



Intercultural  
Programs



## THE EDUCATIONAL RESULTS STUDY

Designed and Conducted by Mitchell R. Hammer, Ph.D. of Hammer Consulting, LLC  
"Assessment of the Impact of the AFS Study Abroad Experience" • January 2005

THE AFS INTERNAL DESCRIPTIVE REPORT OF THE COMPLETE FINDINGS

Prepared by Bettina Hansel, Ph.D. • December 12, 2005



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## INTRODUCTION

At AFS we often say that we are changing the world, one person at a time. But in spite of all the testimonials from our hundreds of thousands of returnees, we wanted to show clearly, with a solid academically sound research project, that our program produced real changes in participants, and that our program was built on serious, educational objectives that we are achieving. We also wanted to understand better the nature of the intercultural impact we have. Our introduction to the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, created by Milton Bennett, helped us with a new framework that we felt could be useful to us as we sought to document our educational impact. We also hoped to be able to have research findings that would give AFS a marketing edge when we are promoting our programs with schools, donors, parents and others.

From our earlier impact research, begun in 1981, we had learned that AFS students on both the year-long and the “summer” or two-month program demonstrated significantly greater gains than a comparison group in 10 of the 17 self-reported measures used in the study.<sup>1</sup>

- 1. Awareness & Appreciation of Host Country & Culture**
- 2. Foreign Language Appreciation and Ability**
- 3. Understanding Other Cultures**
- 4. International Awareness**
- 5. Adaptability**
- 6. Awareness of Opportunities**
- 7. Critical Thinking**
- 8. Non-Materialism**
- 9. Independence; Responsibility for Self**
- 10. Awareness & Appreciation of Home Country & Culture**

Our first impact research was based on a self-assessment of competence, skills, and personal characteristics that previous students themselves saw as the major outcomes of the experience. With the passage of 20 years we expected some changes, but in general we believe that these overall outcomes are still achieved by our students.

## STUDY GOALS

With the Educational Results Study, designed and conducted by Dr. Mitchell Hammer, AFS has learned much more about the level of intercultural competence students bring to the experience, and the impact that an AFS program can have on their development in intercultural sensitivity. This investigation drew deeper insight about several of the outcomes we had previously identified. We also used the study to understand better the level of foreign language development achieved by our students, their level of comfort

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<sup>1</sup> The full report of this study can be found in the AFS-published Research Report No. 33, “The AFS Impact Study: Final Report” (July 1986).

and ease around other cultures, their intercultural social networks and friendships, and the extent to which they demonstrate the core values of AFS.<sup>2</sup>

The research goals for this project, and their related measures, were to assess the impacts of the AFS experience on:

- 1. Intercultural Competence**
- 2. Intercultural Anxiety**
- 3. Cultural Knowledge**
- 4. Foreign Language Proficiency**
- 5. Interaction with People from Other Cultures**
- 6. Friendships with People from Other Cultures**
- 7. Intercultural Effectiveness**
- 8. Demonstration of AFS Values**
- 9. Satisfaction with the Study Abroad Experience**

The quantitative measures used, with the exception of the last two items, were all standard measures that had previously been validated in other research. With the independent researcher engaged to design the project, AFS now has data about our participants and a control group that can be compared with other groups who have used these same measures. By using not only self-administered surveys but also data provided by parents and host parents, we feel confident that we are able to get a more objective view of the impact and levels of achievement shown by our students.

### **The Study Population**

The study population consisted of over 1500 AFS students from nine partner countries (Austria, Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Germany, Hong Kong, Italy, Japan, and the United States) who participated on AFS's year-long high school exchange program from July, August, or September of 2002 until approximately July of 2003. In addition, in each country, at least 40 students were asked to nominate good friends similar to themselves in age, sex, type of school and general socio-economic background, but who were not participating on an intercultural exchange program. These friends constituted a control group of over 500 that responded to the survey instruments at the same time as the AFS students. Parents of the students and host families were also involved in the surveys.

Surveys were conducted as follows:

- May 2002 – Pre test
  - Students, parents, friends (control)
- August 2002 – Pre test
  - Host families

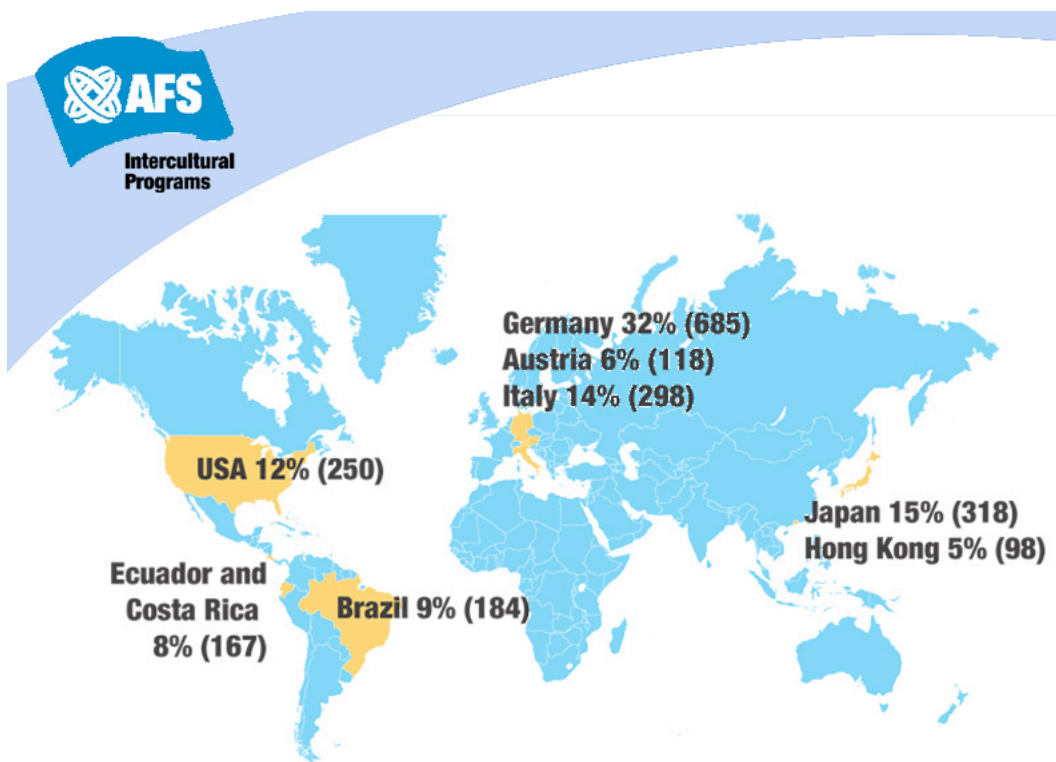
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<sup>2</sup> In the AFS Mission Statement drafted at the 1993 World Congress, the core values of AFS are defined as: dignity, respect for differences, harmony, sensitivity, and tolerance.

- October 2002, January, May, November 2003 – Journals
  - Students
- September 2003 – Post test
  - Students, host families, friends
- February 2004 – Post-post test
  - Students, parents, friends

As the map shows, the largest group of students and controls are from Germany. Almost two-thirds of the group are female, and one-third male. Typically the students are 17 years old, though the control group is slightly older.

Nearly 70% of the students in the study were hosted in the USA.



**Map: Numbers of students participating in the study, by country.**

### **Qualitative Data**

Part of the Educational Results Study included an analysis of student “journal” responses to four sets of questions emailed or mailed to them at four different points in the experience. Approximately 40 students were selected from each country from those who had initially responded in the pre test that they would be willing to provide these responses. The questions were translated into their own languages and students also typically responded in their native language. A total of 465 students were identified, but the response rates were quite low. At best (Journal 1) only 20% of the students

responded and only 9 students responded to all 4 journals.<sup>3</sup> A total of 37% of the selected students responded to at least one set of journal questions.

95 – Journal 1

66 – Journal 2

53 – Journal 3

26 – Journal 4

Nevertheless, the 240 journals from 172 students provide some compelling stories and interesting insights into the experiences of these AFS students. From the more complete sets of journals and questionnaires, we have produced a series of case studies with IDI profiles for individual students and a discussion of their experience as reported in their journals.

