An Investigation of Cultural Awareness: Knowledge, Attitudes Experience and Education

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An Investigation of Cultural Awareness: Knowledge, Attitudes, Experience and Education

Honors Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Bachelor of Psychology

In the College of Arts and Sciences
at Salem State University

By
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Dr. Sophia Evett
Faculty Advisor
Department of Psychology

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Commonwealth Honors Program
Salem State University
2016
Abstract

For my senior honors thesis, I surveyed 84 convenience sampled participants to uncover their attitudes, knowledge, experiences, and to decipher how Salem State University has impacted diversity in their lives. This study is important because the faces of the world are ever changing and inter-racial experiences will shape professionalism. Therefore I wanted to discover how diversity has played into the lives of Salem State University students. Significant correlations were found between the four variables, and between the second part of the survey. Students were surveyed based on a seven point scale and one open response question. Participants were then asked to label a map of the United States or list as many states as they could if they could not identify states, then asked to name as many countries as they could according to continent. Implications of these findings are further discussed.
Since the 17th century, the land that we call the United States of America has had an ever-changing and growing population. People of all different cultures and ethnicities have walked miles expanding the roots of America for opportunities and freedom. But how can a country uphold its greatness if we lack global awareness and we underestimate the value and importance of diversity? If you were to ask a college student if they knew the difference between culture, ethnicity and race, what do you think they would say? Can “America’s future” have an educated conversation about the world? Does a college student know where other countries in the world are located? Global awareness is an important topic that should be part of college students lives. Diversity, cultural knowledge, experiences, and attitudes are valuable concepts for college students to acquire.

Cultural intelligence is regarded as one of the essential skills of the 21st century, and should be a learning experience spread across higher education (Lopes-Murphy 2014). As students emerge into their desired professions they will achieve success not just from their college education, but by possessing cultural intelligence and having a basic competency of world knowledge. Acquiring a global mindset will allow future graduates to function in the professional world (Lopes-Murphy, 2014). Many Americans can think back to elementary and early middle school days when they learned the 50 states, or the countries of the world, but how many people actually retain that information? Our education system teaches about WWI and WWII, Vietnam, and other important historical events, but that is not enough. How will students become culturally intelligent? At Salem State University all students are required to complete classes that fall under general education curriculum. Under these graduation requirements students must complete courses that explore world cultures, the historical past, and contemporary society. Do these courses allow students to gain useful knowledge about different cultures?
Baffled by a conversation I had between two other college students, I asked the first student (21 year old, nursing major) if she knew where Haiti is located. She then replied “Africa?” while the other student replied, “I have no idea… I just know they had a really bad earthquake.” Both were then asked if they know where the Dominican Republic was located. Student 2 (20 year old, nursing major) responded “in the Caribbean.” I then asked the student why she didn’t know this, and she said “does not really matter to me, because what is outside of Massachusetts does not concern me”. Through this personal experience, the knowledge, or lack of, and attitudes amongst these students encouraged me to discover how other students felt about diversity and I started to develop the present study.

