

2019

# SERVICE LEARNING

## Evaluation Report



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# African Sisters Education Collaborative (ASEC)

## Service Learning Program

### 2019 Evaluation Report

<b>Overview of the ASEC Service Learning Program</b>	<b>3</b>
Service Learning Program Components	3
Student Experience	4
Service Learning Site Hosts	4
Service Learning Staff	5
<b>Service Learning Program Objectives</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Service Learning Program Evaluation Methodology</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2019 Service Learning Program Outcomes</b>	<b>6</b>
2019 Service Learning Participants, Mentors & Site Hosts	6
2019 Service Opportunities	9
Cultural Immersion Experiences (Objective 1)	9
Enhancing Students' Academic Course Content Related to Globalization (Objective 2)	12
Broadening Participants' International Perspectives (Objective 3)	14
Diversifying Students' Career Perspectives (Objective 4)	15
Communication, Building Relationships, and Enhancing Cross-Cultural Awareness & Mutual Respect (Objectives 5 & 6)	16
Service in the Context of Spirituality (Objective 7)	19
<b>Successes</b>	<b>21</b>
Cross-Cultural Sharing and Relationship-Building	21
Cultural Activities	22
Participants' Personal Growth	23
Increased Interest in International Experiences	23
<b>Challenges</b>	<b>24</b>
Daily Spiritual Reflections	24
Communication	24
Service Expectations	24
Planning and Implementation of Service Activities	24
<b>Recommendations for Future Implementation</b>	<b>25</b>
General Preparation	25
Student & Mentor Preparation / Training	25

Host Site Preparation	26
Trip Implementation	27
Post Trip	27
Evaluation	28

## Overview of the ASEC Service Learning Program

ASEC's Service Learning program is a spirituality-based global immersion experience that enables students and sisters from ASEC's charter U.S. colleges / universities and congregations to participate in cross-cultural learning and sharing as they provide service to communities in sub-Saharan Africa. The overarching goal of ASEC's Service Learning Program is to provide international service learning opportunities for students, faculty, and sisters of ASEC charter colleges, universities, and congregations. ASEC believes that its Service Learning program promotes global leadership, a key attribute in building the next generation of leaders, as well as a strategy for sustainable growth in human development.

ASEC Service Learning opportunities are intended to broaden the cultural perspectives and enrich the lives of those who serve and those who are served. Through these opportunities the participants engage in a mutual cultural exchange, deepening their understanding and appreciation of a culture different from their own and understand more objectively the strengths and challenges of their own cultures. The program fosters communication and relationships between U.S. participants and local stakeholders through hands-on projects in the field with mutually-inclusive benefits, shared value creation, and lasting impact. In addition, the program offers an opportunity for students to integrate academic coursework with international service experiences.

Service Learning participants take part in a two to three week Service Learning trip to one of the ten ASEC countries: Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Nigeria, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda or Zambia. Every two years the host country rotates to a different country ASEC serves, increasing opportunities for varied cross-cultural exchange.

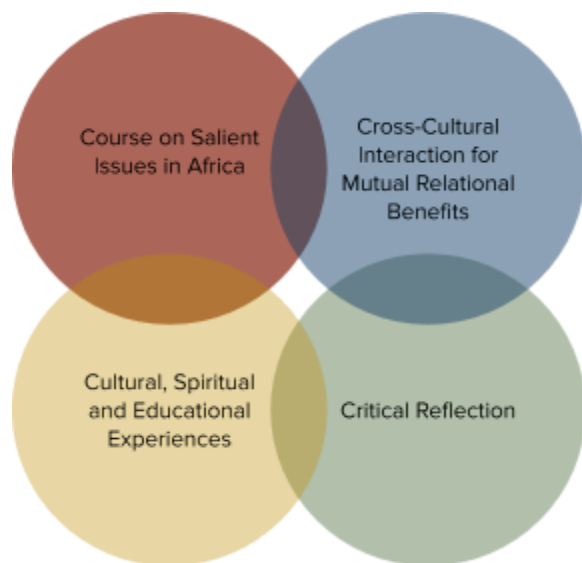
Evaluation outcomes, personal testimonials, and academic reflection papers of former ASEC Service Learning participants indicate that the immersion experience and the relationships they built on the ground in Africa result in broadened perspectives and personal transformation, which is fundamental to developing holistic intercultural awareness.

## Service Learning Program Components

ASEC's Service Learning program consists of three essential components: the student experience; engagement with sisters from ASEC member institutions; and involvement of Service Learning Staff.

## Student Experience

Within the student experience, there are four subcomponents that support a holistic and dynamic program: a course on salient issues in Africa; cross-cultural interaction for mutual relational benefits; cultural, spiritual and educational experiences; and critical reflection (see Figure 1).



*Figure 1. Four subcomponents of the student experience, within the framework of the Service Learning program.*

Students are recruited in the fall semester and participate in a three-credit course in the spring semester. In the Service Learning course, students learn about the purpose and components of service learning; Africa as a continent and specifically the country the students will visit; diversity across cultures and dynamics of privilege and power; and the challenges and strengths within sub-Saharan Africa. After gaining knowledge through the academic course, and working to fundraise a portion of the funds for their travel, students participate in a two to three week trip to the selected country during the summer semester. Students “learn-by-doing” through exposure to salient issues within African society, and through cross-cultural interactions with the people they meet and serve. Students also participate in

cultural, educational and spiritual activities outside the service they provide, which can include visits to national parks and museums, cultural and artistic venues, religious services, and other in-country sites of interest. As students engage in a variety of service opportunities and experiences, they are expected to engage in critical personal reflection as well as spiritual reflection, guided by their mentor(s). Students also write a reflection paper upon return to the U.S. with the intention of leading them to take action in their local communities, informed by issues they observed and experienced while in Africa.

## Service Learning Site Hosts

ASEC alumnae and their congregations have the opportunity to participate in the ASEC Service Learning program as site hosts in selected nations where ASEC serves. Sisters who are selected as site hosts welcome Service Learning participants to serve in their ministries. Host sites for

service learning are selected in collaboration with ASEC Staff; sisters working in a variety of ministry sites may host students. Service opportunities may include: working with orphans and vulnerable children; assisting persons who are ill or who have developmental challenges; tutoring students, especially in English; agricultural work / gardening; assisting staff in hospitals and / or health clinics, such as HIV / AIDS programs; joining school students in extracurricular activities; working with children who formerly lived on the streets in slum areas; and more. The sisters' presence also supports the spiritual focus of the Service Learning experience.

