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ARTICLE

Transformation Inspired from the Margins

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Literature on international study and civic engagement acknowledges multiple conditions through which students may achieve personal and intellectual transformation. Less is written about student and faculty transformation when courses reside at intersecting disciplinary margins. Funded by the Luce Initiative on Asian Studies and the Environment (LIASE), two co-located, month-long, off-campus study courses situated faculty and student development within the thematic context of environmentalism in Japan. During the month available, by teaching at the margins, or in other words, beyond familiar lifestyles and areas of knowledge, we examined powerful common-sense assumptions regarding proper questions and answers about environmental challenges. Paired natural and social-science courses explored grassroots efforts to achieve environmental sustainability at the margins, in terms of socio-cultural structures, geography and place, normal life and crisis, cross-cultural and cross-language communication, and between wealthy and developing economies. This article contributes to our knowledge of transformative experiential learning by (1) documenting our processes in and products from co-designing and co-teaching these courses, and (2) reporting on learning resultant from the courses in the words of participating students and faculty, with their consent.

Keywords: Interdisciplinary teaching; environmentalism; experiential learning; sustainability; Japan; LIASE

Introduction

Intensive, community-based study-away programs can prompt students and faculty to reframe environmental challenges and solutions. We report on two recently developed, co-located, month-long off-campus study courses that situate faculty and student development and learning within the thematic context of environmentalism in Japan. We created the courses as part of the Luce Initiative on Asian Studies and the Environment (LIASE). Teaching these courses reinforced our commitment to research and teaching that values community partners, collaborative teaching practices, experiential learning, and interdisciplinarity. We have observed that students' self-reflection yields richer, more nuanced value statements regarding off-campus study than the higher education literature would expect, and that students' comments frequently point to encountering the margins as a key factor in their learning. Furthermore, we found that students recognized how these courses immerse them in contested cultures and challenge them to create meaning themselves because the people they meet in Japan choose to respond to environmental challenges.

For the first decades of the twenty-first century, educators held cosmopolitanism as a treasured goal (Houston & Lange 2018; Kahn & Agnew 2017; Perry et al. 2015). In a related, longer-running conversation, educators promoted intercultural learning as a key component of students' individual development and skill acquisition (Vande Berg 2009; Vande Berg 2014; Vande Berg & O'Donnell 2018). Both viewpoints rest upon often unarticulated assumptions that students should develop global mindsets and intercultural competencies in order to thrive professionally in an era of intense globalization. Yet student outcomes beyond earned degrees and career success remain largely unexamined.

The debates within these two conversations revolve around the best methods for promoting international awareness and transformative student development. Researchers have sought to evaluate the relative merits of various forms of international education on- and off-campus. Many studies focus on individual courses or institutions, and as case studies these add to our understanding by yielding hypotheses worth exploring through more generalized investigation

(George, Bennett, Miller, & Lynn-Jones 2005). For example, small case studies point to the value of experiential learning across global/local partnerships (Houston & Lange 2018; Simm & Marvell 2015; VeLure Roholt & Fisher 2013) and careful self-reflection (Perry et al. 2015; Sawhney, Graver, & Breitkopf 2018). Larger studies have focused on individual development measured through cross-cultural competencies – these find that students achieve greater intercultural skills when guided carefully by educators on site (Vande Berg 2009). Debates continue about the extent to which the psychometric instruments used in such studies measure what they purport to measure (Matsumoto & Hwang 2013).

These findings and related initiatives to improve undergraduate education and advance liberal arts education through the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) inform our study. We appreciate their guidance on potentially meaningful aspects of student learning, and their call for additional studies of actual student learning (Brownell & Swaner 2009). In addition we recognize Vande Berg et al's caution not to take students' claims of transformation at face value (2014).

We argue that the research cited does not interrogate its assumed goals and findings sufficiently. Educators often accept uncritically that cosmopolitanism and intercultural competencies are good, because these mindsets are believed to be useful to students. Part of the problem is educators' reliance on methodological, individualistic, developmental, psychological measures, such as the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI);¹ these metrics are incapable of recognizing cultures as continually contested, dynamic, and flexible. We suggest that educators address more than such simplistically framed individual development measurements if we can hope to achieve transformation. We should teach and learn about collective environments, and design learning experiences that invite students to grow individually, achieve professional satisfaction, and see past their own individual trajectories. We want students to recognize that they are immersed in contested cultures that require them to make meaning themselves, and to both see and experience that others whom they

¹ <https://idiinventory.com/> accessed Nov 1, 2018.

encounter through study away are likewise involved in meaning-making that arises from within specific socio-cultural, historic, and political contexts.