## **THE DEVELOPMENTAL MODEL OF INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY (DMIS)**

The theory behind the main part of the study is the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), elaborated by Milton Bennett. The model describes a series of stages along a continuum of increasingly complex ways in which people experience and understand cultural differences. The range of experiences begins with denial or lack of awareness of the existence of other cultures, through a polarized view of “us” versus “them,” to a subsequent recognition of the common humanity found in all cultures. Later stages in the “ethnorelative” realms include the experience of one’s own culture as just one of many equally complex worldviews, and further on, the increasing ability to adapt one’s behavior and reactions based on understanding and accepting another way of perceiving the world, and finally to a fully bi-cultural or multi-cultural stage in which a person would be equally engaged in more than one culture.

Understanding the predominant worldview of the AFS students and how their experience of cultural difference changes after participating in AFS is inherently useful for us, not only in understanding where our programs have impact but also in understanding the best way to address the particular development needs of our participants through our orientation and support activities.

The survey instrument developed to assess an individual’s level of development in this model is called the Intercultural Development Inventory, or IDI.<sup>4</sup> This instrument allows a detailed reading of an individual’s predominant world view in terms of how he or she experiences other cultures. It was created jointly by Mitchell R. Hammer and Milton

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<sup>3</sup> The journal questions were mostly sent out by email except for the Japanese students, largely because of technical issues with the Japanese character set. For the students from Hong Kong, the journals were sent out in English with the option of responding in Chinese and mailing the response back to the AFS office in the host country or, after they returned, in the home country. We suspect that the student email address were not always current, since students frequently change email addresses while they are abroad. This would have lowered the expected return rate.

<sup>4</sup> There are two good references on the DMIS and the IDI. (1) Bennett, M.J. “towards ethnorelativism: A developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. In R.M. Paige (Ed.), *Education for the Intercultural Experience*. pp. 21-71. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1992. (2) Hammer, M.R., Bennett, M.J. & Wiseman, R.L. “Measuring Intercultural Competence: The Intercultural Development Inventory.” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*. Special Issue, Autumn 2003. M. Paige, (ed.).

Bennett and has been validated statistically through repeated surveys with individuals from a wide range of cultures. The IDI was translated into each of the languages needed, back-translated into English and then submitted to a consistency review with professional multi-lingual translators. AFS students and their friends completed the 50-item, printed questionnaire three times, along with the other questionnaires sent to them.

### The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

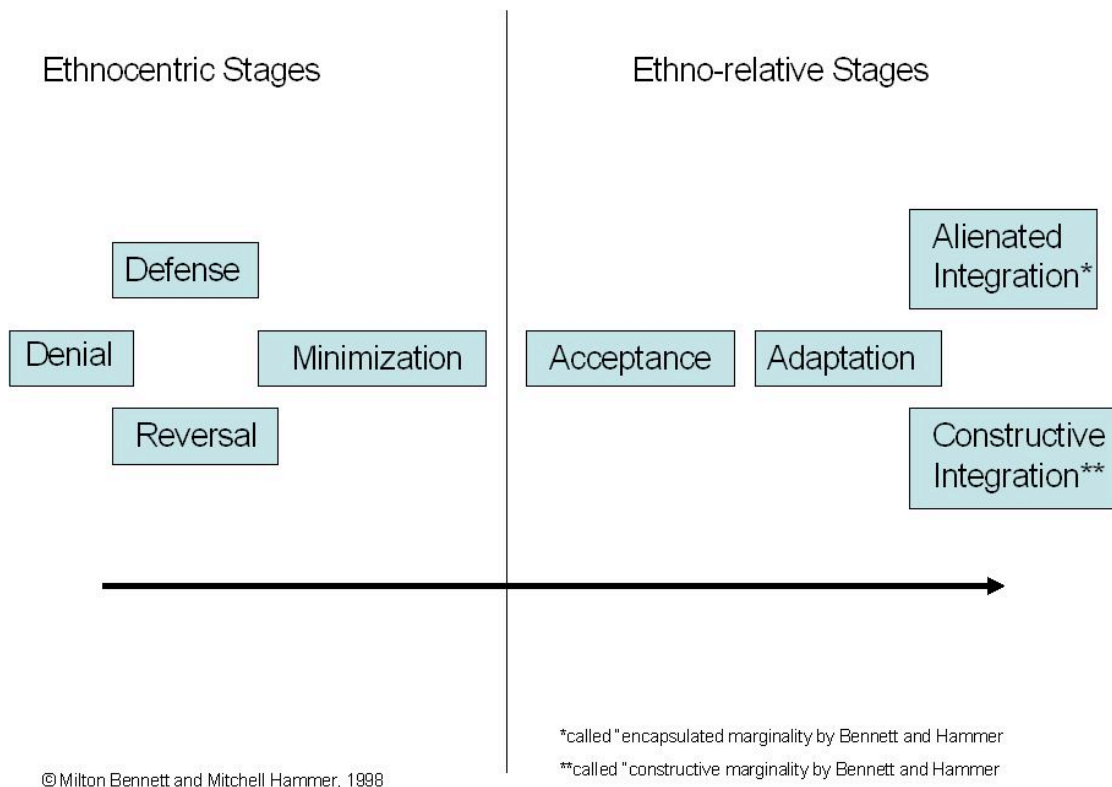


Figure 1. Stages of development used in the DMIS

The theory put forth by Milton Bennett is that individuals progress through different developmental stages of intercultural sensitivity, and that each stage represents a necessary step in moving forward to a more complex experience of cultural differences.

**Denial:** The “default” stage where an individual is basically unaware and incapable of experiencing cultural differences.

**Defense:** A step forward in that the individual now does experience other cultures, but sees the other cultures quite superficially while viewing his or her own culture as superior to the other culture or cultures.

**Reversal:** As in defense, the individual experiences other cultures quite superficially, but in this case sees the other culture or cultures as superior to his or her own culture.

Defense and Reversal are seen as mirror images of the same basic stage of development where the individual polarizes cultural differences into categories of “us” and “them.”

**Minimization:** A movement beyond stereotyped or romanticized characterizations of cultural differences found in Defense and Reversal, encompassing a recognition of the common humanity among all cultures and a tendency to minimize the differences found between cultures. In this stage cultural differences are seen as less important than our common humanity and universal values and principles.

Minimization is a common strategy for peace organizations and provides a way for people to relate to those from other cultures through the similarities that exist between cultures.

**Acceptance:** An awareness and understanding that one’s own culture is one of many equally complex and rich ways in which the world is experienced by people. In this stage, people perceive that other cultures are different, with their own organization and complexity, and that the way reality is experienced by that culture may not always have counterparts in their own culture.

**Adaptation:** An ability not just to perceive that other cultures have different ways of experiencing the world, but to begin to take part in that experience by adjusting one’s behavior and mental framework to fit the other cultural context. The understanding of another culture is quite profound in this stage.

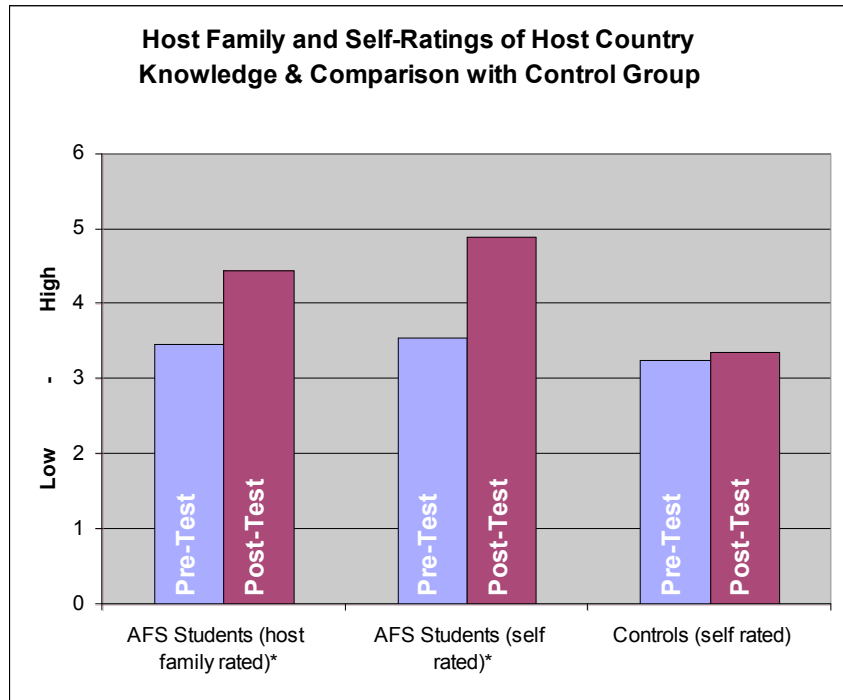
**Integration stages:** A further set of highly advanced developmental stages is identified by Milton Bennett in which the individual is fully integrated into two or more cultures. Bennett’s work describes these stages in more depth, but these stages are not yet fully assessed by the IDI measurement.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Knowledge of Other Cultures**