## Service Learning Staff

Four roles are pivotal in providing participants with a successful Service Learning experience: coordinator, mentor(s), ASEC staff members in the host country, and the course professor. While the individual roles call for specific activities, the collaboration of the team members is vitally important.

The coordinator oversees recruitment and selection of students, student fundraising activities, and trip preparation tasks. The coordinator serves as a hub of communication between the different staff involved in the Service Learning program. Mentors are selected from each participating charter university or college of ASEC. Mentors accompany students on the Service Learning trip, assist in preparations leading up to the trip, and facilitate reflections and discussions during the trip. Mentors also collaborate with ASEC's in-country staff to plan the trip agenda, engage with the site hosts, and make any necessary adjustments. ASEC staff members in the host country play a pivotal role in planning and organizing the Service Learning trip, including arranging the service sites, accommodations and logistics, and cultural activities. Finally, professors at each participating college/ university teach the service learning course which focuses on salient issues in Africa and the host country as well as cross-cultural issues and service learning. In some cases, the professor and mentor roles may be filled by a single faculty member at the participating university or college.

## Service Learning Program Objectives

1. Provide participating U.S. students, faculty and sisters with authentic situations for cultural immersion experiences;
2. Enhance participating students' academic course content as it relates to globalization;
3. Broaden international perspectives of participating students and faculty;
4. Diversify participating students' career perspectives;



5. Provide students in Africa with the opportunity to practice and communicate using standard English, and build relationships with people from a different culture;
6. Enhance cross-cultural and international awareness, mutual respect and appreciation of others among all participants;
7. Provide an opportunity to experience service with a spirituality foundation.

## **Service Learning Program Evaluation Methodology**

The Service Learning program evaluation utilizes an objectives-based logic model approach, assessing progress towards meeting its seven program objectives, listed above. Service Learning participants, mentors, site hosts, and participating ASEC staff members are asked to complete separate surveys assessing their experiences, perceptions, and beliefs related to the program objectives. Both quantitative and qualitative data are collected. Quantitative data is collected through closed-ended survey items, in which respondents provide a yes or no answer, or they rate their level of agreement with statements using a Likert-type scale ranging from 4-Strongly Agree to 1-Strongly Disagree. One question asks respondents to rate their knowledge using a scale of 1-Not at All Knowledgeable to 5-Extremely Knowledgeable. Qualitative data is collected through open-ended survey questions. Paper and electronic formats are used for data collection. Program evaluation data is stored in a secure database, hosted by Marywood University.

## **2019 Service Learning Program Outcomes**

Within this section, program outputs and outcomes related to the 2019 ASEC Service Learning participants, service opportunities, and the seven program objectives are discussed. A total of 13 (of 17) Service Learning participants completed a post-program evaluation survey, including one alumna of Marywood University, one sister from the U.S. and one former ASEC Service Learning mentor who participated in the 2019 trip. Two mentors, three site hosts, and the ASEC West Africa Regional Director also completed post-program evaluation surveys.

## **2019 Service Learning Participants, Mentors & Site Hosts**

In 2019, 17 individuals participated in the ASEC Service Learning program: two mentors, two Catholic sisters (one member of the Sisters of St. Joseph and one member of the Sisters,

Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary), one Marywood University alumna, one former ASEC Service Learning mentor, and 11 students.

Three participants identified as African-American/ Black and 10 identified as White (non-Hispanic). Among the student participants, six (6) are Marywood University students and five (5) are Chestnut Hill College students. Student ages ranged from 19 to 42, with nine students (82%) between the ages of 19 and 22. One participant was a graduate student, one was a doctoral student, and the remaining participants were undergraduate students. Four of the undergraduate students were first-year students. Most students were pursuing education and social science degrees and one student has a dual major. The students' specific fields of study are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1

*2019 Service Learning Students' Fields of Study*

Field of Study	Level of Study	Number of Students
Early Childhood Education/ Special Education	Undergraduate	2
Psychology	Undergraduate	2
Global Affairs	Undergraduate	2
English/Communications	Undergraduate	1
Speech Pathology	Undergraduate	1
Music Therapy	Undergraduate	1
Art Education	Graduate	1
Administration & Leadership	Doctoral	1

Prior to their experience in the ASEC Service Learning program, the 2019 participants (including all students, an alumna, a Catholic sister, and a former mentor) reported their experiences with volunteering, service learning and international travel. All respondents previously volunteered in the U.S. and the majority had previous international travel experience. Eight participants had multiple experiences travelling internationally for different purposes and two students who previously participated in the ASEC Service Learning program returned to participate again in 2019. However, for five students, the ASEC Service Learning program was their first time



traveling internationally for any purpose. Figure 2 shows the number of respondents who engaged in volunteering, service learning, and/ or international experiences prior to participation in the Service Learning program.

Prior to participation in the ASEC Service Learning program:  
**All Service Learning Participants volunteered in the U.S.**  
 and **61.5% travelled internationally** in some capacity.



Figure 2. Participants' prior service, volunteer, and international experiences (N = 13).

The participants were accompanied by two mentors, one is an Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Marywood University and one is an Assistant Professor of Psychology at Chestnut Hill College. Both mentors have prior experience facilitating service learning experiences. The mentor from Chestnut Hill College also served as the professor for the Service Learning course at Chestnut Hill College and the ASEC Coordinator taught the Service Learning course at Marywood University. The course professors and mentors collaborated and made efforts to connect the Marywood University and Chestnut Hill College students prior to the trip, although the mentors reported there could be improvements in pre-trip collaboration.

Participants and mentors offered service at three different sites during their trip. Each of the three site hosts hold leadership positions in their ministries and have previous experience working with students or volunteers from countries outside of Africa. The participants and mentors were given accommodations by the Hospitallar Sisters of the Sacred Heart Convent in Elmina, Ghana, in close vicinity to their service sites. The participants and mentors were also assisted by ASEC West Africa Regional Director in Ghana and ASEC Country Coordinator in Ghana who participated in extensive pre-trip planning and provided in-country support with logistics, daily activities, and other needs. Site hosts collaborated with ASEC Staff in preparation

to receive the Service Learning participants and mentors. A meeting between the site hosts, ASEC Staff, participants and mentors was held to help everyone learn more about one another, understand each other's roles, discuss the service sites, review cultural norms, and allow for questions about the service learning experience.

