussed by Chickering et al. in their 1969 study, indicating attributes such as “increased
autonomy” and “increased emotional awareness and expressiveness” (p. 324). On multiple occasions, a sense of confidence was gained through the ability to problem solve through struggle—Hazel and Sophie described this within the academic landscape when a computer broke down and a tutorial was missed. Others described the challenges of academic rigor, while also provided reflections that depicted self-realizations about having a “respected mind.” This is also seen heavily across the landscape of exploration, as participants conveyed feeling empowered by instances of overcoming challenges while navigating about town and traveling on their own (Chase, Hazel, Karlie, Emma, Sophie). Such cases reveal that increased confidence and agency are perhaps borne out of independently finding solutions to challenges or consequences.

The platform through which the above instances occurred were heavily connected to the unstructured nature of the OPUS semester schedule. Even with a pre-term program created by APU and the study abroad organization, students articulated having “free time,” allowing for room to explore and develop understanding of themselves through their surroundings. The structure is complimentary to Arnett’s (2000) description of what emergent adulthood is marked by—“it is a period characterized by change and exploration for most people, as they examine the life possibilities open to them and gradually arrive at more enduring choices in love, work, and worldviews” (p. 480). While a search for meaning (Arnett, 2000; Chickering et al., 1969) might be ingrained in participants within this developmental stage, being in an environment that promoted more independence than the participants’ former environment can be seen as a catalyst to the development process.
The extension of this process beyond the Oxford semester can be seen in participant reflections about pursuing further education through graduate school (Emma, Karlie, Sophie, Heather, Layla), or otherwise (Chase), and in preparation for careers, such as working for a humanitarian organization (Hazel). These findings support similar outcomes as those that came out of Paige and Fry’s (2009) Beyond Immediate Impact: Study Abroad for Global Engagement (SAGE). The SAGE study highlighted student perceptions of study abroad impact to include career changes, educational changes, and pursuits in graduate work, noting that over 50% of participants who studied abroad went on to pursue graduate studies.

Furthermore, this developmental process was seen to extend beyond participants overcoming challenges, leading to participants gaining confidence and agency within their external environment, as referenced above. This process led to the reframing of internal perspectives as well. The new environment set participants up for a process of becoming more aware of their “cultural and psychological assumptions”—a contributing element of Mezirow’s (1978) theory of perspective transformation (p. 101). As participants explored and engaged in new cultures, they were able to reflect on their beliefs about themselves and others. Some participants identified experiencing an innate sense of belonging within the natural environment as they traveled and explored (Heather, Stonehenge; Daisy, Ireland, a quieter church experience). Others described becoming aware of being identified as American (Hazel, Sophie) and different cultural norms such as the presence of alcohol (Sophie, Karlie, Emma).

While all participants reflected on becoming aware of differences in the cultural environment, and many indicated signs of a changed perspective, a few indicated
translating their internal changes back out into the world for the benefit of others. Sophie, for example, was aware of her cultural identity while abroad and further connected her experience to a desire to help the international students she tutored at the APU writing center. She recognized what it was like to feel challenged in a new cultural setting, without a language barrier, and wanted to extend her new experience to others in her former environment that might need assistance. Karlie recognized the challenges that came with the Oxford academic culture of research, indicating that while it was too late to get a book she needed from the library, she wrote a letter to get it for the next scholars studying her topic. Hazel extended her knowledge of philosophy towards practically understanding the population of people she worked with through her career at Americorps. Similarly, Chase took his experiences traveling around Europe and new understanding of faith and reason through his study of Kierkegaard works as a way to view and engage with people who have differing beliefs than his own.