One of the components of intercultural learning and cultural intelligence is the knowledge of other cultures. Some of these aspects are taught in schools or are found in some types of news reporting that could be available to students who do not travel to another country. This would include knowledge of the history, language, economic and political systems of a particular country. Also relevant for true intercultural competence is an understanding of the organization of the society: its educational practices, beliefs, medical practices, customs, and so forth.

In the Educational Results Study, both before the program began and at the time when the exchange students were back home, the students and the good friends in the control group rated themselves on scales of 1-6 covering various aspects of cultural knowledge about the host culture (or about other cultures in general for the control group). In addition, the host family provided pre test and post test ratings for the AFS exchange students.

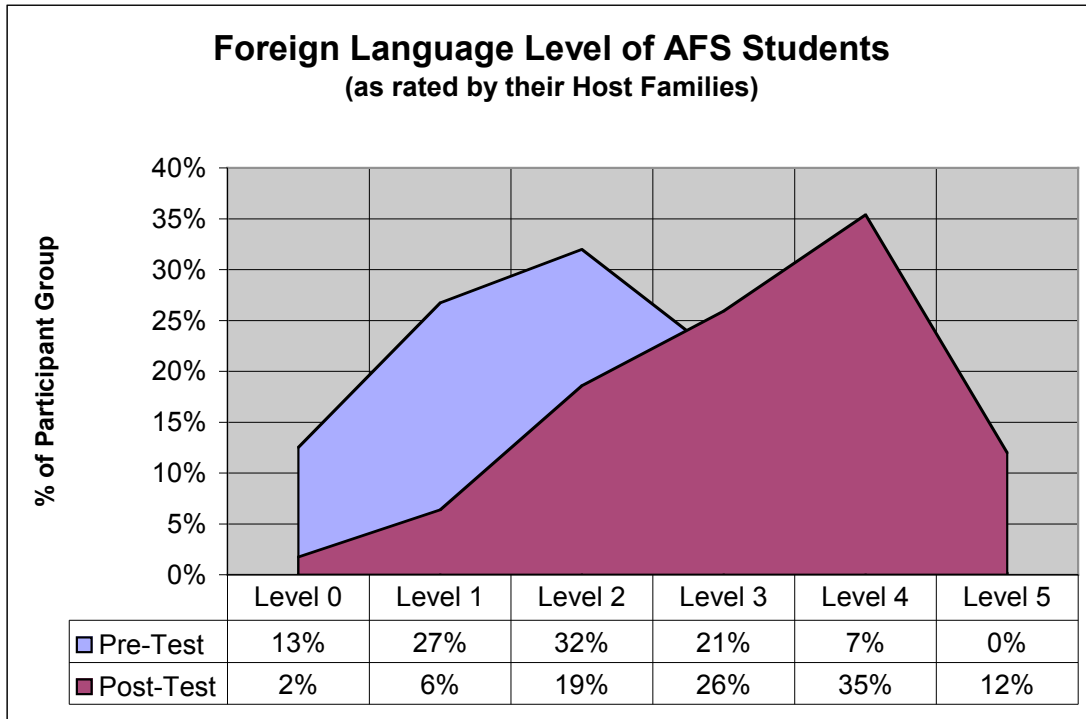


**Figure 2. Knowledge of the host country and culture.**

In this chart (Figure 2), we can see that there was very little learning about other cultures among the control group in their self report. However, for the AFS students, both in their self reports and in the reports from the host parents, the year's experience in another culture brought about a significant increase in their knowledge of these various aspects of the host culture.

### **Foreign Language Learning**

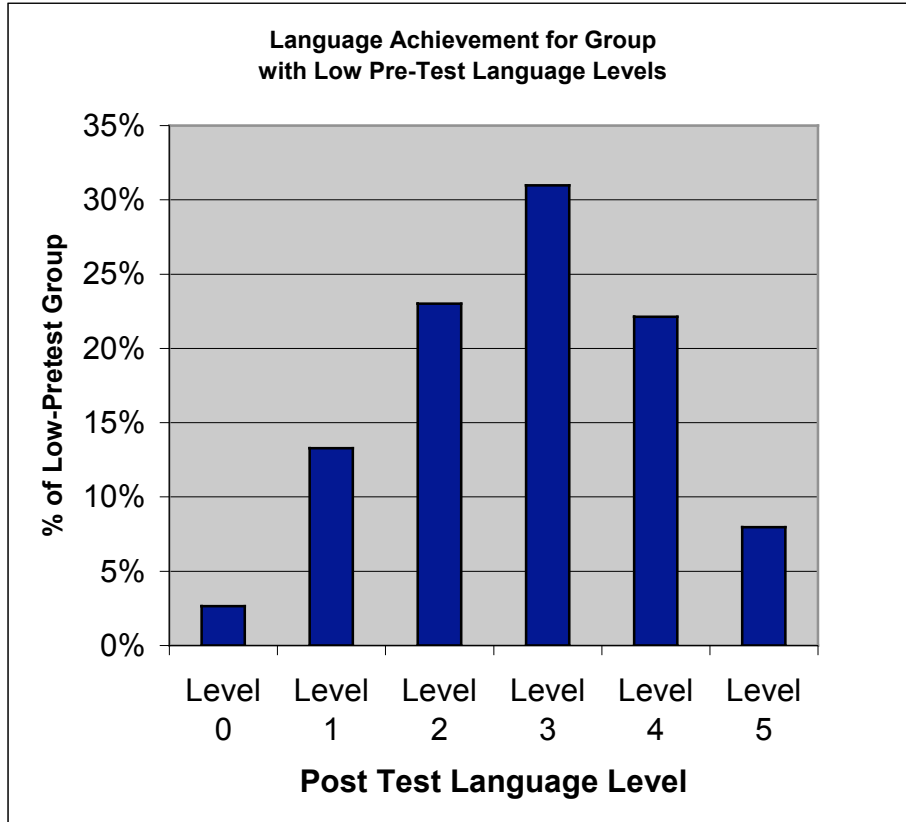
The Educational Results study also provides us with a reputable, host-family assessed measure of the AFS students' host language fluency before and after the program. While not surprising, the fluency levels achieved by our students are impressive: nearly half (47%) achieved advanced fluency or bilingual levels by the end of the program. Even students who started at very low levels achieved very good results.



**Figure 3. Foreign language increases by AFS students.**

The largest group of students (32%) began their exchange program with basic proficiency, Level 2 in our scale. At this level, the student understands basic meanings in most conversations, has an elementary grasp of the grammar, and can manage most social situations in the host language. By the end of the experience, the largest group (35%) is at advanced proficiency or Level 4. They are able to use the language fluently and accurately, are able to act as an informal translator, and can participate fully in any conversation within the range of their personal experience. An additional 12% of the students were assessed by their host families to be completely bilingual, at Level 5. At this highest level, the student has a speaking proficiency in the host language equivalent to that of an educated native speaker.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> A complete description of all the language levels can be found in the appendix.