## 2019 Service Opportunities

During the Service Learning trip in Ghana, the participants and mentors served at three sites:

- Mary Queen of Peace School, a nursery and primary school;
- Cornelia Connelly School of the Holy Child Jesus, a nursery and primary school;
- Padre Pio Rehabilitation Center, a center and school serving individuals (children and adults) with physical and/or mental disabilities and older adults.

Participants and mentors offered service through teaching classes in the schools, engaging school children in recreational activities, assisting in daily activities of the Padre Pio Center, and interacting with the residents at the Padre Pio Center. Notably, an SLDI alumna works at the Padre Pio Rehabilitation Center and an SLDI Instructor serves as Director of the Padre Pio Center, enabling these two ASEC stakeholders to connect cross-culturally with another ASEC program and its participants.

## Cultural Immersion Experiences (Objective 1)

Program Objective 1 is to provide participating U.S. students, faculty and sisters with authentic situations for cultural immersion experiences.

Cultural immersion



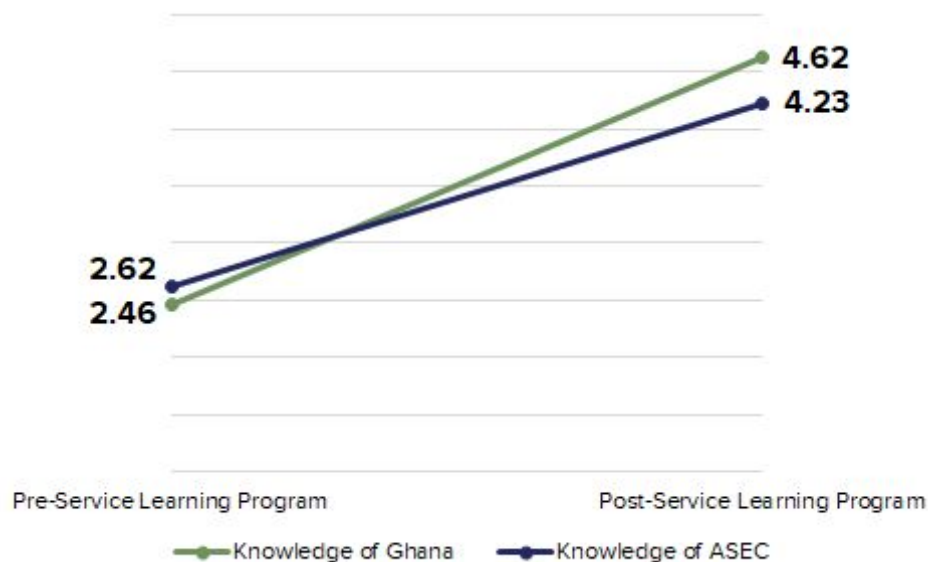
*Service Learning participants and mentors with the Chief of the Atonkwa tribe*

experiences occur at service sites, through visits to cultural and historic sites, and through cross-cultural interactions between people living in the host country and Americans. It is anticipated that cultural immersion experiences will facilitate cross-cultural understanding of the host country (among participants) and the U.S. (among site hosts), increased knowledge of ASEC's mission and work, enhanced interest in international experiences, and engagement in self-reflection and growth.

As the participants and mentors engaged in service, guided by the site hosts and ASEC staff members, they learned about each site including its mission, staff, and operations, and engaged in daily interaction with the Ghanaian children and adults they served. In addition they participated in cultural activities, including the honor of meeting the Chief of the Atonkwa tribe as well as visits to Kakum National Park, the Kwame Nkrumah Museum & Memorial Park, the W.E.B. Du Bois Center, Assin Manso Slave River site, and the Cape Coast castle which was a major hub in the transatlantic slave trade.

After participation in the Service Learning program, outcomes show that participants were able to increase their knowledge of both ASEC and the host country, Ghana. Figure 3 shows the mean scores of participants' knowledge of Ghana and ASEC before and after participation in the Service Learning program, with 1 being Not at All Knowledgeable and 5 being Extremely Knowledgeable. There were clear increases in knowledge at the conclusion of the program.

**Participants increased their knowledge of Ghana and ASEC through their experience in the ASEC Service Learning Program.**



*Figure 3. Pre- and Post-Program Knowledge of ASEC and Ghana (N = 13).*

In addition to gaining knowledge about ASEC and Ghana, participants also reported that the Service Learning program allowed them to: engage in cultural activities; increase their cultural understanding; consider unfamiliar beliefs and perspectives; engage in increased personal growth and reflection; and gain a sense of empowerment (although there was less strong agreement with this item compared to other items under this Objective). Figure 4 shows the participants' level of agreement with items related to cultural immersion experiences and personal growth. Items were rated on a scale of 4 being Strongly Agree to 1 being Strongly Disagree. This scale was used for all subsequent closed-ended survey responses discussed in this report.

All participants somewhat or strongly agreed that they learned more about themselves and a different culture; **participants most strongly agreed that they increased their knowledge of Ghana and experienced growth as a person.**

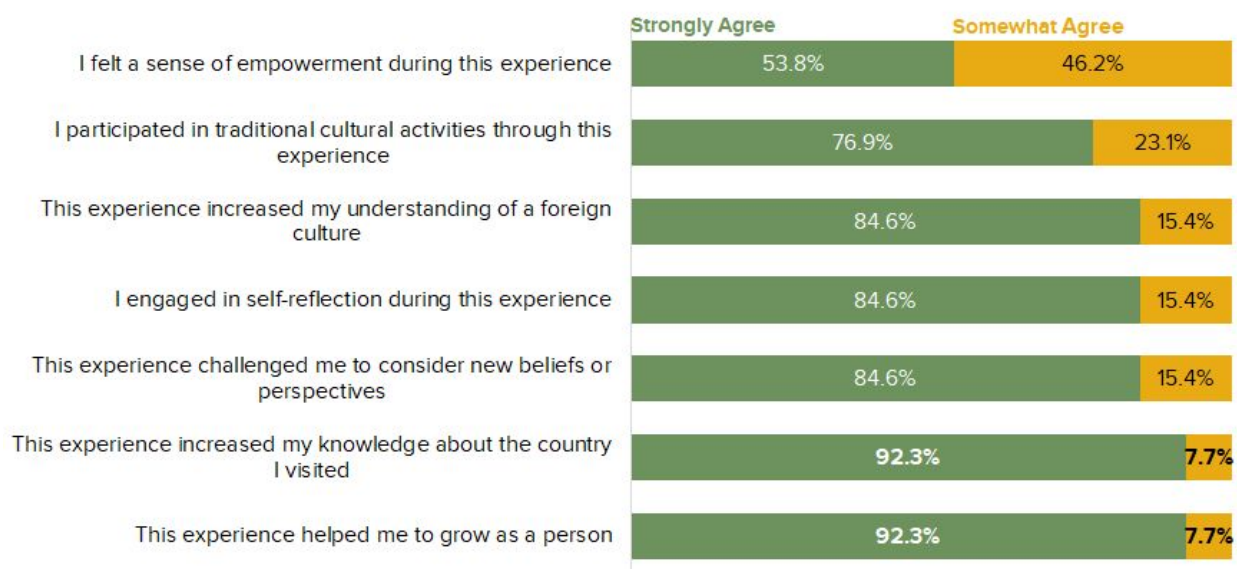


Figure 4. Participants' Survey Item Responses: Cultural Immersion (N = 13).