Student outcomes involve more than individual skills and competencies. The outcomes rest upon a larger understanding of and participation in contested socio-cultural spaces. Tying together environmental science and Asian studies has allowed us to deepen our ability to articulate to students why such learning matters. Environmental sustainability, as a focal topic, relies upon this kind of richer conceptualization of the global. We have committed ourselves to teaching students about the long historical traditions of linking the global and the local and to invite them to participate in those processes. Avenell underscores this when he describes “the transformations made possible by repositioning the local in spatial imaginaries that transcend the nation,” and how this “confirms the critical importance of the local as an ideational platform and motivating factor in environmental knowledge and transnational action in the modern world” (2017, 23).

Five years into our shared teaching project, we found that some of our students realized simple outcomes as predicted by the research reviewed above, such that they understood themselves to have pursued individual development through our courses. Others, however, grasped that they had been invited into a broader sort of transformation by us and by the people they met in Japan. Over the remainder of this essay we illustrate how the course structure, particularly the places and people engaged, provoked our students to respond to contested spaces situated at socio-cultural margins with personal lifestyle changes and a better understanding of how they fit into global environmental challenges. We explain how coupling shifted lifestyles with complex readings and the chance to live in community with pragmatic utopians of varied visions sets students up to recognize radical possibilities for a globally aware, locally grounded, and environmentally sustainable lifestyle that eclipses the neoliberal options most often presented to them.

Co-Designed and Co-Taught Courses

The *Luce Initiative for Asian Studies and the Environment* exploration and implementation grants allowed us to foster faculty and student development in the Asian Studies and Environmental Studies departments, initiate professional

collaborations, and attend to institutional relationships. The grants afforded us time to explore, learn, experience, and imagine, and then craft innovative courses that found synergies between our expertise and our backgrounds. Being teacher-scholars at a predominantly undergraduate liberal arts institution meant that faculty knew one another prior to this collaboration. The LIASE timing was ideal as Paul was entering the final year of a grant-funded community collaboration to scientifically assess the functional health of a small local watershed subjected to heavy agricultural land use and bordering two urban expansion boundaries. Kathy was eager to build on recent research about civic engagement in Japan. We realized that grassroots civic action linked our lines of inquiry, influenced the way we taught our related subject matter, and afforded us opportunities to set up meaningful student learning.

We grounded our collaboration in an effort to create student-centered learning that would foster global perspectives. We began by collaborating with other colleagues and student-research assistants to host on-campus guests from China and Japan, and by funding several out-of-the-country undergraduate research experiences (in China and Japan). These trips included visits to partners in Japan, as a way to bring student voices into the planning conversations. In doing this, we heeded the call to build greater transparency into course development (Fisher 2016, Yosso 2015). The early cooperation with students led us to understand that they sought: (1) opportunities that fit smoothly into established curricular and co-curricular frameworks; (2) activities that asked them to practice what they were learning/had learned in courses; and (3) experiences that they could engage in effectively in cross-cultural contexts with modest preparation. This feedback resulted in our decision to design two paired courses taught during our January term that aimed to deepen collaboration between the college and Asian partner institutions, and to build curricular connections between our two departments. The faculty collaboration and shared experiences mirrored those called for by Fisher et al., where, “Faculty need opportunities to ‘co-develop’ and try new teaching approaches, simultaneously and together” (2016, 11).

The first, larger course (class number 277) of about 20 students explored environmental sustainability in Japan through a focus on civic engagement, community leadership, and grassroots initiatives at the margins of majority culture.

It leveraged the facilities and community connections of the Asian Rural Institute (ARI) in Nasushiobara, Tochigi, Japan. The second course (class number 396) of six to eight students employed an undergraduate research model to ask how environmental inquiry could examine questions that would help ARI staff assess and improve their rural leadership training and organic farm operations. Both courses drew attention to how the March 2011 earthquake, tsunami, and Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power-plant meltdown revitalized grassroots environmental movements in Japan, and how institutions and landscapes recovered from such a disturbance. To date, the #277 environmental sustainability course operated in January 2015, 2016, 2018, and 2019; the #396 undergraduate research course complemented it in 2016, 2018, and 2019. In addition to our work with ARI, the courses connected St. Olaf students and faculty to their peers at Japanese universities, specifically students and faculty from the Tokyo University of Agriculture (Nodai). They shared their own distinctive approaches to community-based environmental sustainability via their work on a Mountain Village Regeneration Project in Nagawa Town, Nagano Prefecture. For the entire month-long term, students and faculty from the two courses lived, studied and traveled alongside each other with only a few class sessions per week running independently.