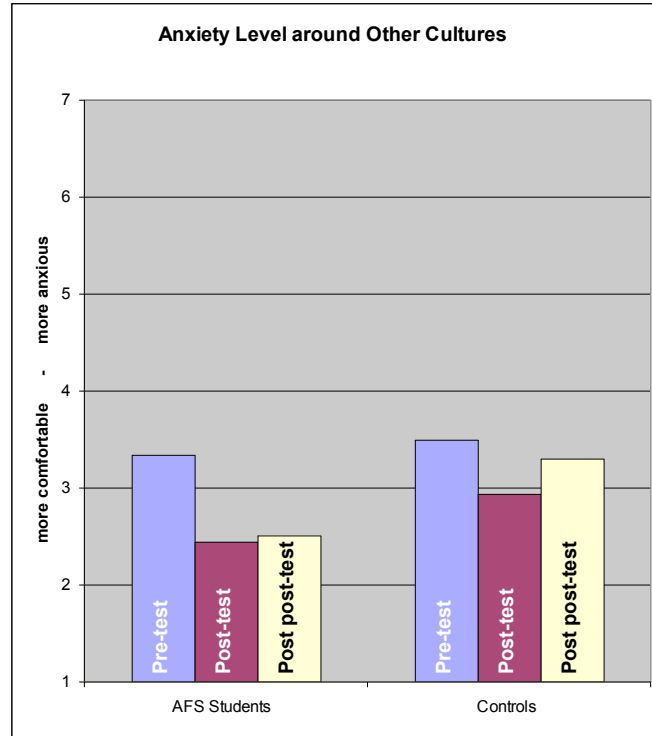


**Figure 4. Language achievement for those starting at low pre test levels**

Among those AFS students who began their exchange program with little or no language ability (Level 0) or at Level 1, elementary proficiency where they are able only to handle the most basic conversational needs, we find that substantial progress in the language is still achieved. Nearly 60% of this group achieve at least moderate proficiency (Level 3) where they are able to use the language quite effectively and easily, participating comfortably in most formal and informal conversations.

The level of language proficiency seems have a relationship both with the student's sense of comfort around other cultures and with the "first impression" that the student makes on the host family. Statistically, the language level rating given by the host family at the beginning of their hosting experience is positively correlated with lower levels of student intercultural anxiety, and with the family's pre test assessments on the student's knowledge of the host culture, his or her intercultural competence and the extent to which the student demonstrates AFS values. Post test language achievement is positively correlated with the participants' satisfaction with the experience 6-8 months later. These correlations are not large, but are statistically significant.

## Anxiety Reduction



**Figure 5. AFS Students have significantly lower levels of anxiety around other cultures following the AFS experience while students in the control group do not change significantly.**

One of the measures of the study was a self-rated assessment of the level of anxiety, embarrassment or discomfort that the participants and control group members felt when dealing with cultural differences. Both AFS students and the control group began in May 2002 at a similar, low mid-level anxiety, though AFS students were slightly less anxious than the control group members. By the end of the exchange experience the AFS students had dropped to a significantly more comfortable level and they maintained this lowered anxiety 6-8 months after the experience. In contrast, the control group tended to remain at the pre test levels. The variation in the anxiety levels for the control group shown in Figure 5 are a result in part from lowered response rates for this group; there is no statistically significant change in the anxiety level for the control group.

### **Anxiety Reduction & Language Level**

As mentioned earlier, a small but significant inverse correlation was found between the level of language achievement and the level of anxiety or discomfort students felt about cultural differences. The same pattern is found at the post test, with a significant but small inverse correlation between post test language level and post test anxiety. This pattern indicates that there is a relationship between foreign language acquisition as rated by the host family and the student's self-reported feelings of relative comfort around other cultures. It is not clear whether greater anxiety contributes to a reluctance to use and learn the language, or if the lower language level itself makes the students feel less comfortable.

Comparing the group of students who started the experience with Language Levels 0 or 1 with those who started at levels 3 or higher, we find that those with higher language levels are more at ease around other cultures than those who started the program with limited language ability.

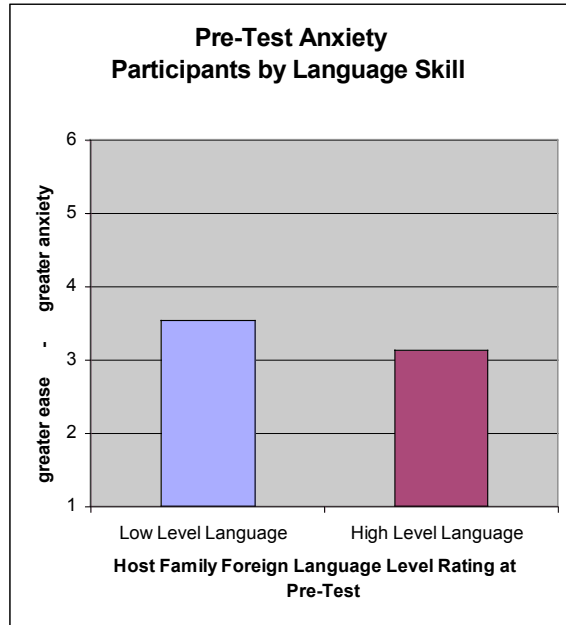


Figure 6. Pre test levels of anxiety or ease around other cultures.

### **Friendship & Social Networks**

Before the exchange experience, AFS students reported that 11% of their friends were from other cultures and the control group had a slightly lower level of friends from other cultures (9%). Some eight months after the students were back in their home environments following their AFS experience, the AFS students were again asked to identify what percentage of their friends were from other cultures. On average they counted 23% of their friends as being from other cultures, while the control group surveyed at the same time was unchanged in their friendships across cultures. AFS Students also show that after their experience they are spending a significantly greater amount of time with people from other cultures, while the control group is spending somewhat less time with people from other cultures.

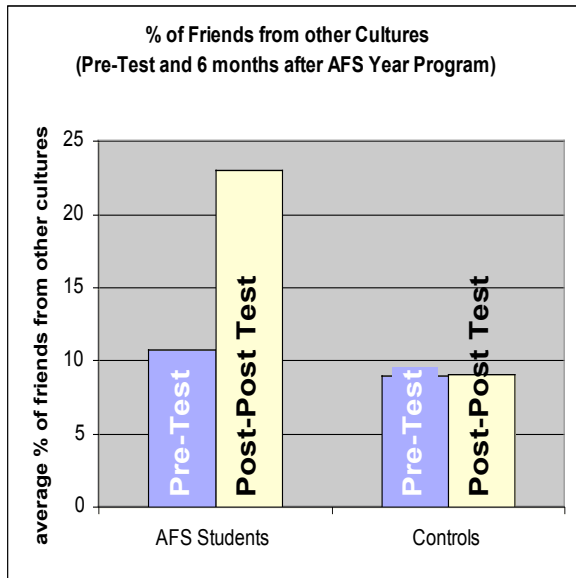


Figure 7. Friendship Index

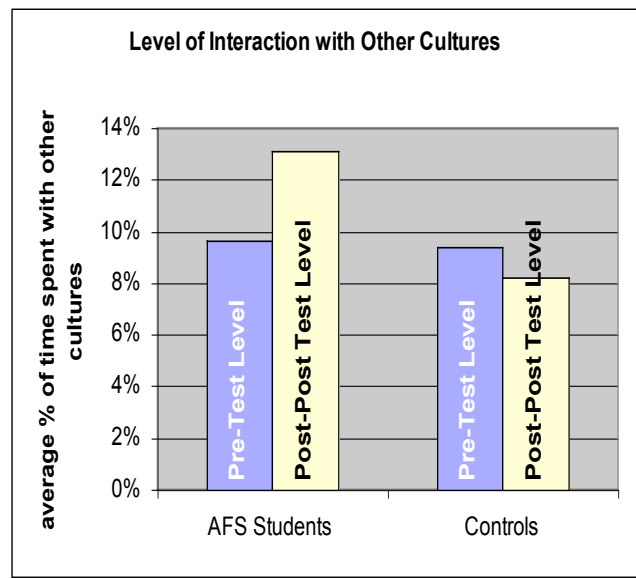


Figure 8. Intercultural Interaction Index

### **AFS Values, Intercultural Effectiveness**

The AFS students received very high ratings from both their own parents and their host parents in the various measures of intercultural effectiveness and their demonstration of AFS values. These two questionnaires sent to parents and host parents are related to the students' ability to build relationships across cultures, to show a certain respect and sensitivity in their interactions with others (measures of intercultural effectiveness), and to exemplify the AFS values that are stated in the "Core Values" section of the AFS Mission statement.<sup>6</sup> At the pre test, ratings by parents and host parents in all these measures were already quite high. For example, in assessing the students' demonstration of the AFS core values, 12% of the sending parents and 24% of the host parents giving the students perfect scores. At the post test, 25% of the host families gave their students perfect scores, and 6-8 months later, 20% of the students' parents gave their sons and daughters perfect scores. When scales are limited at the upper end, having so many begin at the highest possible rating means less possibility for upward movement. We do see with ratings by the host parents a significant movement upward from an average 5.1 to 5.3 on a 6 point scale, but with nearly a quarter of the host families giving perfect ratings to their hosted students, the average of 5.1 stays the same.