Participants also shared how their perspectives on service learning and Ghana changed after their participation in a cultural immersion experience through the ASEC Service Learning program:



“I have gained so much love and respect for Ghana, and I have learned so much that I want to implement into my daily life. After completing the course and trip I just gained a deeper love and respect for Ghana.”



“My outlook has become even more invested in participating in these types of initiatives.”

The site hosts and mentors reported increased cultural understanding as well, with one site host reporting that the experience challenged her to consider new beliefs and perspectives (the other two site hosts did not respond to this item) and two site hosts sharing that they learned something new about American culture from the participants (one site host did not respond to this item). The mentors found the cross-cultural interactions and the participants' growth to be some of the most valuable aspects of the program, as stated in their comments below:



“Most valuable is the connections with people both Ghanaian and the American participants. Opportunities to create community and understanding is valuable to me as well as to bear witness to and become part of the more difficult questions of community, understanding, personality, and justice.”



“Interacting with the sites and seeing the students grow through their exposure and experience was very gratifying. I am glad to have been a part of their growth.”

## Enhancing Students' Academic Course Content Related to Globalization (Objective 2)

Program Objective 2 seeks to enhance participating students' academic course content as it relates to globalization. Students complete a three credit course in the spring semester before the trip, which covers content including but not limited to: information about the host country and Africa as a continent, the purpose and process of service learning, and cross-cultural exchange and understanding. The course provides a basic foundation of knowledge to prepare students not only for the upcoming service learning trip, but for ongoing cross-cultural learning and global citizenship into the future.

Under this Objective, all students somewhat or strongly agreed that the course helped them prepare for the trip and that service opportunities helped them integrate the course content. Students most strongly agreed that reflections during the trip assisted in course content integration. Figure 5 shows students' level of agreement with items related to the Service Learning academic course.



All students somewhat or strongly agreed that the course helped them prepare for the trip and that providing service helped to integrate course content, but **more students strongly agreed that reflections helped them better understand the course content.**

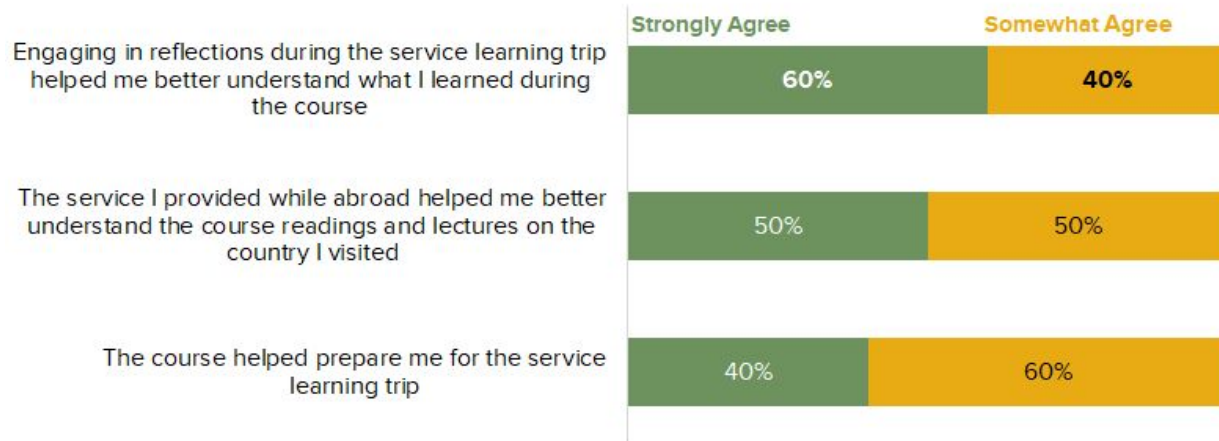


Figure 5. Participants' Survey Item Responses: Academic Course Content ( $n = 10$ ).

However, in a few qualitative responses, students indicated that there could be improvements in connecting service opportunities with the course readings and lectures. One student suggested:



“The course could be focused more on the language and everyday things we could have benefitted from.”

In addition to the coursework completed during the spring semester, students completed a paper after returning from the trip, reflecting on their international Service Learning experience. Among past Service Learning participants, some chose to organize a community-oriented activity after completion of their reflection paper, which empowered them to share the insights and experiences from their Service Learning trip with groups in the community. It has not been reported yet if any of the 2019 Service Learning participants plan to engage in a community activity.

Both mentors strongly agreed that enough time was spent in class preparing students for the Service Learning experience. Both mentors also agreed (one somewhat and one strongly) that the students' subject matter comprehension was increased by the Service Learning experience. Mentors did see opportunities for improvement of the academic course though, including the creation of clear timelines and better integration of reflections and other activities to assist in connecting course content to the Service Learning experience. One of the mentors offered:





“While the course was comprehensive and well-planned, I think there were so many things that didn't become real for the students until we arrived and were on the ground. I think the mentors can think about planning more structured exercises or process activities to refresh the students on things that they learned during the course and help them connect it to what they will be experiencing as they serve.”

## Broadening Participants' International Perspectives (Objective 3)

Program Objective 3 aims to broaden international perspectives of participating students and faculty. Both participants and mentors expressed a stronger interest in international experiences and being an active participant in the global community after participation in the Service Learning program. Participants generally reported strong agreement that their interest in international affairs, international service learning or volunteering, and international travel increased after their Service Learning experience. Only one participant somewhat disagreed that s/he would want to participate in another international Service Learning or volunteer experience. Participants' responses to survey items related to broadening participants' international perspectives appear in Figure 6.