We provided opportunities to spark transformation in the short time (one month) because of the intensity, iteration, and relevance of the experience. We designed our courses to provide true immersive experiences, according to several meanings of that term. We created intense social interactions by spending from eight to 16 hours a day together for most of the month, studying, doing chores, traveling and relaxing together. Students and faculty took only four or five days “off” throughout the four-week course. We rotated students in and out of pairings, small groups, and full class discussions, chores, homework and travel teams, allowing them to have iterative interactions with each other and with us as professors. We provided them with a rich substantive education through readings, field-site visits, and interactions with knowledgeable local people. We situated them in living and studying situations that immediately demonstrated the relevance of what they had read and heard. Finally, we required them to pause and reflect at several points throughout the semester regarding what they had learned and done.

The first immersion was set at three sites in Japan: Tokyo; Nasushiobara, Tochigi Prefecture; and Nagawa-machi, Nagano Prefecture. All students found something new about these environments, regardless of their personal backgrounds. In Tokyo, we focused on food systems in the metropolitan setting as we guided students to observe how people got food, with attention to marketing and sales across classes and neighborhoods, noticing packaging, taste, presentation, price, point of origin and social setting. In addition, we noted how food systems intersected with transportation and waste systems, through both direct observation and brief complementary readings and instruction about Tokyo. We dedicated five days to Tokyo for orientation to Japan – understood as another wealthy democracy grappling with environmental questions. The conversations began to pull students away from the unexamined assumptions about food and environment grounded in their own families' lives.

Our second site relied upon cooperation with the Tokyo University of Agriculture. For two decades, a professor there in International Agriculture and Food Studies has run a project which links his students to the people and community organizations in Nagawa-machi, Nagano, as part of the Mountain Village Revitalization Project (山村再生プロジェクト). This project involved varied forms of cooperation among local residents, professors, and students to increase community sustainability for this rural town beset by population aging and decline, and economic stagnation (Tokyo University of Agriculture, 2019). We joined one of their regular monthly weekends on site, where we attended a seasonal festival and engaged in culturally rich holiday traditions tied to agricultural life.

Our third site and primary base was at the Asian Rural Institute in Nasushiobara, Tochigi Prefecture. ARI educates rural leaders from poorer areas of the world, primarily in Asia and Africa, with attention to organic agriculture as a form of community development. We resided on their campus during their off season; joined in the daily patterns of life including farm chores, cooking, shared meals, and daily gatherings in their chapel. We held discussion classes and researched projects at ARI. We relied upon ARI's networks to introduce us to multiple guest speakers and field sites, including a rich array of organizations involved in alternative food systems, even as we shared our own networks with them. We spend nearly three weeks living at ARI.

The next (second) immersion involved moving students outside the high-energy-use lifestyle common to liberal arts college students in the United States. While at college and in their home lives, most of our students chose what to eat from a position of abundantly available food and associated products. They lived and studied in rooms with carefully moderated temperatures that required little attention or thought. Before study-away, some students had thought about the ecological footprint of their lifestyle; more had not. Regardless, few had studied the systems that produced their lifestyles, the negative consequences those could generate, and any human responses to their living in a profoundly different way. While at ARI, our students lived without the easy availability of prepared food, out-of-season produce, and centrally controlled heat. There was limited space heating. We ate what the farm produced, meals that we planned and cooked ourselves. We cut way back on electricity-fueled entertainment. For the most part, students found that while they might miss their creature comforts, they could live without them.

The third immersion involved conversation and participant observation with “pragmatic utopian” people, who had determined to set up their own lives in contradiction to common-sense expectations in wealthy countries. We met many people committed to producing food organically and eating locally. We met professors concerned with fostering resilience and sustainability in communities affected by depopulation and profound environmental degradation. We met Japanese university students who gave a weekend every month to cooperate with people who lived in a little-known rural town away from Tokyo. We met entrepreneurs aiming to shift household energy consumption. As we interacted with the different groups of people, our students learned how rich cultural patterns and repertoires provided resources for reimagining lifestyles in more sustainable ways. In addition, they critically learned that utopian pragmatists vary tremendously in how they claim culture, what dreams they work toward, and how willing they are to engage with dominant economic and political systems.

Learning Results among Faculty and Students

As faculty, we value both the learning derived from these paired courses and the grant-seeking and management that gave rise to them. We appreciate the opportunities

we have gained to expand our professional expertise in terms of scholarly subjects and debates. We value the relationships with new community partners as well as colleagues at our home institution because of the friendships and fresh insights about environmental sustainability and Japan that they all brought to us. We have been rewarded by the chance to create intense, meaningful learning opportunities for students that differ from our ordinary teaching assignments. And students reported meaningful learning in multiple venues, including writing completed during the course, conversations with us in the months/years since, and the formal study included herein.