The above examples contribute support to Mezirow’s (1991) 10th phase of transformative learning, regarding “reintegration into one’s life . . . dictated by one’s perspective,” and further suggest how an altered perspective might look for college students in a cross-cultural setting (pp. 168-169). In addition, these findings related to an increased level of cultural awareness also correspondent with outcomes that emerged through Sutton and Rubin’s (2010) Georgia Learning Outcomes of Students Studying Abroad Research Initiative (GLOSSARI). The GLOSSARI study found that students who studied abroad had an improved understanding of cultural context and a more integrative and intercultural knowledge that could be applied rather than just theoretical knowledge.
While the process of identity formation that emerged through an environment promoting independence and agency is illustrated through individual experiences in Oxford, these individual experiences occurred while participants were living communally with other students in a like situation, contributing a valuable platform through which to view Wenger’s theory of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1998). Wenger’s work is new to this study and is seen as applicable through the participant stories that emerged about communal living in the findings. APU students traveling to Oxford together through OPUS can be seen as a community of practice through the following definition: “Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor” (Wenger, 2006, p. 1). This work is evidenced through recounted participant stories, such as Sophie’s reflection of her roommates “sharing in each other’s sufferings,” Heather’s imagery of eating dinner with her housemates every night, as well as Karlie’s reflection of being part of a church community that shared her same values. These experiences all illustrate the importance of community as an integral part of identity formation.

**Result Three: Spiritual development is an integrative and holistic process for participants—occurring through individual exploration, intellectual pursuit, and within the context of community.**

Participants’ recollections of their spiritual lives in Oxford were directly connected to their experiences across the landscapes of exploration, academics, and community life. While stories related to spiritual life varied in degree and situation, every participant in this study indicated engagement involving “an increasing openness to exploring a relationship with an intangible and pervasive power or essence that exists beyond pursuit of being connected to themselves and something greater” (Love & Talbot,

The stories told about being connected to self or something greater were also the stories that captured participant moments of self-realizations through internal conflict, as referenced in the fourth finding section. These instances further contributed to the results Astin et al. (2011) gained through a four-year longitudinal study, in which spirituality was found to be:

[H]ow students make meaning of their education and their lives, how they develop a sense of purpose, the value and belief of dilemmas they experience, as well as the role of religion, the sacred, and the mystical in their lives. (p. 40)

Self-realizations took form through participant descriptions which highlighted (a) intangible experiences in nature (Daisy, Heather), (b) connecting with God intentionally and non-intentionally in solitude (Emma, Sophie), (c) understanding the nature of God through intellectual pursuit through reading literature and philosophy (Chase, Hazel, Sophie, Heather), and (d) through conversation and interaction with community groups (Layla, Hazel, Karlie).

The internal conflict of which participants spoke authenticates the discussion on spiritual struggle with research grounded in work by Bryant and Astin (2008) and Astin et al. (2011). This research indicates that spiritual struggle is sometimes perpetuated by concerns about values and beliefs, or experiences of loss or homesickness, and is more likely to be present in Christian or Catholic school environments. These ideas correspond with multiple reflections in this study, where participants discuss their embrace of questioning their beliefs about God and truth in the stories they tell (Chase, Hazel, Layla). Such reflections hint at a process of “self-authoring” in one’s faith, which occurs
between Fowler’s Stage 3 and Stage 4 of spiritual development (Evans et al., 2010, p. 198). This movement from Fowler’s Stage 3 to Stage 4 is similar to findings of Holcomb and Nonneman’s (2004) study, which particularly focused on CCCU students. The questions participants asked about God mirror those presented by Walter Bruggemman, as captured by Morgan’s (2010) reflections as a chaplain for CCCU students in the Oxford semester. While these questions might infer doubt and disorientation, they are actually indicators of spiritual development and transformation.

**Result Four: The transition back to APU from Oxford was more difficult than the transition from APU to Oxford for many participants.**

While participants indicated experiencing both positive and negative experiences over the course of their time in the Oxford semester, many participants indicated that returning home was more challenging for them than originally leaving APU for Oxford. This insight corroborates with cultural adjustment research, which indicates variances in sojourner experiences (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Lysgaard, 1955; Ward et al., 1998) and affirms the need to understand the personal and psychological impacts of studying abroad (Gaw, 2000; Hunley, 2010; Wielkiewicz & Turkowski, 2010).

Multiple participants provided insight into their community life and family life prior to leaving to go abroad; some referenced not having a strong community at APU before leaving (Daisy, Layla, Karlie), others referenced dealing with depression and family and relational challenges (Heather, Daisy). In the stories these participants told, many of these former challenges were met and fulfilled with new positive experiences in community life, such as feeling loved in romantic relationships (Daisy, Layla), experiencing family dinners (Heather), and having a strong church community (Karlie).
Conversely, Chase, who had a serious relationship at home and many community engagements on APU’s campus prior to leaving, appeared to find less value in the Oxford program on the whole.