Most participants agreed or strongly agreed that their interest in international experiences and global affairs increased after the Service Learning program, and **nearly all participants reported that they would participate again in a similar program.**



Figure 6. Participants' Survey Item Responses: Broadening International Perspectives (N = 13).

Participants also shared their post-program perspectives on international experiences through open-ended survey responses:



“I really believe after this trip that I want to do something that involves traveling in my future.”



“Strengthened my belief that person to person contact is one of the best ways to build global understanding.”

In addition, both mentors also strongly agreed that they felt more connected to a global community after the Service Learning program.

## Diversifying Students’ Career Perspectives (Objective 4)

Program Objective 4 focuses on diversifying participating students’ career perspectives. As participants provide service at different sites and gain more in-depth knowledge about the social service, healthcare and education systems in a different country, they are exposed to a variety of professional settings and human development needs. Some participants’ career trajectories may be shaped by their Service Learning experience, whereas others who are already pursuing specific career goals can enhance their professional skills and global perspectives through cross-cultural sharing and learning.

Students shared in their own words how the program influenced their career perspectives:



“I believe this experience is extremely relevant for my future, and it has given me the inspiration to move forward in my chosen degree/ future career.”



“It [Service Learning experience] makes you grow as a person, so I think it’s relevant to everyone [sic] future. I also now know that I want to go in this direction for a career.”



“I am motivated to travel and serve as much as possible in the next couple years so that I can work with migrants and refugees here at home and have a broad sense of different cultures and gain professional communication skills.”

In addition, two students shared that they plan to work with children in their careers and the opportunity to work with children at the service sites was relevant for their future.

In responses to closed-ended survey questions, all students strongly agreed that their motivation to serve the global community increased after participation in the Service Learning program and nearly all participants somewhat or strongly agreed that the program increased their interest in working internationally, with the exception of one student who somewhat disagreed.

Participants' responses to survey items related to career perspectives are shown in Figure 7.

**All participants reported an increased motivation to service the global community and nearly all somewhat or strongly agreed that they have an increased interest to work internationally, apart from one participant.**



Figure 7. Participants' Survey Item Responses: Career Perspectives (N = 13).

## Communication, Building Relationships, and Enhancing Cross-Cultural Awareness & Mutual Respect (Objectives 5 & 6)

Program Objective 5 is to provide students in Africa with the opportunity to practice and communicate using standard English, and build relationships with people from a different culture. Program Objective 6 is to enhance cross-cultural and international awareness, mutual respect and appreciation of others among all participants. Under these two Objectives, there is a focus on Service Learning participants and students in Africa having the opportunity to communicate in English, forming connections and relationships among those participating in the Service Learning experience (including those being served), developing mutual respect and compassion, and engaging in a cultural exchange to increase understanding across cultures.

The 2019 Service Learning participants and mentors served at two schools during their experience in Ghana. At these service sites, participants and mentors were able to communicate with primary school students in English, speak English with the students while engaging in sports



and recreational activities, and some participants assisted in teaching students in the classroom. Although one site host mentioned that it was challenging for the schoolchildren to understand the participants' accents, they were eventually able to communicate well.



*A Service Learning participant plays soccer with residents at the Padre Pio Rehabilitation Center*

Participants and mentors also offered their unique gifts and skills as they engaged in service. One site host mentioned that the most valuable aspect of the Service Learning experience was that the participants and mentors offered creativity, new teaching techniques, and new methods of assessing children with learning disabilities. One participant initiated a mural art project at a school service site, encouraging students to take part in their own creative expression while beautifying their school. Through these interactions, the participants were able to form positive connections with the schoolchildren, teachers and site hosts at the schools. One of the site hosts commented:



“Yes, the pupils loved the participants. Their interaction with them was good. We hope the participants found the experience good too. It was certainly worthwhile.”

In addition, survey items related to Objectives 5 and 6 received very positive ratings among participants, mentors and site hosts. The two mentors agreed (one somewhat agreed and one strongly agreed) that the mentors and site hosts were responsive to each other's needs. The site hosts agreed (two strongly agreed and one agreed) that the participants and mentors provided quality service at the sites as they responded to the needs of the site and those being served. Two site hosts (one did not respond) said they would host Service Learning participants in the future. Almost unanimously,<sup>1</sup> the three site hosts strongly agreed that the participants acted respectfully towards the people served and that they themselves felt respected by the participants. One site host mentioned the participants' respect for the people served when she shared what was most valuable about the experience:



“[The most valuable aspect of the Service Learning program was the] opportunity to share experiences and above the love and care they provided the children. The participants were respectful to our people.”

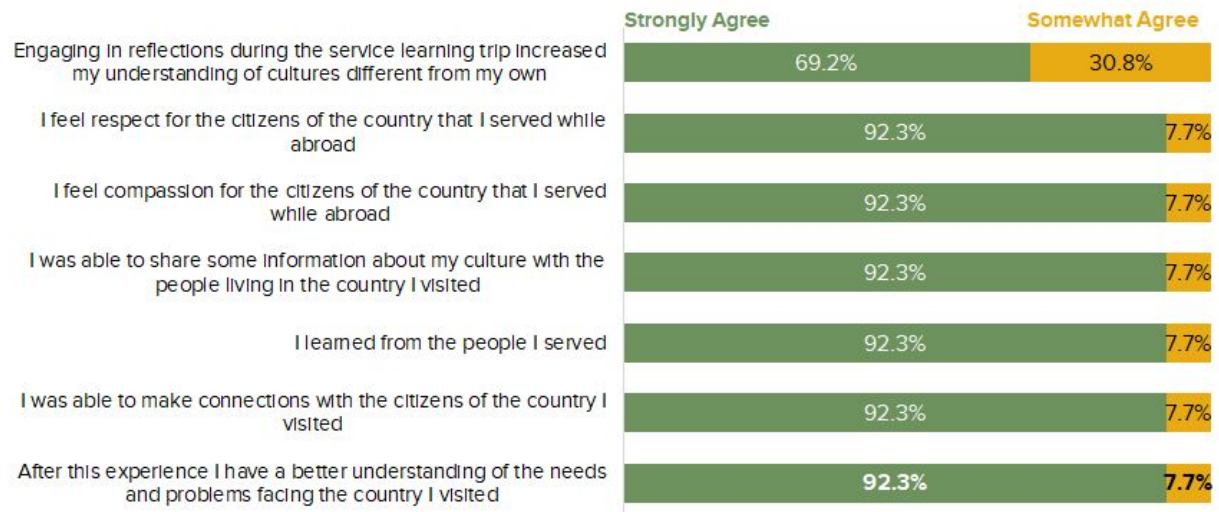
While the site hosts were satisfied with the level of service provided, they reported that the level of service could be improved by setting clear expectations of the type of service to be provided. At the school service sites there were some expectations that the participants teach classes but some participants did not share this expectation. Efforts could be made to clarify these expectations through online video conference meetings prior to the trip.