Faculty Learning

By choosing to facilitate multiple undergraduate off-campus study-away or study-abroad programs, we have constantly found new insights into our professions and the processes of teaching, learning, and living which significantly differ from our on-campus work. Many of our insights dovetail with the pedagogical structures and functions reported by Jasinski as contributing to the distinctiveness of faculty-led off-campus learning (2018).

The significance of faculty-student contact should not be underestimated. While living and learning together, both faculty and students take advantage of formal and informal moments to process course content, debrief about excursions, and discuss the fuller picture of student and faculty lives. Students are surprised to learn that faculty have other responsibilities that do not disappear with a new geographic locale. Yes, we have assignments due (recommendation letters, budget reviews, manuscripts, next semester's syllabus, etc.). We miss our loved ones, work to maintain our homes from far away, and struggle with the same adjustments to new places and cultural contexts. The veil lifts and students see their professors as humans. In similar ways, we observe how students manage their health issues, engage with course assignments and readings, employ technology for coursework and maintaining social connections, and open themselves to new contexts.

As faculty leaders, we initially doubted whether co-locating our courses at a rural leadership training center and working organic farm situated at the margins of Japanese society would serve the student experience. We worried that we were too far

out of the mainstream because the ARI lifestyle displaces us and students from the services we expect, and grounds us among people who have dedicated themselves to an alternative lifestyle. The farm chores and maintenance we undertook illustrate local material and energy cycles. We harvested foods and transformed them into meals we cooked for ourselves and others working on site; the farm is over 90 percent food self-sufficient. Solar panels supplied modest thermal heating to some community spaces, and layers of clothing along with space heaters just took the edge off the cold. Limited internet bandwidth and coverage enabled us to cut much electricity-fueled entertainment. The group engaged with volunteers and staff about experiences working and living across the world, including many socioeconomically challenged places in Africa, South Asia, and SE Asia. Yet our concerns were largely misplaced. Being at the margins turned out to be one of the core aspects of how these courses provoked student learning, as explained below. As we read and researched what was “sustainable,” our in-country living experiences stood in direct contrast to the normalcy of non-sustainable factors in our own lives back on campus. Coupling academic readings with lived experiences produced a depth of perspective seldom seen in our on-campus experience. We now wonder how we might bring more of this kind of learning back to our institution.

Another kind of faculty learning rested upon our good fortune in being able to bring a member of the college staff with us each year. While their absence created coverage and some budgetary pressure within their on-campus unit, it paid off in multiple aspects of professional development and programmatic assistance among faculty, staff and students. Over the four years of course offerings, staff have joined the program from our student life office, vocation and career office, administrative assistant group, and instructional technology team. Each came away with a new appreciation for what off-campus study entails, insight into the faculty preparation and course delivery, and an improved understanding of both how to help students process their experiences once they are back on campus, and how to help others consider adding this kind of learning to their academic plan. Once they are in-country, these individuals help faculty leaders identify, address, and respond to student health needs and other emergencies, and use their professional expertise to

aid students in completing course assignments or in considering life choices. While staff experiences have yet to fully manifest themselves back on campus, we have successfully introduced others to the nexus of environment, sustainability, Japan, and off-campus study, and we have invited them to consider how their work at the institution can help campus learning goals move forward.

Finally, as faculty we have come to appreciate the significance of the group and sense of community based on the learning experience. Most years when we begin the course, few students know many of their peers well, if at all. The allotted time and space to share experiences has served to bring learners together. At first we wondered if students would dwell on discomfort – it does bind them together – but they quickly moved beyond that. We observed them debriefing one another about their course readings, reflecting on the day's chores, and discovering one another as fellow human beings. In addition, integration into the ARI community moved students away from self needs into the needs of others. The layered aspects of community enabled each student to sort out multiple spaces and roles to occupy, and continually provided different frameworks in which the individual could engage. This “being in this together” idea mirrored some of our experiences teaching on-campus courses with academic civic engagement components, yet the 24/7 living took it to another level.