In addition, many participants highlighted the depth of their academic experience and what it was like to have a respected mind and be valued as a scholar, making returning to the academic environment at APU difficult—for example, Karlie highlighted feeling a lack of agency in getting to guide her own work. Thus, these participant experiences reveal that the cultural adjustment process may be based more on one’s existing internal framework, rather than shock within a new external environment. Furthermore, disorientation was less related to “culture shock” as prescribed by anxiety in a new external environment (Oberg, 1954), but rather through internal shocks that challenged previously held frames of reference (Mezirow, 2000). And, for many, these internal shocks were positive in nature, suggesting that disorientation can exist when frames of reference are negative, met by positive experiences that challenge a previously held worldview.

**Summary**

The finding, results, and interpretations that emerged through this study illuminate that the Oxford semester through OPUS supports individual growth through an environment that promotes independence within the context of community. The rigor of the academic system encapsulates key facets of transformative learning in practice through critical thinking, dialogue, and reflection. These facets translate into all areas of life in Oxford, causing participants to critically think about their values within a given context. This is seen through reflections on spiritual development, which highlight
moments of tension and struggle, pointing to possible areas of perspective change in participant lives. Overall, most participants alluded to experiences in Oxford as positive, making the return home more challenging than the entry process.
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

This narrative study explored the perspective changes that occurred in the lives of eight CCCU students from Azusa Pacific University who participated in the OPUS over the last five years. Through the stories participants told, evidence of perspective change emerged across three thematic landscapes: (a) exploration and the daily landscape, (b) intellectual pursuit and the academic landscape, and (c) relational life and the communal landscape—each of which contributed integrative elements into a fourth theme of (d) self-realization: inner conflict through external experience.

Within the context of these themes, this study’s results revealed that transformative learning was fostered through the Oxford tutorial model, and that participants gained confidence, agency, and a sense of belonging through the experiences in their environment. In addition, spiritual development was seen to be an integrative process that occurred across all three landscapes for participants. Also, while participant stories were not devoid of challenges upon entering the new culture, the transition back to APU from Oxford was more difficult for many participants.

In light of these findings and results, this chapter offers conclusions drawn in response to the three research questions that guided this study. Additionally, recommendations for action and for future research are addressed. These actionable solutions predominately focus on the higher education sector, emphasizing considerations for administrators, program directors, and instructors—with particular pertinence to small Liberal Arts Colleges within the CCCU organization.
Conclusions

The three overarching research questions that guided this study are answered below, using the findings and results that emerged from Chapter 4.

Research Question One: What stories do participants share about their lived experiences during the Oxford Programme for Undergraduate Studies (OPUS) study abroad semester and their transition home?

Participants in this study told stories of exploration, intellectual pursuit, and life lived in community during their time abroad. Within these stories, experiences of loss and gain emerged for individuals: overcoming failure, finding confidence, gaining agency and independence, and experiencing a sense of belonging in new surroundings and with new people.

Experiences of exploration and adventure were part of the daily experience in Oxford for participants. Due to the minimally structured schedule of the tutorial system, requiring formal meetings only a couple times a week, participants consistently communicated having more time and space to navigate around town with friends, visit local historical landmarks and pubs, and travel to other countries, while also tending to their rigorous courses of study. Within the landscape of exploration, individuals also highlighted choosing daily and weekly moments spent in solitude—while in nature, on walks, and in their flats. The time and space contributed to experiences of independence and identity formation for participants.

The notion of independence translated into the academic life of participants throughout their time in Oxford. While individuals spoke of the challenging rigors of reading hundreds of pages and writing thousands of words per week, followed by critically reflective discussions with tutors, they almost unanimously conveyed a sense of
confidence in discovering a life of scholarship and the ability to think critically. This life of scholarship transcended the idea of academics being practiced at set times in weekly meetings, but became a lifestyle of conversation and dialogue, of intellectual pursuit. The most dynamic part of this pursuit is that learning was self-directed and centered around an individual’s ability and interests with the guidance of a tutor. While high academic achievement was the natural expectation, growth was the mindset. Learning began for each participant from where they were and could be taken as far as they chose to go.