Among participants, nearly all strongly agreed that they developed respect and compassion for the people they served, participated in cross-cultural sharing, made connections with those they served, increased their understanding of a different culture and better understood the needs and issues facing Ghanians. Participants showed slightly less strong agreement (compared to other items under these Objectives) that engaging in reflections helped them better understand a different culture. Figure 8 provides participants' responses to survey items related to cross-cultural respect and communication.

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<sup>1</sup> One Site Host agreed, rather than strongly agreed, that the Participants acted respectfully towards the people served.

**Most participants strongly agreed that they created connections, felt compassion and respect for the people they served and engaged in cross-cultural sharing and learning;** there was less strong agreement that reflections facilitated cultural understanding



*Figure 8. Participants' Survey Item Responses: Cross-Cultural Respect & Communication (N = 13).*

## Service in the Context of Spirituality (Objective 7)

Program Objective 7 is to provide an opportunity to experience service with a spirituality foundation. Students participating in the Service Learning program are enrolled in one of ASEC's charter institutions, all of which are Catholic universities and colleges. Spirituality and religion are embedded in their education and the Service Learning program also includes a spiritual / religious component which aims to enhance participants' relationship with their religion and / or spirituality. Students learn about service in the context of religion and spirituality in their course and also are expected to engage in daily spiritual reflection during the Service Learning trip, guided by their mentors.

After participation in the Service Learning program, most participants agreed or strongly agreed that they view acting as a global citizen and cross-cultural learning as a component of their spirituality. There was slightly less strong agreement among participants that the program deepened their spirituality or encouraged them to practice their spirituality differently. Survey items under this Objective were rated with slightly less strong agreement, and slightly more disagreement, than items under other Objectives. Participants' responses to survey items related to spirituality appear in Figure 9.



**Most participants somewhat or strongly agreed that acting as a global citizen and learning about different cultures was part of their spirituality or religion**, but there was less strong agreement that spiritual beliefs or practices changed post-program.

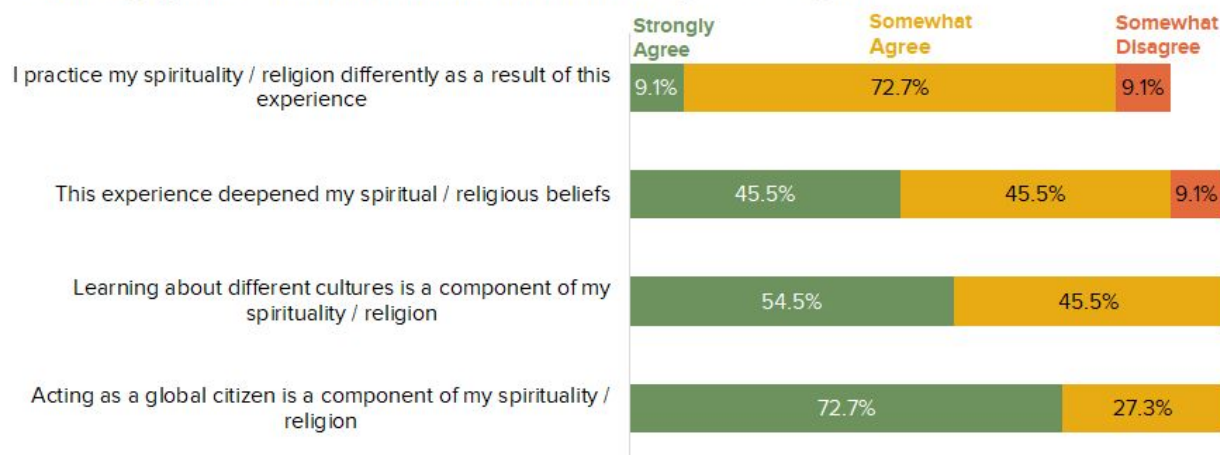


Figure 9. Participants' Survey Item Responses: Service in the Context of Spirituality ( $n = 11$ ).

Among the mentors there was agreement that the Service Learning experience deepened their spirituality (one mentor strongly agreed and the other somewhat agreed). However, one mentor expressed that there were challenges in carrying out daily reflections, which play an integral role in laying the spiritual foundation of ASEC's Service Learning program. She commented:



"The only area that I felt not as prepared as I would have liked was with scheduling the daily reflection piece. ... I began with sending out a pre-trip reflection to all the Marywood participants and had a list of readings and reflection questions for all participants and mentors for everyday of the trip. After the first few days in Cape Coast, I hesitated with how to proceed. Part of the challenge was logistical, people trickled to meals because of napping, heat, illness, or fasting, and disappeared afterwards. In the future, I would establish a set reflection time from the first day - 7 or 8pm reflection every night allows for a rest and dinner and a sense of regularity in a context where little is normal or regular. I feel with this small change, the reflection piece will be an integral part of everyone's whole experience."

Among the site hosts, one disagreed and one agreed that the experience deepened their spirituality, and one site host felt the question about spirituality did not apply. Overall, this component of the program could be enhanced through the use of more structured daily

reflections, a daily reflection schedule, and through discussion of the site hosts' congregational charisms<sup>2</sup> and how their religious beliefs are embodied through their ministry work.

## Successes

### Cross-Cultural Sharing and Relationship-Building

Among the different categories of survey items, participants tended to most strongly agree with items related to building cross-cultural sharing, mutual respect, and building connections/relationships. Participants felt they were able to learn about Ghana and its culture and people, share knowledge of their own culture, and build relationships with those being served. Participants reported that they were engaged in service opportunities that allowed them to provide valuable service while also creating authentic connections with the people they served; eight of the participants expressed specific plans to stay in communication with people they met during the Service Learning trip. Participants' offered their comments on the cross-cultural sharing that occurred:



"We were warmly welcomed from day one by all the schools and organizations we worked with. In addition, the group was told in no uncertain terms how much they valued our presence and the assistance we provided."



"The cultural exchange was amazing. I knew some information about Ghana, but being among its actual citizens provided me the opportunity to learn so much more."