Student Learning

Our observations that students learn a great deal in these two courses have been reiterated by a survey of past participants, which we discuss in this last section. A high proportion of student writing for these courses impressed us as exceptionally insightful in every iteration. We noted how well students connected the experiential learning, field trips, and readings in required blog posts, research, and final integrated papers. During the term and in conversations in the months and years after, we sensed that students found multiple avenues of learning in this month-long course for deep development and meaningful self-reflection that extended beyond individual concerns. In other words, we found that inviting students to engage in experiential learning and critical reflection as part of their study-abroad coursework yielded

deeper learning. As Perry et al. note, citing Dewey, “...experience without critical reflection is just an experience... Whether an experience and subsequent reflection leads to transformation of self/perspective or affirmation of self/perspective is not the point; the point is that the process of reflection is imperative for learning to occur” (2015, 325). Students expressed their learning and their process around three broad topics: (1) pragmatic actions resulting from the course and relationships in the community, (2) reframing their own context in light of their experiences while philosophizing about individual agency and their own responsibility, and (3) processing how their academic trajectory was affected by experiential learning in this place. To some extent, students’ self-reflections pointed to personal development as imagined by the IDI. Yet overall, we argue that they gained broader outcomes and transformation in their approaches to and understanding of self in the context of global environmental challenges and solutions.

In hope of more systematic evidence to complement our impressions of student learning while in the field, we assessed student learning via an IRB-approved, online (Google Form), anonymous survey that asked four open-ended questions and four demographic questions (see Appendix A). In October of 2018, we contacted by email all 74 students who had enrolled in one of the five courses offered in 2015, 2016 and 2018, and received replies from 19 for a response rate of 26 percent. Our four open-ended questions were informed by prior conversations with enrolled students during and after their classes with us, and by our reading of their written materials submitted for grading purposes. We invited reflection. The questions were as follows:

1. How did your environmental sustainability/research course fit within your overall St Olaf experience? Consider, for example: do you understand your course as having allowed you to explore a new field, deepen ongoing studies and interests, seek adventure, spend time with friends, meet new people, broaden your worldview?
2. Compared to other experiences you had during college, what aspects of Environment in Japan course(s) are particularly memorable or distinctive to you?

3. What, if any, lasting lessons, ideas, practices, questions, habits, and/or relationships did participating in the Environment in Japan course(s) create for you? Please describe below.
4. What about the course experience, specifically, allowed you to gain these lasting lessons? Consider: people you got to know, excursions, coursework, lifestyle, personal insights, etc.

We employed multiple approaches to discern how students processed their in-country experiences and how they identified, examined, framed, and reframed common sense assumptions about environmental challenges. We began our analysis with structural topic modeling (STM).² Structural topic models employ statistical analysis of input text to *infer* the content of topics under study. The power of the STM approach lies in its ability to recognize multiple topics within any particular open-ended response, and that it requires few assumptions about the particular texts under study (Roberts, et al. 2014). STM defines topics as distributions or collections of words (vocabulary) that represent distinguishable and interpretable themes. The model allows the analyst to articulate an arbitrary number of possible topics in advance and then execute the analysis under each of those numerical parameters. When executed, the model “blocks” or clusters words into those parameters in ways that maximize the likelihood that a topic is captured; it expresses that capture as a probability of how well the collected vocabulary matches each open-ended response. Note that the model does not explicitly articulate the interpretative theme; the analyst needs to make sense of those selected and clustered vocabularies.

For this STM analysis, the team used the R package available on the Comprehensive R Archive Network (Roberts, et al. 2018). Completed surveys were compiled and the text associated with the four open-ended response questions extracted into an input text document. Punctuation was removed and all capital letters were changed to lowercase, yielding 76 open-ended entries from 19 completed surveys. After each iterative run of the model with 2, 3, 4, and 5 possible topics, the team examined the words that were both frequent and exclusive (FREX), as these terms potentially

² Many thanks to research assistant MyKhe Nguyen, who assisted the authors with STM analysis.

distinguish the topics. In each instance the team attempted to see how the words might hang together in meaningful ways. When the team had possible ideas for a given topic, it turned to individual responses with a high probability match (>0.90) as a means to ground-truth the topic identity. When the suite of words for each possible topic appeared to match themes, the team inferred from reading three to four relevant high-match entries, the numerical topic parameter was accepted. In all other cases the topic parameter was rejected.

STM analysis seeking three topics ($k = 3$) in respondents' answers to our survey yielded the best suggestions for distinctive categories, in our preliminary interpretation. The three topics were:

1. Self-reflection identified subsequent pragmatic actions related to the environment taken by respondent as a result of having been embedded in course and community relationships.
2. Self-reflection focused on philosophical discussions of individual agency and/or responsibility toward environmental concerns, placing self in the context of broader environmental issues.
3. Self-reflection about how the courses' experiential learning in specific places shaped respondent's academic trajectory.

The next step in our analysis was for co-authors to code each of the nineteen responses to determine the prevalence of each topic.³ We coded individually and then did a second round together to reconcile preliminary differences. If responses to the four open-ended questions pointed toward a dominant topic, understood as two-thirds or higher of the substantive content, we coded it as focused on that topic. At the end of this process we identified two responses as focused on topic 1, six as focused on topic 2, and eight as focused on topic 3. For the remaining three responses, we determined that there was no single dominant topic, but rather a shared focus on topics 1 and 3.