There is a similar issue with the parents' and host parents' ratings of the students' intercultural effectiveness, though the ratings were not quite as high. Again, in this case the average rating by the parents moved from 5.0 to 5.2, a difference that is statistically significant, while the host family ratings moved from 4.8 to 4.9, a difference that is *not* statistically significant. We also see a number of parents and host parents giving their students perfect ratings. For the parents, this jumped from 7% to 18%, while for the host

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix for full Mission Statement and Core Values of AFS.

parents the increase was from 13% to 17%. With lower average ratings than given by the natural parents, but a higher percentage giving perfect marks at pre test, it is clear that there is more variation among the responses of the host families.

In short, we can be pleased with the very high marks received by the students at both pre and post test, but the scales did not prove useful in measuring improvement in part because of the high pre test assessments.

### **Shift in Developmental Level**

In their average, overall developmental IDI scores,<sup>7</sup> the AFS students began the program at a significantly higher level than the control group of friends who did not go abroad. At the pre test (May 2002), the average developmental score (DS) for future AFS students is almost one standard deviation higher than the average for the control group, and at the post test is it a full standard deviation higher. If we convert the DS scores to normative percentiles, we find that the AFS students, on average, start at the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile on the scale while the control group starts at the 15<sup>th</sup> percentile. At the end of the experience and again 6-8 months later, the AFS students are ranked at the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile, while the control group remains at the 15<sup>th</sup> percentile. At all stages, the differences between the AFS students and the control group are quite significant, and the growth of the AFS students between the pre test and the post test is also statistically significant.

DMIS Stage	IDI Code	
Denial & Defense	DD	Ethnocentric stages
Reversal	R	
Minimization	M	
Acceptance & Adaptation	AA	Ethno-relative stages
Overall Developmental Level	DS	

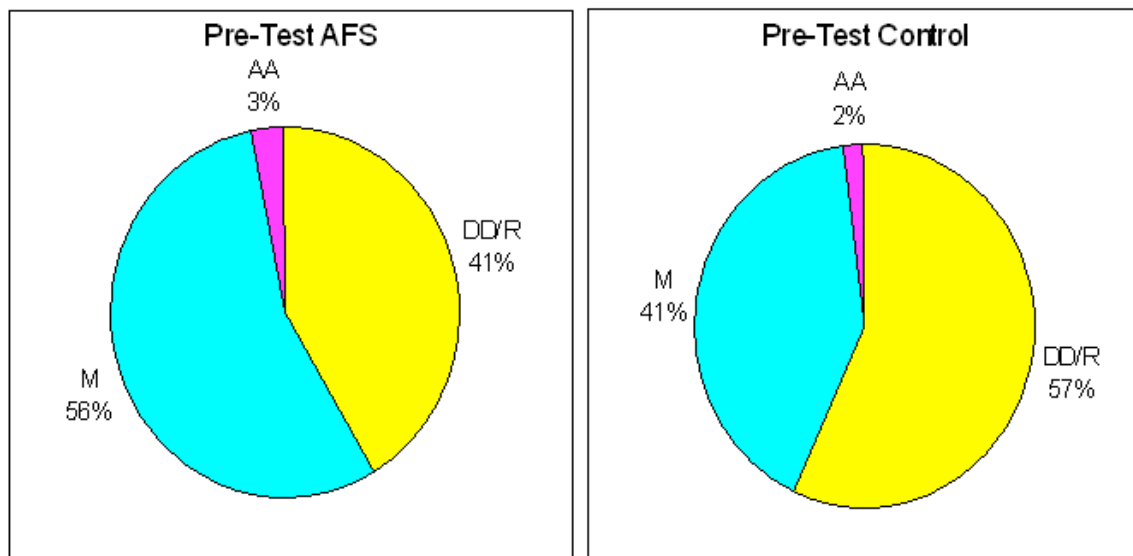
In terms of the DMIS model, the AFS students initially have an approach to other cultures that is more tolerant than those of the control group. The average score demonstrates a low to mid “M” or Minimization stage. In this level of development, students experience other cultures as being very similar to their own. Though they see cultural differences, they don’t attach as much importance to these differences as they attach to the common elements that appear in all cultures. As one student said, “I’d say that there are similarities and differences... but as I do not see the differences as relevant, I’d say that there are more similarities than differences.” The control group’s initial average score shows more ethnocentrism in their approach to other cultures. At the end of the experience and persisting 6-8 months later, the AFS students on average have moved up slightly but significantly, but are not moving beyond the “M” stage.

<sup>7</sup> The IDI measurement follows the DMIS model, but the some stages contain more than one subscale while other stages correlated so closely that they are collapsed into a single broader category. So Denial and Defense were highly correlated and so are combined as “DD” with some subscales, while Reversal (“R”) is a separate measure. Minimization (“M”) encompasses two different subscales while Acceptance and Adaptation are also highly correlated as a combined scale. At the highest developmental levels, an “EM” scale measures an integrated stage in which the person shows confusion about his or her cultural identity, and there is as yet no measure for Bennett’s “Constructive Marginality.” There is also an overall “developmental score” or “DS” which is indicative of the general developmental level of that student.

We are able to explain better what is happening by splitting the pre test results for the AFS students and for the controls into three groups:

1. those who begin with primarily polarized experiences of other cultures (“DD” and “R” orientations, though by far most of them are showing “R” rather than “DD”)
2. those who begin at the more advanced “Minimization” stage (“M” orientation), and
3. those who already have a more ethno-relative experience of other cultures and are classified as having an “AA” orientation.

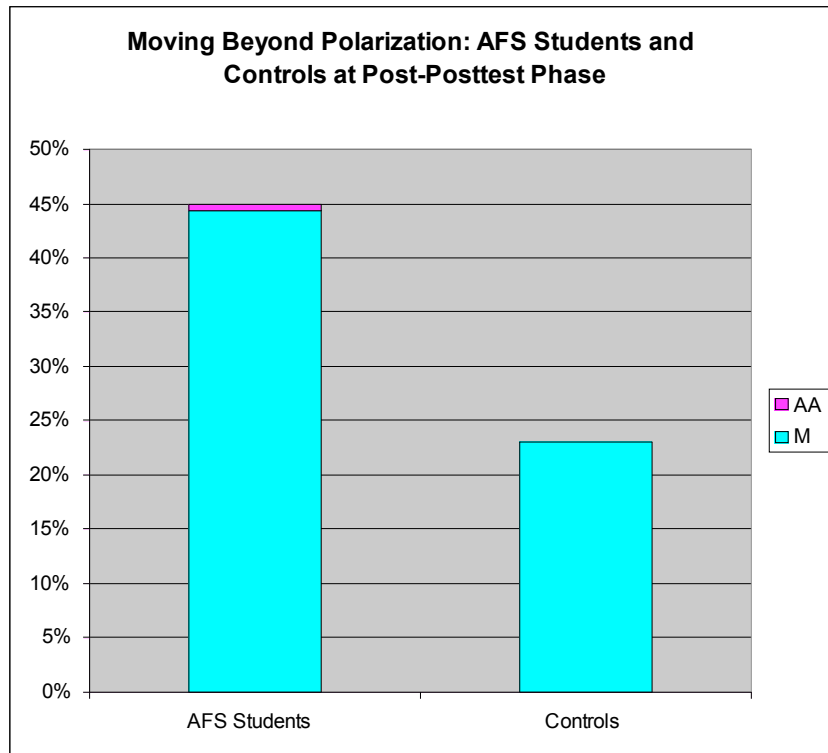
We know that a larger percentage of the control group is in the polarized group, and a larger percentage of the AFS group is already in the Minimization group. As the graph below shows, 41% of the AFS students began their program with scores showing a primary orientation of Denial/Defense or Reversal, and 56% began already showing a more tolerant approach to cultures (the “M” stage). For the control group, the situation was virtually the opposite, with 57% with primarily ethnocentric orientations, and 41% with primarily “M” orientations. For both groups, only a small percentage of those surveyed had reached Acceptance & Adaptation levels. The DD/R group (almost entirely characterized by Reversal) is represented in the chart below in yellow, the M group (Minimization) in blue, and the AA group (Acceptance & Adaptation) in pink.