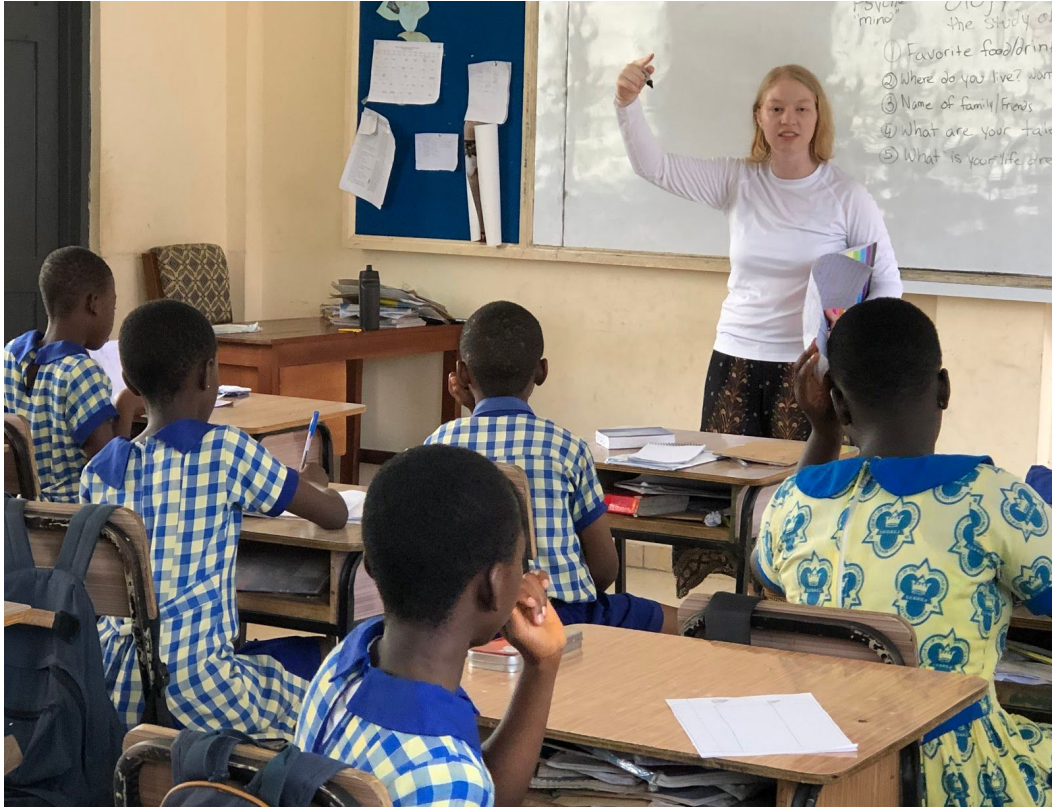
"We learned so much from each other and built such good relationships."

Site hosts also reported that the participants and mentors formed good relationships with the people being served and felt that they provided quality service. Site hosts shared that the children in the schools and residents in the rehabilitation center truly enjoyed interacting with the participants and mentors. In addition, there was positive feedback about the relationships participants, mentors and site hosts formed with the ASEC West Regional Director in Ghana. In open-ended survey questions, three survey respondents specifically noted the meaningful impact

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<sup>2</sup> Each religious congregation or community has its own unique spirit or character, called a charism. It can be described as a gift the congregation seeks to share with the world. It develops from its founding inspiration, mission, spirituality and lived experience of the members.

the ASEC West Africa Regional Director had on their experience and that they would like to remain in contact with her.



*A Service Learning Participant engages with schoolchildren  
at the Cornelia Connelly School of the Holy Child Jesus*

## Cultural Activities

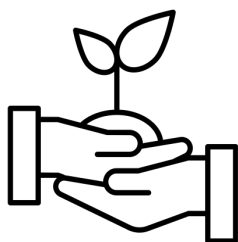
Participants visited a variety of cultural sites throughout the course of the trip, many of which highlighted the history of Ghana and West Africa. Participants often referred to the cultural activities as one of the most valuable aspects of the trip; in qualitative responses, four participants stated that the most valuable experience during the trip was visiting the Cape Coast castle and learning about the history of the slave trade in West Africa. One participant commented on her visit to the Cape Coast castle:



“I learned more about slavery in that one day than I have ever in the school system.”

## Participants' Personal Growth

All participants somewhat or strongly agreed that the Service Learning program helped them grow as a person, challenged them to consider new beliefs or perspectives, enabled them to engage in self-reflection, and facilitated a sense of empowerment. Participants shared their thoughts on their personal development after completing the Service Learning program:



"I felt empowered to help even more."

"It makes you grow as a person."

"My understanding deepened."

"I know this is only the beginning and I have so much more to explore."

Through participation in the Service Learning program, outcomes show that participants were able to step outside their personal comfort zones and allow themselves to reflect, learn and grow.

## Increased Interest in International Experiences

All participants ( $N = 13$ ) reported strong agreement that the Service Learning program increased their motivation to serve the global community and all but one participant had an increased desire to work internationally. Also, all participants somewhat or strongly agreed that their interest in global affairs and their desire to travel internationally increased after participation in the Service Learning program. Regarding future participation in international service learning or volunteering, all but one participant strongly agreed they would like to participate again, given the opportunity to do so.

Among the five participants who had not previously traveled internationally, all strongly agreed that after participation in the Service Learning program, they felt an increased motivation to serve the global community, are more interested in global affairs, and would like to participate in future international service learning or volunteering. All of these participants strongly agreed that the program increased their desire to work internationally, apart from one student who somewhat disagreed that her desire increased. Overall, outcomes indicate that the program has sparked an interest and motivation among participants to be more active members of the global community and to participate in future international experiences.



## Challenges

### Daily Spiritual Reflections

Mentors reported difficulties in implementing daily reflection sessions with the participants, which aligns with outcomes from the 2017 Service Learning evaluation report. There were challenges in organizing everyone to meet in one place due to logistical and health issues. Also there was a need for a more structured schedule for reflections. Suggestions to more effectively implement daily reflections are provided in the section on Recommendations, below. Also, in the surveys distributed to participants and mentors, it's unclear if they interpreted the use of the word "reflection" in the survey items to mean their own personal reflection or daily group reflections as part of the Service Learning program. This terminology could be clarified in future surveys.