**Cultural Awareness & Cultural Intelligence**

Since the 1980’s immigration to the U.S has quadrupled, many individuals migrating from non-English speaking countries (Liu & Sokhey, 2014). This significant growth may create an opportunity to share traditions and learn about each other’s culture, yet research conducted on the international awareness of undergraduate education demonstrated significant gaps in the cultural understanding of undergraduates. In a survey of 3,000 undergraduates (Torney-Purta, 2001) reported self-assessed language competences, nearly all seniors reported having studied a foreign language, but only half could count to ten, recite the weekdays and answer simple questions. About a third of students could order a simple meal at a restaurant while fewer than ten percent felt competent to understand news broadcasts or movies. Exposure to other languages promotes in-depth thinking, comparison and appreciation of other countries where a non-English language is spoken. Torney-Purta (2001, p. 202) reports that while many students stated interest in meeting people from other countries, students were uncomfortable around people of different cultures, revealing relatively superficial interest.
Van Dyne’s research investigates how cultural intelligences can lead to successful leadership and high quality relationships in our world (Van Dyne, Ang & Livermore, 2009). An individuals’ capability to function effectively across cultures is cultural intelligence (Lopes-Murphy, 2014, p. 288). Cultural intelligence promotes leadership qualities (Van Dyne, Ang & Livermore, 2009), mindfulness and other skills needed when encountering cross cultural experiences (Lopes-Murphy, 2014). Van Dyne et al. (2009) developed a four factor cultural intelligence (CQ) model: Motivational CQ, Cognitive CQ, Metacognitive CQ, and Behavioral CQ (Van Dyne, et al., 2009). “Cognitive CQ” involves and compares different cultural norms, values and practices (Lopes-Murphy, 2014). “Metacognitive CQ” prepares individuals for cross-cultural encounters through awareness, and understanding different cultures (Lopes-Murphy, 2014, Van-Dyne, 2009). “Behavioral CQ” allows cultural interactions to succeed through appropriate behaviors and adaptations to both verbal and nonverbal communications (Lopes-Murphy, 2014). The fourth part of the model is Motivational CQ the desire and interest for individuals to lean about other cultures (Lopes-Murphy, 2014). Motivational CQ also refers to having the ability to work through and be engaged in cross-cultural challenges and conflict. This model as a whole, suggests that with drive, strategy, action and knowledge, all enhance cultural intelligence therefore will promote cross-cultural leadership (Van-Dyne, et al., 2009).

Multicultural Awareness

A second study emphasizes the importance of diversity awareness as a necessary skill to be prepared for a global environment by measures in the Miami University Diversity Awareness Scale (MUDAS) (Mosley-Howard, Witte, & Wang, 2011). Students that graduate from diverse campuses are expected to engage in a more diverse environment than in previous years and may do so successfully with gained knowledge from diversity education (Mosley-Howard, et al.,
The MUDAS model attempts to measure cultural competence and diversity awareness. Several important factors within awareness include general knowledge and learning, appreciation and value of others, adopting a social justice mindset while implementing diversity-based principals throughout life (Mosley-Howard, et al., 2011, p.66). According to the U.S Census Bureau “minorities” will become the majority by 2042. Higher education can prepare individuals with knowledge and the ability to work with diverse populations through social interactions and proper learning experiences (Mosley-Howard, et al., 2011). This study was designed to measure first-year students’ perceptions of cultural awareness, social justice and intergroup interactions of university students by measuring cultural competence and diversity awareness. The MUDAS, a 29-item survey was developed for the university’s assessment project within the School of Education, Health and Society (Mosley-Howard, et al., 2011). Researchers discovered significant differences between male and female students regarding awareness, appreciation, learning/knowledge and intercultural interactions (Mosley-Howard, et al., 2011, p. 71). Among ethnic groups Latino/Hispanic students showed the highest diversity ratings followed by Black students (Mosley-Howard, et al., 2011, p. 72). Results further discussed showed that students’ scored the highest in the area of knowledge, and lowest on intercultural interactions (Mosley-Howard, et al., 2001 p.73). The goals of these findings were implicated upon professors to design instructional plans for diversity classes (Mosley-Howard, et al., 2001).

**Multicultural Knowledge**

A third study recognizes the demands of multicultural knowledge require professionals to be aware of their own culture, and have knowledge of their clients, students, etc. major values that construct their cultures (Lee, 2012). “The western world has never been more racially and ethnically diverse” (Lee, 2012, p.209) requiring current, and future professionals broaden their
minds even further. Representatives from the University of Hawaii designed the Multicultural Awareness, Knowledge, and Skills Survey (MAKSS) (D’Andrea, 1991) to assess perceived multicultural awareness, knowledge and skills, which followed “the development of the concepts of multicultural competencies” (Lee, 2012, p.210). MAKSS, along with others developed over time have been used by mental health professionals, counselors, social workers and psychologists. These tools allow professionals to work with a culturally diverse population. Student’s cultural competence can be predicted by multicultural training, experience with culturally diverse people and educated conversations on cultural issues (Lee, 2012). As empirical research on multicultural competency continues to grow and populations increase student cultural competency will flourish.