**Figure 9. Pre test IDI development categories**

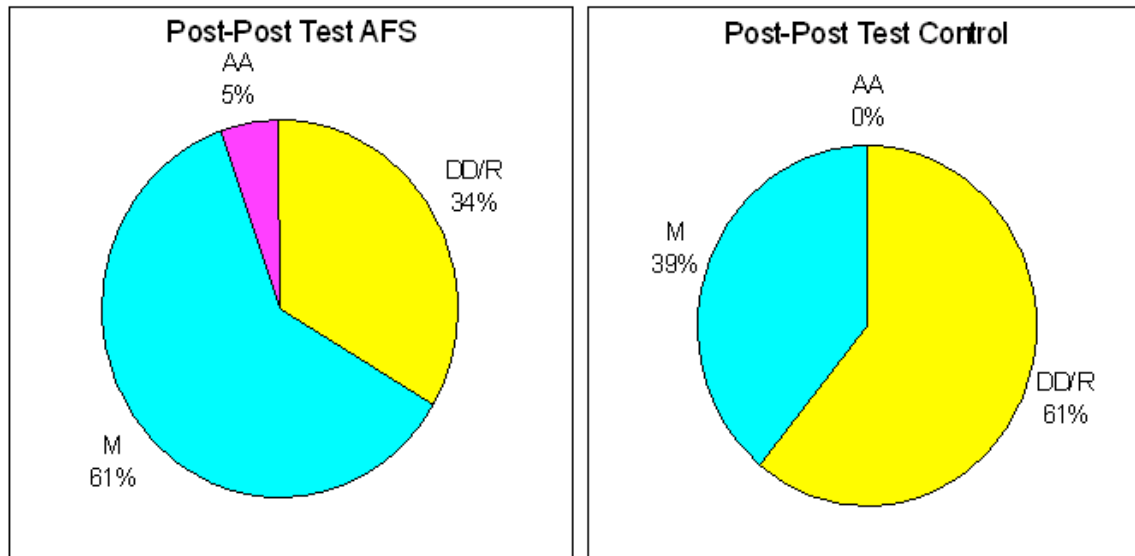
If we look just at those students who began with an outlook characterized by polarization, we can see the major impact that the AFS program can have with these students. Of the 256 AFS students and 82 friends in the control group who started out with this more ethnocentric outlook and who completed the post test, 45% of the AFS students and 20% of the Control group moved beyond the “us”/ “them” mentality to the next level of development, “M,” which is “Minimization.” In the case of the AFS students a few moved on to the higher, ethnorelative level of “AA.” At the post-post test, six to eight months after the AFS group returned home, the figures are similar: of the 180 AFS students and the 65 Control group students who initially started out with a polarized

outlook, 45% of the AFS students and 23% of the Control group have developed to the next level of intercultural sensitivity, Minimization, where their primary focus is on our common humanity. In general, we see that the students with the AFS experience advance to higher levels of sensitivity at nearly twice the rate of the control group. The chart below shows the % of the originally ethnocentric AFS students and control group students who were able over the course of the 20-22 months between pre test and post-post test surveys to move beyond polarization to a more advanced level of intercultural sensitivity.



**Figure 10. % of AFS students and controls in the DD/R group at pre test who were able to move beyond the "Reversal" or "Denial/Defense" stage to a more advanced level ("M" or "AA").**

At the end of the AFS experience and after the students have been home for a while, the AFS group is a very different group from their friends who did not go abroad. When we look at the two groups at the end of the study, we see that two-thirds of the AFS students are now experiencing other cultures primarily from a perspective of minimizing cultural differences, showing tolerance with a focus on our common humanity ("M"). In some cases, students reach an even more advanced level of intercultural understanding. At the same time, over 60% of the control group experiences cultures in terms of "us" and "them" ("DD/R") as the predominant mode.



**Figure 11. Post-post test IDI development categories**

Although most of the students who began in May of 2002 with “Minimization” approaches maintained that level and did not increase substantially, we know that those who started with a polarized outlook did advance on average over 6 points, or one standard deviation, and the AFS group as a whole moved forward, coming close to the transition from reversal (or defense) to the more tolerant stage of “Minimization.” In short, AFS students who had been experiencing other cultures more in terms of romanticizing the other culture, or in being defensive about their own culture, were able to catch up with the other exchange students, while the control group encountered no experience during their time at home to move them forward at all.

### **Understanding “Reversal” and “Denial/Defense” Polarization**

“Figure 9. Pre test IDI development categories” shows that 41% of the AFS students and 57% of the controls started in a polarized worldview. But the chart in Breakdown of Denial/Defense and Reversal tendencies in the AFS Group. Figure 12, below, shows that the experience for most of the AFS students in this 41% is Reversal rather than Denial or Defense. However, a good number of students at this level are experiencing both a Denial/Defense reaction and a Reversal reaction at the same time. This is not surprising or uncommon. A student who romanticizes the host culture at the expense of his or her home culture can still feel threatened when faced with criticism of his or her own culture by the host culture, for example. It is also possible that a student may be critical of his or her home culture in relation to the host culture but feel that his or her own culture is superior to other cultures. What our study shows is that following the AFS experience, there are fewer AFS students experiencing Denial and Defense and fewer experiencing Reversal, but there are still about 1/3 of the AFS students at the Reversal stage 6-8 months after the experience. Post-return orientation is normally a good opportunity to address issues about Reversal – the feeling that the host culture is superior to one’s own.

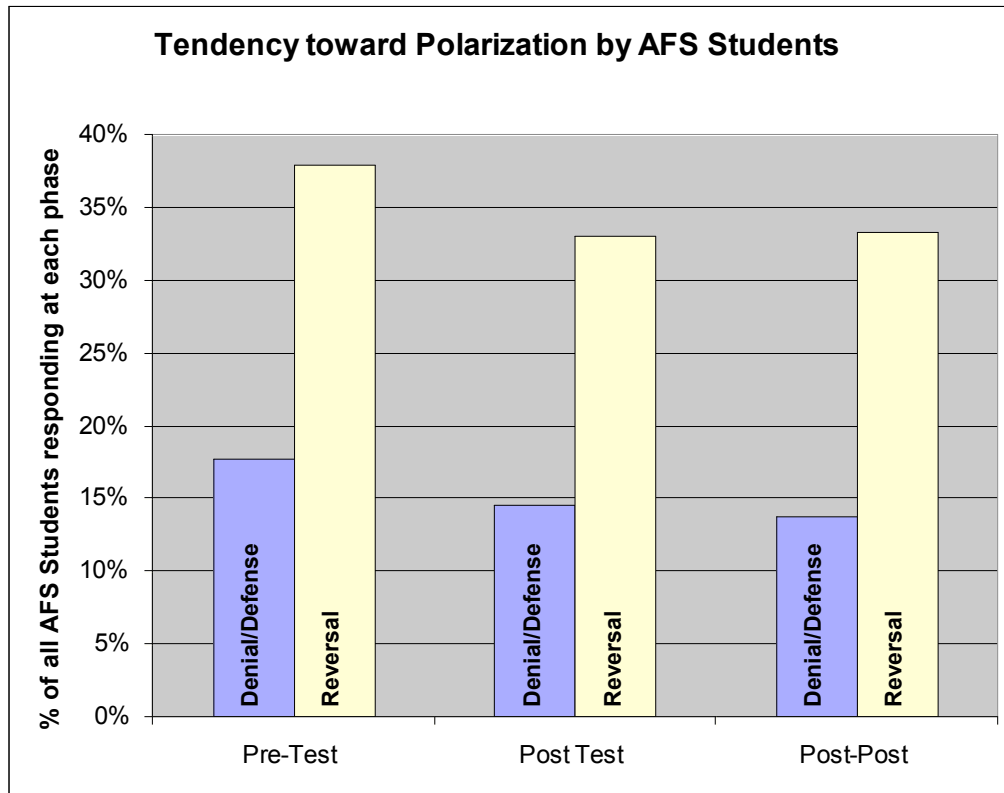


Figure 12. Breakdown of Denial/Defense and Reversal tendencies in the AFS Group.