Table 1 summarizes this data.

³ While we gathered basic data in the survey about students' prior knowledge of Japan and Asia, environmental themes, and the extent to which they believed their personal identity shaped their learning, we did not analyze that data due to the low number of respondents.

We think these findings, while small in number and only suggestive, show that some students valued this course in ways consistent with assumptions embedded in higher-education literature referenced above: that global study matters because it is instrumentally useful to students who will likely build professional careers in an era of intense globalization. The largest number of respondents focused their replies upon how the course(s) shaped their academic trajectories. We might read academic trajectory as a loose proxy for career development, which is why we see some consistency between these results and the literature’s assumptions.

Yet 42 percent of our respondents did not focus upon academic trajectory or any other proxy for career, and another 16 percent did so only in combination with a focus on pragmatic actions they have taken since completing the course(s). Moreover, academic trajectory was only (at best) a very loose proxy for careers in a globalized world. Given that the courses address environmental issues and crisis, they directed students toward careers that arguably rest upon a distinctive conception of global systems.

Delving into the substantive content of responses showed that students could draw rich, nuanced lessons from these courses’ placement at the margins of disciplinary fields, places, and lifestyles. **Tables 2** and **3** reveal outcomes that deserve broader attention in higher-education debates. These findings, scant though they are, direct our attention to a different set of valuable outcomes from study abroad than what we might measure via the IDI. The students reported on people engaged in contested policies and taking stances on tensions within Japanese society’s environmental practices. They noticed differences between dominant and alternative food production systems, and between urban and rural lifestyles.

Table 1: Distribution of Topical Focus in Student Self Reflections.

Dominant Self-Reflection Topic	Number of focused responses	Percentage of total
(Topic 1) Pragmatic actions	2	10.5
(Topic 2) Philosophical self-in-context	6	31.6
(Topic 3) Effect on academic trajectory	8	42.1
Mix of Topics 1 and 3	3	15.8

Table 2: Substantive Examples of the Three Dominant Topics.

Dominant Topic	Exemplar Answers
Pragmatic actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before taking this class, I knew very little about farming/agricultural science in general. After working on a farm and seeing how the farmers come up with new ideas to sustain their farm made me appreciate farming a lot more. It made me think more about how back home, the food I purchase mainly comes from packages that have traveled miles and miles just to get to the grocery store. Rotating the jobs helped me see what I am capable of doing. Cooking over there especially inspired me to experiment more with cooking for myself at home. • I am much more mindful of my footprint on society and just how much space I take up now especially whenever I'm on a train. I also strive more than I did before to reduce the amount of waste I produce whether that be by only getting as much food as I need at the cafe or by composting more effectively at home. • I have more appreciation for the food that I purchase, knowing how much work goes into producing something that most consider simple. I sometimes do Rajio-Taiso when I'm feeling stiff.
Philosophical self-in-context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The topics of disasters covered in this class...helped to contextualize and build a much deeper understanding of how to envision the relationship between people and nature, which are further complicated by the local context as well as top-down governmental policies... course really imparted to me that sustainability is not simply just a singular action that someone can check off and be done with. Sustainability is an awareness that permeates through life, an awareness that one has to actively keep at the forefront of one's mind if one is to act upon it. • The fact that we were responsible for maintaining the farm and thus feed ourselves was a really big responsibility that I felt was understated before this course. I had a greater appreciation for nearly everything when we returned to the metropolitan area, not to mention the United States. When I finally returned, I had a running counter of the amount of time and effort used to produce my food.... I truly do not look at food the same way anymore. Of course I was aware of the effort and time that went into food production from my life science background but the hands on experience at ARI made everything so much more real to me. The carrots we ate that night were the same ones my friends and I pulled from the cold hard ground earlier that morning, sown and cared for by ARI earlier that year. I began to mentally calculate the value of food; grocery shopping is a bit different now. I've also picked up the habit of doing a little bow whenever someone hands me anything.

(Contd.)