### Communication

Several participants as well as mentors and site hosts noted that there were communication challenges in both the pre-trip planning and during the trip. Survey respondents suggested that pre-trip planning and communication, specifically regarding vaccinations, the trip itinerary, and program timelines, could be improved. Also several participants mentioned difficulties in group dynamics and communication during the trip, which some suggested could be improved through stricter participant and mentor selection criteria and more frequent pre-trip meetings among all participants, site hosts, and mentors.

### Service Expectations

There were differing expectations of the type of service to be provided at the school service sites, specifically whether or not the participants would teach (or assist in teaching) classes. There were also challenges regarding cultural norms and the dress code at one of the schools. Several survey respondents suggested that there be more opportunity to clarify service expectations, discuss service site rules and basic operations, and share any other important information about service sites prior to the trip.

### Planning and Implementation of Service Activities

Nine of the thirteen participant survey respondents noted that the overall planning and organization of the Service Learning trip could be improved. Survey respondents indicated that

there should be full engagement of the mentors in this process, and that specific service opportunities and a detailed trip itinerary should be clarified and shared prior to the trip.

## Recommendations for Future Implementation

### General Preparation

- An ASEC Service Learning program manual has been created. Once this manual is approved by the ASEC Board of Directors, disseminate the manual to all necessary parties for improved communication and program implementation.
- Develop a ASEC Service Learning Participant Handbook which could contain important information for participants, such as vaccinations needed, travel safety, visa application processes, etc. This would need to be updated annually.
- Consider developing Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) or basic partner agreements with host sites.

### Student & Mentor Preparation / Training

- Require students to complete a criminal background check and child abuse clearance as part of their application process.
- Incorporate more course content on daily life in the host country, basic language instruction, and cultural stereotypes.
- Include more extensive education on the concepts of social justice, privilege, and inequality, guided by a theoretical model.
- Incorporate more training on sexual harassment and assault, and develop clear procedures on action to take if a student reports any type of sexual harassment or assault. Include course content on culturally relevant gender norms.
- Include role plays and experiential learning scenarios as part of the academic course or general trip preparation. One mentor suggested role plays centered on: "...offering / not offering social media contact information; being asked for money or material goods by students, professionals at sites, etc.; being able to recognize sexual / marriage interest from strangers; being able to handle badgering and subtle come-ons (inappropriate or uncomfortable touching, etc.)."



- Include course content on basic conflict resolution and healthy communication skills.
- Encourage students to plan “offline” time without access to their phones or the internet to help them, as one mentor suggested, “...not only get used to the possibility of no connections, but also to develop the discipline to be fully present to the time together, the group, slow pace of life, other qualities of life not immediately noticeable when constantly online with family, friends, teammates, etc.”
- Consider offering service learning scholarships (to cover the \$2,000 expected fundraising amount, and perhaps other costs associated with the trip) to aid students with less access to resources, networks, and support.
- Hold at least two to three online video conferencing meetings with all Service Learning participants, mentors, professors, site hosts, and relevant ASEC Staff members prior to the Service Learning trip, with at least one opportunity for all participants and mentors to meet in person. Service Learning alumnae should also be invited to participate in the meetings and share their experiences. If the mentor(s) is/are not the professors for the Service Learning course, create opportunities for the students to interact with the mentor(s) prior to the trip. This could facilitate positive group dynamics and a stronger sense of bonding.
- Create a Frequently Asked Questions document for participants and mentors.
- Create a specific timeline for the participants, professors and mentors to guide them through the program, including important assignments and dates for the academic course as well as important dates and activities related to trip preparation (including important paperwork, vaccinations, visa, and other important tasks) to help keep everyone on track.

## Host Site Preparation

- Although some improvements were made this year regarding the communication of expectations at service sites, in both 2017 and 2019 site hosts held some differing expectations of service than the mentors and participants, specifically at school sites. When a school is selected as a service site, clarify expectations with the site hosts, mentors and the Service Learning participants about what type of service the participants will provide, such as tutoring, engaging in extracurricular activities, or teaching classes. Hold an online video conference meeting with all parties to discuss expectations.

- Assess the needs of each ministry on a regular basis. Consider which sites may function well as service sites (where students are actively providing a service to meet a need) and which may function better as observation sites (where students are not providing a specific service but are learning through observation and conversation).
- Develop a list of Service Learning activities or observational activities with the site hosts several months prior to student arrival. Engage in more streamlined and detailed planning regarding the specific service to be provided at each site prior to the trip. Provide each participant, mentor, site host and ASEC staff member involved with a detailed itinerary before departure for the trip and if possible, hold a video conferencing meeting to discuss that itinerary.

## Trip Implementation

- Practicing daily group reflections during the trip was a challenge in both the 2017 and 2019 Service Learning trips. Mentors should consider engaging in pre-trip discussions about the type of reflections to be used, when reflection is expected to occur, and who will facilitate each reflection (making adjustments as needed). One mentor recommended the use of “...more structured exercises or process activities to refresh the students on things that they learned during the course and help them connect it to what they will be experiencing as they serve.” A daily reflection guide has been created but this could be paired with a daily reflection schedule (and included in the trip itinerary). In addition, a daily reflection workbook could be useful as well, as a way for students to write out their reflections and look back on them later, and as a means to facilitate reflection if a participant cannot attend a group reflection session.
- When providing service in ministries, ensure all participants are serving with at least one other participant or mentor present.
- Ensure participants complete the Participant Agreement form and that they understand the cultural norms, appropriate dress and conduct, and any site-specific rules.

## Post Trip

- Plan a debrief session to discuss successes, challenges, and ways forward.
- Consider creating an ASEC Service Learning Alumnae Network.

- Although students are required to write a reflection paper after they return from the Service Learning trip, it may be useful to include a requirement that students also share their experience through a community-oriented activity such as a presentation, event, fundraiser, art show, roundtable discussion, or other activity. In sharing their experiences and takeaways from the program, participants can raise awareness about emergent issues in another country, expand the impact and visibility of the program, and engage in continued cross-cultural learning and dialogue, post-program.

## Evaluation

- Consider adding a pre-evaluation survey for participants to complete once they are accepted into the Service Learning program.
- Clarify what is meant by the term “reflection” in survey items.
- The Assistant Director of Program Evaluation at ASEC could meet with the Service Learning participants as a group at the onset of the program to discuss the purpose of evaluation and the points of data collection.
- Collect basic information about the trip dates, accommodations, participants, service sites and cultural activities through a brief reporting form once all participants, mentors, professors, and site hosts are selected.
- Consider interviewing students (and possibly host site sisters) at the onset of the program and at the conclusion of the program, to gather richer qualitative data about their expectations of and experiences with service learning.