### Understanding “Minimization”

Since 56% of the AFS students start off with scores showing them to have a worldview in minimization (compared with 41% of the control group), and since this is the developmental stage where over 60% of the AFS students remain at post-post test (compared with 39% of the controls), it is useful to understand what the “M” scale is measuring. According to Milton Bennett and Mitchell Hammer:

"The M Scale measures a worldview that highlights cultural commonality and universal values through an emphasis on *similarity* (a tendency to assume that people from other cultures are basically 'like us') and/or *universalism* (a tendency to apply one's own cultural values to other cultures). This worldview is considered to be 'transitional' from more ethnocentric orientations measured by the "DD" and "R" scales to more cultural sensitive (ethnorelative) worldviews."

Students are focusing on similarity when they think about other cultures compared to their own. They use their own reactions, judgments and ways of organizing experience, and believe that those from other cultures have more or less the same types of reactions, judgments, and ways of organizing experience. They are not ready to consider that belonging to another culture may mean a very different way of being. The differences they notice are usually put into a range of variations such as they might also find at home. So the difference between using chopsticks or using a knife and fork is not seen as possibly related to very different attitudes toward food and its meaning in the

society. A student at this stage might see a knife and fork as the European or Western equivalent of chopsticks, and as such the difference is really trivial compared to the common humanity shared by the two cultures.

Adolescents may also be drawn to universal values, and this relates as well to the “M” scale and this stage of development. For a student who believes that men and women should be treated equally, this universal value applies equally in Ecuador, China, Sweden and the United States. For that student, the universal value holds more importance in how he or she will relate to others than the differences that may be found between these cultures.

### **Satisfaction, Host Family Changes, and Language**

“I tried for three months to get accustomed to the lifestyle of my host family, but it became more and more difficult, and I talked to my host family, and we came to the decision that it was better to change family. I felt a little “stupid” after this decision, because I was not able to get used to the lifestyle of the family. And it was also a strange feeling that I had to move away from the family, and it is still strange when I run into the family somewhere.”

A family change is part of the experience for approximately 25% of all AFS Year Program students. The experience is typically difficult for the student as well as the host family. As part of the research project, we looked at the role that a family change might play in the student’s learning and satisfaction with the experience, and whether there might be any way to predict family moves based on some initial assessments of the students.

For most of the measures in this study, no difference could be found between students with just one host family throughout the year and those who had lived with two or more host families. Students who change families show up at similar levels of intercultural competence as those who stay with one family. They have just as many friends from other cultures and intercultural networks. Their parents rate them similarly and they rate themselves similarly in all measures. They also seem to show similar patterns of learning and growth in virtually all areas.

However, we learned that students who stay with the same host family throughout the year create a good first impression with the host family. At the pre test survey given to the host families shortly after the arrival of their students, host families who kept the student all year rated their students as significantly more knowledgeable about the host country compared with those who lived with two or more host families. They also rated them at a higher level of ability in the host language.

“My family sat down with me and slowly explained why I can’t take long showers and that everything was ok but they needed me to follow this rule. My Spanish wasn’t too good then but they took their time and explained so I understood. I felt a little foolish for not understanding them the first time they explained the rules.”

A student’s language ability may have an affect on the host family’s ratings of that student’s knowledge simply because he or she can communicate that knowledge better than the student with lower language ability, but it may also be an important factor in the

student's satisfaction with the experience. We discovered that students staying in just one host family had higher language levels at the end of the experience (post test) than those who changed families, and also higher levels of satisfaction. Those who had changed families also showed a higher level of intercultural anxiety upon their return home. Higher levels of language ability at the end of the program are also correlated with higher levels of satisfaction with the exchange experience and have an inverse relationship with intercultural anxiety levels. In all other areas, students who stayed with one family are indistinguishable from those who had more than one host family.

By the time of the final survey, however, some six to eight months after the students returned home (post post test), the differences between students who changed families and those who remained with just one family are largely gone. There is no longer any difference in satisfaction or anxiety: students who had two families are similar to those who had just one host family, though the few students who had three or more host families are still somewhat less satisfied with their experience than those who had just one host family. The parents of the students who had more than one host family show just as high assessments in intercultural effectiveness and in the student's demonstration of AFS values as those who had more than one host family. There are no significant differences in intercultural development as measured by the IDI that distinguish students with just one host family over those with two or more host families.

## CASE STUDIES

Among the journal responses from the 172 students who provided them, the journals of several students were selected for in-depth case study analysis. These students were chosen because they provided multiple journals describing their experience at different stages, and because we also could assess their full IDI profile at each of the three survey phases: Pre test, post test, and post-post test. The case studies cover a range of experiences.

At the high end of the learning scale is "Stefan," a rather normal German teenager who had lived from 0-3 months in another culture before his experience with AFS. He attended pre-departure orientation. His AFS experience seems largely unremarkable, at least as he reports it in the journals he submitted to us. He spent a year in the United States living with a host family and attending high school. There he received support and attended in-country orientations. Though there is no mention about it in his journal, his post test questionnaire reported that he lived with two host families during his experience.

Stefan's progress in terms of intercultural sensitivity is one of the strongest, with an overall 28 point increase. He was successful in other ways as well. His host family at the post test rated him as having "bilingual" language ability and gave him top ratings in his knowledge of the US culture, his intercultural effectiveness and competence, and his demonstration of important AFS values such as respect for other cultures, tolerance, ability to act in harmony with others, and to behave as a responsible global citizen. (The first host family did not provide any ratings.)

From the IDI profile, we know that Stefan started his AFS year experiencing cultural differences in a very polarized way, and that he also was somewhat disinterested in cultural differences. Like so many of the students, Stefan's view of his own culture was

critical. While he may have recognized that all cultures have good and bad points, his primary focus was on the bad points of his own culture and the good points of other cultures. Stefan began his year without much sense of his motivation for coming on AFS. "I simply registered with AFS and everything went from there," he wrote.

As he arrived in the United States, Stefan happily reported "I feel like I have already settled down like an American." In his statements he is vague about what he is seeing in terms of differences or similarities in the two cultures. He notices some new measures of social status (where you go to school or church, the social value of achievements at school or work), but he thinks maybe he is "so used to the differences" that he doesn't notice them. This is typical of the "disinterest" or denial issues he displays in the IDI profile: in his worldview, cultural differences simply are not that relevant or worthy of attention.

At mid-stay, Stefan reports having "no real problems." Instead of commenting on problems or issues, however, he instead talks in a general way about his strategy for dealing with annoyances and controlling his irritation. "I simply always tried to be as open and understanding of everything as possible. This is the way they live. Besides, I think that it helped me a great deal that I always tried to see everything from the positive side. Every time something happened that annoyed me, instead of getting irritated, I always tried to see the good things I had. I believe that this makes it easier to 'eliminate' problems already at an early stage; it is simply much easier to solve something with a positive attitude rather than at a time when one is annoyed at everything." Since he has developed such a strategy, it seems clear that he has faced a number of challenges, but prefers not to focus on them. This not wanting to focus on problems or conflicts can be related to the growth he is experiencing as he starts to move into the minimization level which shows up in the post test IDI profile.

A few months after his return, Stefan emphasizes two points of growth that are relevant here. In one he is more prepared to try something new, "to do things that by their first appearance don't look as if they could be fun." He is more open, as he says. He also returns to the idea he brought up at mid-stay, that it is "not worthwhile to get upset about things." A few months after this entry, we have the last IDI profile for Stefan. Here we find that he has grown again. His profile shows that he is working more with the moral issues around the search for universal values, and his comments seem to reflect that development.