Their pursuit did not exist in intellectual isolation, but was seen through conversations participants described having with friends while exploring and living in community with one another in Oxford, rather than being limited to a classroom setting. The conversations demonstrated the value of having a community of practice in which gaining new knowledge was of central importance—illuminating perhaps that one’s intellect might be stimulated through individuals interests, but not outside of those who are likeminded in the ultimate goal of learning and achieving new understanding. Rather, individual minds cannot meet full potential in isolation, but thrive when multiple minds are seeking meaning together.

In addition, through their intellectual pursuit, multiple individuals expressed having gained a sense of agency and autonomy in their learning process. This became one of the most challenging “shocks” to some participants when they transitioned back to the APU campus, as they were expected to rejoin their former traditional classroom setting; while class sizes were not large, a sense of ownership and independence in their learning process was threatened for some, and work seemed easy. Furthermore, the
community life in which much of this learning process existed also disappeared for many individuals, causing the transition home to be more challenging than the transition to Oxford for many.

**Research Question Two: To what extent do participants reflect disorientation from their study abroad experiences and their transitions home?**

Azusa Pacific University students who studied abroad in Oxford with the OPUS program largely perceived disorientation in terms of the losses and gains they experienced in light of their values and beliefs about themselves and the world through daily exploration, intellectual pursuit, and community life. While the new setting and overall environment in Oxford certainly played a significant role in catalyzing perspective change for participants, traditional issues of culture shock—such as dealing with homesickness and orienting to language barriers—were not central to the described perceptions of disorientation. In fact, most individuals were quick to assert their experience in traveling and being away from home, ranging from previous study away opportunities through APU to time spent internationally with family.

Rather, for many, identification of disorientation while in Oxford came through positive realizations, or “positive disorientation” as coined by Heather, having confidence in intellectual ability, “a respected mind,” agency to navigate and explore on one’s own, a sense of belonging in the natural surroundings and in relationships. These positive articulations revealed internal shocks to previously held frames of reference, suggesting former deficits in these areas. To be disoriented by having a respected mind, or the confidence to navigate and be independent, or the acceptance of a community of people, a lack of these things had to be present first. This lack can be seen partially through
participant stories that referenced experiences of emotional abuse in childhood or in relationships, through depression, or more subtly through not feeling connected to a community of people or losing the foundation of a former identity as “an athlete” or “good student.”

While the presence of these “positive disorientations” existed consistently across female participant stories, the one male participant in this study presented multiple opposing realizations in these areas. Though he indicated gaining perspective from the rich academic content he studied, he highlighted being told he was a bad writer by his tutors in comparison to succeeding at APU; this was a different outcome than most female participants portrayed. Additionally, while most of the female participants conveyed gaining skills that pushed them towards graduate school, Chase indicated considering a career away from academia due to his experience. Regarding community life, he expressed missing the relationships at home and questioning whether it was worth it to come on the trip, also highlighting the loss of a relationship with his girlfriend.

The contrast between the female participants and the single male participant suggests the need for further research. It is not possible to draw conclusive evidence from this limited sample size of whether this phenomenon indicates a greater cultural trend in males being more validated in their previous community and academic setting. However, it is evident that this male participant was dealing with the loss of valuable relationships and ties to community involvement while in Oxford, while female participants were experiencing academic and relational gains while in Oxford.

Regardless of the positive or negative recognitions of disorientation, such moments as indicated above were preceded by stories of inner struggle and conflict over
the values and beliefs of individual participants—beliefs about self worth, doubt, love and relationships—indicating that the disorientation in this study is heavily tied to spiritual struggle and spiritual development. From experiences of struggle emerged perspective transformations; being told you have a respected mind is positive disorientation, believing you have a respected mind is perspective transformation.

Furthermore, depending on the individual perspective transformations that occurred in Oxford, the possibility for further disorientation existed in the transition home. The identified areas of disorientation included orienting back to a traditional classroom without the same autonomy and self-direction in the learning process and the dissolving of community life for some; for Chase, it meant questioning the value of going to Oxford in light of the relationship lost and his transition after graduation.

Research Question Three: How do these study abroad experiences affect participant perceptions of personal identity, spirituality, and academic pursuits?