**Multicultural Competency**

Multicultural competency, personal attributions and self-esteem should all correlate. Ethnicity is identified as the self-identified attitudes, ethnic knowledge, behaviors and practices an individual may retain. Ethnic identity has yielded relation to self-esteem by empirical and theoretical research. It is also said to be crucial to psychological functioning. Various ethnic groups that show higher ethnic identity also have high self-esteem. While these two factors correlate, they may not be direct in relationship (Negy, 2003).

In this present study, Salem State University students completed a survey measuring four variables: knowledge, attitudes, experience and how Salem State University is contributed to a sense of cultural awareness. Variables that will be explored are: How much cultural knowledge Salem State University students hold, their attitudes toward diversity, their experiences with people of other cultures, and if Salem State has cultivated their cultural experience. Participants were asked to list as many states as they could, and/or label a map of the Unites States, then
asked to list as many countries as they could according to continent. I hypothesized students who score high on the knowledge, attitudes, and experience scales, would also score high on the mapping portions of the surveys; students that scored low on knowledge, attitudes, and experience would have more of an ethnocentric world view.

**Methods**

A convenience sample of sophomores, junior and seniors participated in the study. First-year students were excluded from the survey due to the nature of some of the questions asking about specific experiences at Salem State University. Each survey question fell into one of the four variables, attitudes, knowledge, experience and Salem State University. Examples of questions that were used to evaluate attitudes included, In American people from different nationalities should be encouraged to retain their own traditions, beliefs, and language, in your opinion indicate the importance of inter-cultural interactions etc. Questions regarding knowledge included, I am aware of my own culture and ethnicity, I know the difference between race and ethnicity. Examples of questions related to experience included questions such as; I seek opportunities to interact with people of other cultures, In College (putting financial issues and other limitations aside) would you have liked to study abroad? Questions with regard to Salem State University, I have learned about other cultures/races since beginning my college career. Participants were than tested on their knowledge of the United States. They were scored on how many states they named out of those states how many were labeled correctly on a map of the United States. Lastly participants were scored on the number of countries named, and how many were named according to correct continent.
Participants

A total of 84 Salem State University students (56 females, 27 males, 1 unidentified) participated in the study. Of these participants, 4% self-identified as African American or Black, 1% Asian, 56% as Caucasian or white, 26% as Latino or Hispanic, and 10% as Multicultural and 3 unidentified. All participants were volunteers. Students were recruited across campus, from classrooms, to the library, the fitness center, and in residence halls. As shown in Table 1 and Table 2, the sample contained double the amount of females and more seniors and sophomores than juniors.

Table 1. Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
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<td>Female</td>
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Table 2. Academic Level

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<th>Frequency</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
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<td>33.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>42.7</td>
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Results

Each of the 21 survey questions fell into one of the four variables; knowledge (5Qs), attitudes (5Qs), experiences (6Qs), and Salem State University’s influence on diversity (4Qs). Mean scores were generated for all variables; variable 1 (Attitudes, $M=5.206$, $SD=.91430$), variable 2 (Knowledge, $M=5.9096$, $SD=.98895$), variable 3 (Experiences, $M=5.9735$, $SD=.85527$), and variable 4 (Salem State University, $M=5.5089$, $SD=.96118$).
Construct validity was examined by correlations between each item. Table 3 shows correlations between the four variables, as well as number of states named, number of states correctly labeled, number of countries identified, and number of countries correctly identified. My hypothesis was disproven as positive correlations were seen across variables.

**Table 3.** Correlations between variables and number of states, correct states, number of countries, and correct countries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of states</th>
<th>Pearson r</th>
<th>Number of countries</th>
<th>Pearson r</th>
<th>Correct countries</th>
<th>Pearson r</th>
<th>Attitudes</th>
<th>Pearson r</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Pearson r</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Pearson r</th>
<th>SSU Diversity</th>
<th>Pearson r</th>
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<tr>
<td>Correct states</td>
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<td>.593**</td>
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<td>Correct countries</td>
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<td>.594**</td>
<td>.994**</td>
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<td>Attitudes</td>
<td>Pearson r</td>
<td>-.085</td>
<td>-.176</td>
<td>-.011</td>
<td>-.029</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Pearson r</td>
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<td>-.074</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>.406**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Pearson r</td>
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<td>-.221*</td>
<td>-.049</td>
<td>-.066</td>
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<td>.551**</td>
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<tr>
<td>SSU Diversity</td>
<td>Pearson r</td>
<td>-.018</td>
<td>-.066</td>
<td>-.031</td>
<td>-.039</td>
<td>.363**</td>
<td>.464**</td>
<td>.644**</td>
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**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).  
* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).**