Dominant Topic	Exemplar Answers
Effect on academic trajectory	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· By breaking down large ideas into seemingly simple questions like “What is good food?” and “What is nature?”, the course navigated us toward questioning conventions to build our own opinions rather than blindly accepting customary viewpoints. The course did not leave us without hope, bringing us into contact with people who have spearheaded current and past efforts to contend with environmental crises in Japan. Connecting with these individuals and witnessing their grassroots work in action was invaluable and inspiring. They are now examples I recall when it feels as though our environmental crisis is insurmountable, providing the motivation to push a little harder to enact change. These experiences grounded the ideas we were contemplating in ways that a standard class could not.· Since taking the course, I now try to live with an environmental lens every day, considering how to be more sustainable in both small, single actions and larger habits. I frequently contemplate the relationship between humans and the rest of the planet, brainstorming ways to promote sustainable progress... The holistic manner in which we studied Japanese society’s views and actions towards nature went beyond the STEM approach to environmental sustainability. The course effectively demonstrated that a multifaceted approach to sustainable development is key to the health of our planet, looking at situations from social, political and scientific viewpoints. This sparked my current enthusiasm to pursue a career in environmental policy and sustainable urban development.· Not only was the trip a unique and engaging academic experience that was a deep study of sustainability and food culture in Japan... Furthermore, since the trip came during my final year at St. Olaf, it was a great “capstone” experience that was a culmination of my environmental studies major.· As an environmental studies major this course allowed me to fulfill the required experiential component in addition to deepening my understanding of the interdisciplinary nature of sustainability through a unique cultural and societal lens.... While taking classes at St. Olaf you learning in a classroom environment with Sustainability in Japan you are learning every moment of the day. The most distinctive aspect of Environment in Japan would have to be the different cultural experiences over the course of the month. Japan as a country is so different to any other country I have had the opportunity to visit. the juxtaposition of a highly developed country being so entwined with spirituality and nature. The seamless incorporation of temples, shrines and nature within an urban

(Contd.)

Dominant Topic	Exemplar Answers
	<p>landscape still boggles my mind....We could have read and studied the same course material in Northfield, MN but I don't believe the lessons I personally believe to have had the most lasting effects on me would have been conveyed in the same manner. I believe that physically being in Japan, visiting Fukushima Daiichi, living at the Asian Rural Institute, meeting with farm owners, and navigating the shelves of grocery stores in Tokyo all played a vital role in my experience.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · My experience studying environmental sustainability in Japan strongly influenced the way I think about my St. Olaf experience. The ability to study sustainable agriculture practices within a global context helped focus my growing passion for food as an environmental/cultural intermediary and a historical focus on the conception of Japan's environment pushed me to pursue further study in environmental history.

Table 3: Substantive References to the “Margins” as Consequential.

Margins	Exemplar Answers (respondent # and dominant topic)
Community-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Mealtimes in the ARI community and Working on the farm with the ARI community (R2, topic 2) · The community was built by spending so much time together over the month (R12, topics 1 & 3) · developed long lasting relationships with my fellow students from the trip, my relationships with Prof. Jackson & Prof. Tegtmeyer Pak (R19, topic 3)
Crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Fukushima was an amazing experience. I was so afraid to go, but it taught me so much. Mostly I had to escape my comfort zone (R8, topic 3) · Mainly our discussions of and trip to the nuclear explosion (R16, topic 3)
Experiential-learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · working on a farm (R1, topic 2) · cultural experiences (e.g., Mochi [sic]-making) (R3, topic 3) · The course was structured in a way that emphasized and encouraged students to learn through cultural experiences. This meant as a part of the class, we were supposed to explore, soak in, and observe the way of living that was entirely different from our lives in the United States. Some of the best learning happens through DOING, not just from a textbook (R7, topic 1)

(Contd.)

Margins	Exemplar Answers (respondent # and dominant topic)
Grassroots people/ pragmatic utopians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · All the various components of the course including: field-trips, talking to stakeholders, and generally people who are affected (R11, topic 3) · I am a hands on learner, so the structure of this class was wonderful for me with the labor, excursions, and lessons. Each of these alone would have been wonderful, but together they solidified the lessons and made the course material real (R14, topic 3) · The hands-on learning that took place throughout the month (R17, topics 1 & 3) · Meeting and talking to the passionate people at ARI (R6, topic 2) · The professors from Nodai, Staff and Volunteers at ARI, and the other students helped make it a very positive experience (R10, topic 2) · Spending time at ARI and learning how they lived and limited their waste by so much it was honestly inspiring (R12, topics 1 & 3) · The daily opportunities to talk with the ARI staff, and the volunteers from other countries (R13, topic 1) · Meeting the students of our own age that also have interest in what we are studying. Also, meeting people that don't have their life focused around tourism lent to more genuine conversations (R13, topic 1) · Volunteering at the Asian Rural Institute allowed us to learn about the sustainable practices they used as well as the moral code behind their actions (R18, topic 2) · The various field trips we took added to the arsenal of sustainable methods we participated in at ARI. From the creation of non-electric appliances to forest regeneration to the complex recycling system used in Japan to community-run food cooperatives, we found sustainability everywhere we went (R18, topic 2)
Interdisciplinarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Paul provided a ton of biological and scientific knowledge. As someone who didn't have much of a scientific background, Professor Jackson provided the right amount of context and helped me understand radioactive isotopes (R11, topic 3)
Lifestyle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · A big part was being responsible for composting your scraps at the end of each meal. Doing that everyday helped me see how much food I waste and encouraged me to pay more attention to my own body and its wants/needs. Also attending the morning "chapel sessions" (forgot their official name) helped teach me how to appreciate the people in my life (R1, topic 2)

(Contd.)