The experiences participants had through their time in Oxford affected participant perceptions of personal identity, spirituality, and academic pursuits through the context of community, and within the OPUS structure centered around a tutorial model. Participants communicated gains in confidence and agency while studying abroad. Through their experiences with success in an academically rigorous environment, most participants expressed gaining intellectual confidence in their ability to read and articulate their ideas through writing. This ability to articulate ideas translated into their relational lives in which multiple participants indicated growth in having a voice and engaging in challenging conversations where they furthered their skills to support what they believed with reason. In addition, some participants conveyed altered perceptions
related to their identity by recognizing their worth and value as being *more than* success in academics and outside of the context of former unhealthy relationships.

An extension of the overall confidence participants expressed gaining within their academic pursuits was seen through the depth and enjoyment advanced through deep and engaged study of content. Participants communicated excitement about truth in Greek myths, women in literature, truth in philosophy (Aristotle, Kierkegaard, beyond, as well as connection with Oxford authors C.S. Lewis and Tolkien); and their intellectual pursuit extended beyond a classroom—the tutorial sessions were merely a springboard for learning in Oxford’s environment. This kind of learning came with a growth mindset for most. Many participants revealed disconnecting from the idea of grades and latching on to the idea of growing and improving as they invested in their courses of study one-on-one with their tutor. Furthermore, of the eight participants in this study, almost all of them indicated the consideration of, the completion of, or the application to graduate school.

In addition to gains in confidence and agency, participants communicated having altered views in their spiritual and religious lives. Participants indicated experiencing a sense of belonging and connectedness through the natural settings they traveled to, the people they met, and individual experiences with God. Of those mentioned having spiritual experiences with God, some of these encounters took place through times of solitude in reading literature, navigating in solitude while in nature, or spending time in a community of likeminded individuals within church groups. Others mentioned being challenged in their beliefs about God through their engagement with literature and philosophy and through engaging in conversations with people who had differing beliefs.
All in all, participant stories revealed that a spiritual life is a holistic life—it happens across the landscapes of new environments and in exploration, through the intellectual pursuit, and in the context of community. Spiritual growth and development does not occur in isolation but speaks of an integrated life.

**Recommendations**

This study illuminates that perspective change is fostered in CCCU student lives through spaces where exploration, intellect, and community are central to the learning process. The tutorial environment in Oxford promoted these elements, which resulted in expressed confidence and agency for most participants in this study. However, many participants expressed feelings of being stifled in their academic environment, upon return, while some acknowledged disappointment in a dissipating community life. The following list of recommendations addresses the need for more student supports upon reentry from Oxford, while also targeting programmatic efforts to foster opportunities in exploration, critical thinking, and community development campus wide on the whole. While these recommendations are in response to student needs from Azusa Pacific University, they are intended to provide a framework for improvement that extends to similar sized liberal arts universities in the CCCU.

**Recommendations for Study Abroad Program Directors, University Administrators, and Instructors**

**Institute an intentional reentry course seminar.** This study reveals that while in Oxford, students were required to attend a weekly faith and learning meeting with fellow APU students. The idea of meeting weekly should be a requirement that extends at least one semester beyond a student’s time abroad as a form of reentry support for
students. Continuing this community of practice model will allow students to ease back into a university life that is more structured and offers less independence, with the same group of people. This will provide an environment where a reverse sense of loss is less immediate in the transition home. The seminar can continue to provide discussion of topics related to faith and learning, while also allowing students to discuss aspects of impact and growth with various staff and faculty members, assisting these stakeholders in understanding needs on an individual basis.

**Connect returning students to a faculty member in their major for one-on-one dialogue and content-specific extension opportunities.** Multiple participants conveyed having frustration with coursework upon return, due to not being pushed and not having choices with their content. Additional individuals expressed work as being easy. To mitigate apathy towards content upon return, participants need to continue building rich in connection to their area of study and given a platform to share their knowledge. To do this, it is suggested that study abroad directors collaborate with faculty members in specific majors to bridge connections and opportunities for returning students.

These opportunities could include meeting with a faculty one-on-one a few times in the return semester to develop work started in Oxford for the purpose of a conference presentation or a presentation in the department. In addition, these opportunities could include minor teaching roles within a student’s upper division major elective courses for the purpose of giving opportunities that promote agency in learning. Each of these possible opportunities allows for application of content knowledge and supports critical
thinking that extends beyond the Oxford semester and reinforces the notion that students have a “respected mind.”