Significant correlations were found between the number of states named and the number of states correctly labeled. Significant findings were also made between the number of countries and correctly labeled countries. This correlation was also the highest found. The following was expected as the data was collected; those who knew many countries also knew where those countries were located around the world. A few common mistakes were found with countries
misplaced in the North America/Central America category and South America. The average number of states participants were able to name was 28; the average number of countries named was 30.

Almost all participants stated a high interest in studying abroad. Many wanted to travel in hopes of exploring new cultures while others wanted to learn about their own. A few were interested in the history of certain countries. The most common response for where people wanted to study was Europe. Europe was also the continent in which participants were able to identify the most countries ($M=10.955$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4. Statistics of Number of states, correct states, number of countries, and correct countries named</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
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<td>Missing</td>
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<td>Mean</td>
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**Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to measure diversity among Salem State University students. Relationships were examined, using Pearson linear correlations based on the four variables and geographic knowledge if the US and the world. The most significant correlations between variables were experiences and diversity contributed by Salem State University. Results showed that the hypothesis lacked support because peoples’ attitudes were unrelated to their geographic knowledge.

Patterns of common mistakes drawn from the data included placing Spain as well as Portugal in South America, listing cities rather than countries such as Sydney, London, Rome and
Dublin. As far as labeling the United States many participants mixed up Vermont and New Hampshire, placed Georgia in the wrong location, and made Washington DC a state. The most common correct states were: Massachusetts, Tennessee, California, Washington, Oklahoma, Louisiana and Texas. Participants proved to have the known the greatest number of countries in Europe.

Participants showed low self-esteem when they saw the map of the United States. Observed responses including expressions like “I feel dumb”, “wow bring me back to middle school” “I know, I know more than this…” Some laughed when they saw the response box that stated, “I know this country exists, but I do not know where in the world it is.” While it may have provoked humor some participants could name more countries than properly identify their location. Answers that proved to be quite surprising and upsetting were as follows: Pakistan and Iraq listed under North and Central America, Mexico in South America, Honduras in Europe and having no idea where China is. Participants showed a lack of knowledge of the Northeast and East Coast of the United States. While participants scored high on diversity values, their lack of knowledge seemed to threaten their self-esteem.

**Implications**

When attitudes and number of countries were correctly identified, they were compared in a scatter plot, in which some trends can be seen (See Table 4.0). Although correlations did not suggest that low attitude scores and number of countries showed a negative correlation, people with negative attitudes about diversity (a low number) also scored low in number of countries correctly located. These finding may suggest that improving world knowledge may help increase awareness of more positive attitudes about diversity. If people do not know something exists, they will have no knowledge of it. An interesting finding about participants’ knowledge of where states
were located in the United States, was that some students confused their North and South states, such as North and South Carolina, placing South Carolina north of North Carolina. These findings and the fact that people have a GPS at their fingertips at all times, makes an interesting study in itself. How many times has this generation of students, or the upcoming generation actually looked at or studied a physical map. What does this suggest about survival skills?

Limitations & Future Direction

Limitations of this study included restricted range, and self-report. These limitations have an impact on my findings because people may lie on self-report studies. If the survey was available online, the responses may have been different. Participants may have felt less pressured and even though they knew their answers would be anonymous, they asked not to be judged for their answers. However if the survey was available online I would have had a time limit on the states and countries portion to five minutes.

For replication of this study, a few things may be adjusted and improved. When participants came across the part when they had to name countries, people were somewhat confused when they saw Australia as a continent. While many people knew Australia was a continent and a country, they thought it was a trick question. To strengthen this, the category should have been labeled Australia/Oceania. A suggested change may be asking participants to name the first ten countries that come to their mind and list where they are located rather than a less controlled experiment. In this present study participants were just told that the survey would take no more than twenty minutes, some look less others took longer. This may produce results more closely related to attitudes and experiences. Future work might explore cultural specific questions could be asked. Interviews would also provide deeper understandings of students’ cultural intelligence and multicultural competency. Another question to consider after testing
students’ world knowledge, is to ask why or how they know what they do; for example, they list 20 different countries in Africa, 2 in Asia, and 13 in Europe, why is their knowledge of Africa so strong?