Margins	Exemplar Answers (respondent # and dominant topic)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · All of the living experiences at ARI and especially the chore and food related tasks informed my lessons regarding communal living. I found the excursions to visit Teikei sites and other agricultural sites especially impactful (R9, topic 3) · Regimented daily farm-work (R13, topic 1) · The lifestyle was the most impacting part of the experience. I think it's very smart to partner with ARI, it really made the trip more unique (R15, topics 1 & 3) · We worked alongside the staff and volunteers at ARI, physically took care of both the land and animals there, and even had time to explore Tokyo on our own (R17, topics 1 & 3)
Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Meet students from Japan (R2, topic 2) · We were not focused on traditional "tourist" activities, and we actively tried to visit less well-known places in Japan · We could have read and studied the same course material in Northfield, MN but I don't believe the lessons I personally believe to have had the most lasting effects on me would have been conveyed in the same manner. I believe that physically being in Japan, visiting Fukushima Daiichi, living at the Asian Rural Institute, meeting with farm owners, and navigating the shelves of grocery stores in Tokyo all played a vital role in my learning experience (R4, topic 3) · Something about rural Japan that was very relaxing and beautiful to me (R10, topic 2)

For example, as documented in **Table 2**, respondents focused on pragmatic actions and reported substantive shifts in their lifestyles, with particular attention to the food they ate. Those addressing self-in-context reported increased attention to systems thinking relevant to environmental challenges, and a greater awareness of where they fit as individuals within those systems. Even students focused on the third topic, which comes closest to the individual development the literature directs us to aim for, attended to broader cultural and historical contexts when reflecting upon how the course shaped their individual studies.

While the small scale of this study precludes conclusive causal claims, as a close case study we can generate suggestions for future research. In **Table 3**, we report on respondents' ideas about which aspects of this course seemed most distinctive to them. That information provided evidence that our courses' locations at the "margins" set the stage for the meaningful learning they reported in their self-reflections. Students'

reflections on food systems, and sustainability more generally, rested upon the specific siting of these courses at the margins in terms of lifestyle and place. From reading their survey responses, we confirmed our understanding from teaching and grading that seven distinct dimensions of marginal siting fueled their appreciation that they could transform their relationships to environmental sustainability. Those seven aspects include (1) the community-based nature of our lifestyle during these courses, (2) exposure to people grappling with the triple disaster of 2011, (3) intense experiential learning on an organic farm, (4) opportunities to meet many different “grassroots” people who had chosen to live outside the mainstream in order to come closer to their dreams, (5) the interdisciplinary cooperation between professors, (6) the changed lifestyle that comes from spending time at ARI, and (7) the opportunity to be in Japan, and especially, outside the major tourist areas. **Table 3** shares respondents’ own words for describing each of these marginal sitings that mattered to them.

Conclusion

The opportunity to design, teach, and then reflect upon these two courses has renewed our faith in our students’ ability to ask new questions and seek new answers around both environmental sustainability and how people and place respond to major disturbance. Our experience offers insights into others committed to international education and student transformation. First, we argue that displacing students to the margins in multiple ways can fuel deep learning – from the US to Japan, from rural to urban and back again, from the privileged life of enjoying any and all foods at any time in a climate-controlled setting, to eating what can be grown at a single farm. Second, we argue that we can expect richer outcomes from such experiences than what the educational literature predicts. Rather than simply improving students’ personal development as measured by the IDI, we can expect students to gain a deeper understanding of counter-cultural thinkers and movements while also inviting them into broader reflections on possible lifestyles and responses to environmental challenges. Our experiences, as documented in this case study, complicate educational researchers’ assumptions that study abroad matters mostly for linear development or career training.

Additional Files

The additional files for this article can be found as follows:

- **Appendix A.** Environment in Japan: Then & Now (Survey). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/ane.308.s1>
- **Appendix B.** stm: R Package Survey Analysis. k (topics) = 3. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/ane.308.s2>

Competing Interests

KTP served on the volunteer board of the American Friends of the Asian Rural Institute (AFARI). PJ declares no competing interests.

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