**Create exploratory field trips and service learning projects related to content areas.** The results of this study emerged largely through an environment that promoted curiosity and exploration in daily life. While the historical magnitude of Oxford cannot be transplanted, nor the tutorial system easily implemented in America’s system of higher education, promoting opportunities for exploration is possible. One avenue through which to do this is by creating exploratory field trips or service learning projects that relate to major specific content areas—visiting a museum, going to a poetry reading or lecture at a different university campus, and tutoring students and discussing observations as a class.

Each opportunity that provides a new landscape provides a new lens through which previous beliefs and frames of reference might be disrupted. Journeying somewhere new together echoes the idea of a community of practice and allows for different angles of thinking. Additionally, providing opportunities for service learning, even locally, promotes the shaping of a global perspective when done with intention (Bamber & Hankin, 2011). Not only will this recommendation support students who traveled abroad and crave more opportunity for exploration but will also extend holistic learning opportunities to those who do not travel abroad.

**Develop a community involvement pre- and post-trip survey.** One of the most present perspective changes revealed in this study was the idea of being part of a like-minded community. This idea emerged for multiple participants as they reflected on not finding that community before they studied abroad. Reasons for this varied—some were
transfer students, some were going through challenges with depression, others noted not relating to an overly “bubbly” environment.

Developing and distributing an inventory that addresses issues of community involvement and matters of overall wellness both before and after a study abroad trip will benefit study abroad program development. In addition, such an inventory will also provide insight into campus-wide program development, addressing student development needs, such as not having a sense of belonging or feeling isolated and without community. Reentry studies conducted by Gaw (2000) and Hunley (2010) used a range of inventories that might assist in the development of a comprehensive inventory for student travelers, including the Personal Problem Inventory (PPI) and the ReEntry Shock Scale (RSS), the Function of Students Abroad Questionnaire (FOSA), the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI), and Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

In addition to the recommended actions for study abroad directors, administrators, and instructors within the higher education setting, future research is also recommended. The following research suggestions will broaden the scope of understanding when looking at perspective change in relation to the Oxford program and similar study abroad experiences.

**Gender balance.** Increase the numbers of male participant and conduct a narrative study that draws comparison between the differences in male and female participant perspective changes. This kind of study would surpass the limitations of the current study, which only provided evidence of one male’s perspective. While the male participant in this study showed consistently different reflections than the female
participants, there was not generalizable evidence; including additional male participants could provide this.

**Ethnicity and socioeconomic lens.** Explore perspective change through an ethnic and socioeconomic lens. Gather pre-semester abroad data and post-semester data in an effort to intentionally identify frames of reference on a range of factors before and after the experience in a new context abroad. This research would provide insight into the diverse body of students who study abroad represented at an institution.

**Spiritual development across CCCU.** Further explore spiritual development in students studying abroad across multiple CCCU institutions. Distributing an inventory focusing on Fowler’s stages of faith (refer to Holcomb & Nonneman, 2004) both pre-study abroad and post-study abroad will provide useful data to the CCCU at large. Using a mixed methods approach and pairing this inventory with narrative interviews will supply rich understanding of spiritual perspective change that occurs as in student lives through the study abroad experience.

**Cross-program analysis in single institution.** Replicate this study using participants from the same university attending various study abroad programs. Looking at perspective change that occurs for students traveling in different countries would allow for deeper understanding of perspective change in the landscapes of exploration, intellectual pursuit, and community life.

**Summary**

This narrative study explored the perspective changes that occurred in the lives of eight CCCU students from Azusa Pacific University, who studied abroad at Oxford. Through their reflections, it became evident that perspective changes happened for
participants through experiences in the landscapes of daily exploration, intellectual pursuit, and a life lived in community. Within the stories they told, moments of self-realization occurred alongside inner conflicts related to tensions in values, beliefs, and a sense of belonging and connectedness. For many individuals, these perspective changes resulted in a recognized independence, confidence, and a sense of agency.