Scatter Plot Graph between Attitudes and Number of Countries named

Scatter Plot Graph between Attitudes and Number of Countries named
References


Appendix

Survey

Please answer the following demographic questions.

1. Age ______ (must be 18+ to participate)
2. Academic level
   a. Sophomore
   b. Junior
   c. Senior
3. Gender
   a. Male
   b. Female
   c. Other: _______
4. Please specify your ethnicity
   a. African American/Black
   b. Asian
   c. Caucasian/White
   d. Latino/Hispanic
   e. Native American
   f. Multiracial

Please answer the following questions regarding your opinions of race/ethnicity as they apply to your experience at Salem State.

5. I appreciate the diversity here at Salem State
   Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

6. I seek opportunities to interact with people of other cultures while at Salem State
   Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

7. Teachers/universities should offer a variety of courses related to culture
   Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

8. I have learned about other cultures/races since beginning my college career
   Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

9. I have interacted with people of other races since beginning my college career
   Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

10. Do you think your social experience in college helped you learn more about other cultures/races?
    Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
11. Do you think your educational experience in college helped you learn more about other cultures/races?

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

Please answer the following questions regarding your perception of culture/ethnicity as it relates to your personal experience on a scale of strongly agree to strongly disagree.

12. I am aware of my own culture and ethnicity

   Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

13. I know the difference between race and ethnicity

   Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

14. I am comfortable talking about my culture and ethnicity

   Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

15. I can have an educated conversation about culture and ethnicity with others

   Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

16. I have close friends from other cultures

   Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

17. In America people from different nationalities should be encouraged to retain their own traditions, religious beliefs, and language.

   Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

18. I believe people of the same race are generally all the same in the way they act, think, and behave.

   Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

19. I believe intercultural interactions are important.

   Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
20. It is important to learn multiple languages.

   Strongly Disagree 1  2  3  4  5  6  7 Strongly Agree

Please answer the following questions regarding your opinion regarding the opportunity to study abroad.

21. In college (putting financial issues and other limitations aside) I would be interested in studying abroad.

   Strongly Disagree 1  2  3  4  5  6  7 Strongly Agree

22. If you were to study abroad in any continent or islands which would you choose? Why?

To the best of your ability **fill in the map or list** as many states as you can name.
To the best of your ability list as many countries as you can. (List according to continent)  
(Continued on back page)

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<th>North &amp; Central America</th>
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I know this country exists but I do not know where in the world it is…
Disclosure Form

Salem State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Disclosure Statement

My name is Danielle Terrell. This questionnaire is for a research paper I am doing for my senior Honors Thesis. It will ask you questions about knowledge, experiences and attitudes toward diversity. Filling it out is completely voluntary. There are no right or wrong answers. You may stop at any time. All answers will remain completely anonymous. You do not have to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. Your participation should take between fifteen and twenty minutes. When you are done, please fold the questionnaire in half and return it to me. There are no risks in participating. The benefits of participating will bring about greater awareness to diversity in your life. An analysis of the results and an explanation of the study will be available in the Salem State Psychology department. Understand that your name or identity will not be used in reports or presentations of the findings of this research. The information provided to the researchers will be kept confidential with the exception of information which must be reported under Massachusetts and Federal law such as cases of child or elder abuse. This research project has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Salem State University. Thank you for your help. For questions or concerns about the research contact myself at d_terrell@salemstate.edu or my faculty advisor Dr. Sophia Evett at sevett@salemstate.edu or by phone 978-542-6458.

For concerns about your treatment as a research participant, please contact: Institutional Review Board (IRB) Sponsored Programs and Research Administration Salem State University 352 Lafayette Street Salem, MA 01970 (978) 542-7556 or (978) 542-7177 or irb@salemstate.edu

This research project has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board at Salem State University in accordance with US Department of Health and Human Services Office of Human Research Protections 45 CFR part 46 and does not constitute approval by the host institution.