Due to the positive gains participants experienced abroad, the reentry process was more challenging than the initial entry into the setting abroad for most. These challenges provided a framework for recommendations targeted at study abroad directors, administrators, and instructors in a higher education setting. They include instituting a reentry seminar course following the semester away, providing mentorship and academic extension opportunities within major specific areas, integrating exploratory field trips and service learning projects and creating an inventory focused on community involvement for prospective sojourners. Recommendations for further research include exploring perspective changes between male and female participants, through the lens of ethnic and socioeconomic frames of reference, with expanded emphasis on spiritual development across CCCU institutions, and through different study abroad programs offered in the same university setting.
List of References


Appendix A: Interview Protocol

*Perspective transformations through the Oxford study abroad experience*

**Interviewer:** Christy M. Cooper

**Interviewee ID:**

**Date of Interview:**

**Time of Interview:**

**Place of Interview:**

**Interviewee Oxford Semester Year/Term:**

(ex. 2011, Fall)

**Year of Graduation from APU:**

(ex. 2012, Spring)

**Year in School When Abroad:**

(ex. Junior)

**Interview Questions**

1.) Describe a typical day during your Oxford experience; what might you be found doing?

2.) What led to your choice to travel abroad, and attend a program in Oxford specifically?

3.) Tell me a story about a highlight of your journey abroad in Oxford.

4.) Tell me a story about something that was challenging for you when you were abroad.

5.) Describe something that you experienced abroad that was disorienting, or a cultural shock.

6.) How do you think the experience in Oxford impacted you academically?

7.) How do you think the experience abroad impacted your spiritual life?

8.) In what ways was your view of life different upon returning home or to school after being abroad?

9.) What lasting impact has this experience had for you?
Appendix B: Follow-Up Interview Prompts

How do you think previous travel experiences contributed to your experience in Oxford?

How did your academic experience in Oxford make you feel?

How do you think your time in Oxford impacted your mental (emotional) health?

How do you think your time in Oxford impacted your physical health?

Tell me a story about your community life (relational) in Oxford.

Tell me a story about your spiritual life in Oxford. (is there an idea/example where you can share the challenging of your faith?)

How did it feel to come back to APU after traveling in Oxford?

How do you think being in Oxford impacted your view of your self? (identity)
Appendix C: Letter of Invitation

August XX, 2016

Dear ____________,

My name is Christy Cooper and I am a doctoral candidate pursuing an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and Management at Drexel University, Sacramento under the supervision of Dr. Ed Bureau, Principal Investigator, and dissertation Supervising Professor. You are being provided this letter and being contacted to possibly be a participant in a research study I am conducting.

The study is being conducted as part of the dissertation requirement for my doctoral degree. The title of my dissertation is: **Transformation through Disorientation: A Narrative Approach to Perspective Change in Study Abroad Contexts.** The purpose of this study is to explore the perspective changes that may have occurred in the lives of Coalition of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) students through their participation in the Oxford Programme for Undergraduate Studies (OPUS). As cross-cultural travel commonly precipitates culture shock, understanding experiences of cultural disorientation may provide significant insight into spiritual, academic, and identity related perspective transformations that emerged for participants through studying abroad.

To be eligible to participate in the study you need to have:

1) Participated in the Oxford Programme for Undergraduate Studies during your time at Azusa Pacific University.
2) Graduated from Azusa Pacific University during the last five years (2011-2016).
3) Willing to voluntarily participate in two to three interviews (in person, or through a virtual platform), lasting no longer than 90 minutes each.

Participants will be selected on a first come first serve basis. When you indicate your interest in participating, you will be notified by e-mail, and then asked to schedule a telephone call. General information regarding the year participants studied abroad will be collected and recorded on a spreadsheet, and the consent form will be reviewed at this time. Should you agree to participate, interview meeting times, a location, and the study procedures will be solidified.

You will be observed and the conversations will be recorded to assure that your words, voice, and story are accurately represented. If you choose to participate, you will be invited and encouraged to share artifacts such as blog posts, journals, and photographs from your study abroad experience. Interviews will likely be conducted between August and October 2016. I will be available to meet with you at your convenience and at a location of your choosing.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary; all participants will remain confidential (identified only by a pseudonym). You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. There are no known risks and/or discomforts associated with this study.

If you have any questions, I would be happy to talk to you in more detail. I can be reached at 626-665-2323 or by email at cmc495@drexel.edu.

Sincerely,

Christy Cooper
Doctoral Candidate in Educational Leadership and Management
Drexel University Sacramento