Stefan's experience may be typical of those who seem to benefit most from the AFS experience in that as a result of his participation in the program, he has moved from a very low development level to a quite tolerant and open outlook.

At the other end of the spectrum is "Jennifer" a student from the United States whose initial experience of cultural differences was to focus on the similarities among cultures and our common humanity. This was a more advanced stage than more than 40% of the AFS students at the pre test. At the beginning of the year, she wrote happily of the friends she was making, new people she was meeting, and wrote, "I don't think the differences that I notice are really that big or are totally new for me." But after listing the differences and similarities she had found, she wrote, "I would definitely say that there are more cultural differences than similarities I have noticed." Her motivations to go abroad with AFS included some boredom with her high school in her home country. Though we have limited information, we can see that her exposure to AFS led to some

internal struggles. By the end of the experience she is showing dissatisfaction with her own culture. Toward the end of her experience, she wrote: “I personally think that I should pay attention to cultural similarities because there is never going to be understanding between 2 cultures when we only look at cultural differences.” After her experience, her overall developmental score on the IDI dropped 12 points. Six to eight months after her return home, her profile shows that she is coming to terms with the issues of “reverse polarization” that she has developed, and has some signs of identity confusion.

Jennifer’s struggles with accepting her own culture, now that she has lived in another, may ultimately lead her to an even more advanced place, but AFS might have been able to do more to help her with the specific issues she faced. We know from her own survey that she received support in the host country, but she reported that she did not attend a post-return orientation. The fact that she easily made friends in her host country, that she stayed with the same host family throughout the experience, and that she seemed to be developing many friends at the beginning may have made it seem that she had no problems. She may have advanced in her self-awareness, her ability to be responsible for herself, and in many other areas not measured by our study. At the end of the year, her host family and her own parents gave her the highest ratings on all the scales of intercultural effectiveness, host country knowledge, and AFS values. She herself was very satisfied with the experience. Her anxiety around other cultures was fairly high at the pre test and dropped by the end of the program, but it was still somewhat higher than the average level for the AFS students. Her language level as rated by her host parents went from an elementary level (Level 1) to a level of moderate proficiency (Level 3). This two step increase is about the norm for the AFS students, and leaves her with a very comfortable and complete grasp of the host country language. By most measures, Jennifer is a successful AFS student. Yet we also see from her IDI profile that the way she experiences cultural differences six to eight months after her AFS year is now in a less advanced stage of development than before she started the program. This is not necessarily a negative result but rather a somewhat common movement in incorporating new experiences and outlooks.

Through the case studies, we see some students move to more sophisticated and nuanced views of other cultures, and other students who, at the end of their AFS program, are showing new confusion as they struggle with understanding their experience of other cultures. Following a student like Jennifer through her journals and her IDI profiles helps AFS understand better what the nature of the learning experience is and what it looks and feels like. As in many areas of learning, students may develop and grow steadily, or they may reach plateaus where forward progress seems unattainable. In some cases, they may even be pushed backwards while they take apart and rebuild their mental frameworks, because they cannot understand what they are experiencing with the mental framework they came with.

AFS has long been interested in the notion that exchange students learn most from crisis situations, where they in fact do need to reconstruct their mental framework.

“Personal crises are bound to occur throughout an AFS experience because the participant is continuously compelled to act and react in the absence of familiar cues. When they remain manageable, such crises become highly productive bases for intercultural learning because they force the participant to challenge old assumptions, to think creatively, and to acquire new knowledge, attitudes and

skills. Crises rarely become overwhelming for AFS participants because of the emotional security provided by the host family and other host nationals, and because of the network of support available from AFS volunteers and staff members. Participant orientation and support should be re-conceptualized as an effort to provide AFSers with knowledge, awareness, and skills that will better enable them to seize, cope with, recover from, and above all **learn** through the succession of personal crises that inevitably will occur throughout their intercultural experience.”<sup>8</sup>

## CRISIS IN LEARNING

In January of 2003, the students received the journal questions designed to elicit “critical incidents” to give us a sense of the kinds of intercultural issues or conflicts that students face at this juncture in their experience.

These were the questions sent to the students who had volunteered to take part in the journal submissions.

Tell us about a difficulty or problem you have faced while living in your host culture that you believe was caused by “cultural differences” between you and your hosts.

- What was the topic or focus of the difficulty or problem?
- Who was involved?
- When did it take place?
- What happened?
- What was the result or outcome?
- How did you feel?
- What “cultural differences” do you believe caused this difficulty or problem?

AFS staff and volunteers have a large stake in understanding how students deal with the issues and problems they encounter related to cultural differences. It has typically been assumed that responding to and resolving these issues is one of the major components of developing intercultural competence and learning by doing. The students who contributed journals in this study have provided a wide range of intercultural issues that troubled them. AFS can anticipate that these issues of these types will be encountered frequently by our students. In many cases, the journals highlighted concerns which warranted support and guidance from AFS, which could have been presented greater learning opportunities for these students. In the sections below, the issues are discussed as well as the ways students responded to the problems or difficulties they faced as a result of cultural differences.

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<sup>8</sup> “Statement of Recommendations Regarding AFS Program Quality” from *Reports From The Workshop On Intercultural Learning Content And Quality Standards*. A.k.a. The “Montreal Workshop” (March 1984) produced by the AFS Research Department, pp. 6-7.

## **Types of Critical Incidents Reported**

A team of eight AFS staff members from different cultures read each of the 70 journal entries provided by the students in order to identify and validate the categories that emerged from the data presented. Some journal entries encompassed more than one category, and so were included in both or all three categories that applied.

### **“No Problem”**

Over one-fifth (21%) of the students responding told us that they had “no problems” to report to us. Many of these students even apologize to the researchers that they are not able to help with the study, because they cannot report any problems. In some cases, the student seems to understand the question to refer only to problems related to cultural differences and so they may not tell us about problems they have had that they feel do not relate to the differences in culture. For example, an Austrian student wrote:

“I really thought about this for a long time, but really nothing occurs to me! I really did not experience any problem that had to do with cultural differences. I actually see no really great cultural differences between the United States and Austria. Sorry!”

Other students who wrote that they had no problems give some information about strategies they used to avoid problems, or insights they have about why they may not have had any problems so far, as did this student, who credits her pre-departure orientation in Costa Rica as helping her avoid problems:

“Thank God, I haven’t had any problems or clashes with my host family here in the USA. They have treated me like another of their children and I have loved them very much. I think the key points we talked about during the meeting in Costa Rica help me to avoid any type of problems, maybe like:

- \* TOLERANCE: It is a very important point and a quality I was able to develop.
  - \* *‘It is not better or worse, just different.’*
- You learn a lot by trying different things.”

### **Habits and Daily Life**

Another one-fifth of the students (20%) reported some issue with adapting to the habits and daily life they found in the host country. These students may struggle with the family’s daily schedule, routine, food habits or the host culture’s body language. While this wasn’t always a conflict, some students became aware of these differences and struggled in some way to change their behavior to match the host country habits, as did this Japanese student:

“About a month after I started my life here, my host family told me that ‘I always bow.’ It looks like I was unconsciously continuing this behavior, which is not very formal in Western society, since I had not gotten rid of this mannerism. I remember I had a talk with my host family for one or two hours. It took another half a month before I got used to not bowing. Likewise, I think that it took some time before I picked up habits such as handshakes and hugging which do not exist in Japan.”

Food is frequently mentioned as a conflict area, as are bathing, sleeping patterns, and other aspects of daily life.

### **Encroachment on Autonomy**

At age 17, these students are at a developmental stage where establishing autonomy is a primary task. They are developing their own set of principles and ideals, and making their own decisions. In this stage of cognitive development, adolescents may become more argumentative with their parents and adults in general and may become elusive about where they are going or with whom. Whatever degree of autonomy the students have established at home, in the host country they are dependent again on adults and on others in a way that challenges their sense of autonomy. Over 17% of the students reported an intercultural issue related to autonomy. AFS students who now find they are required to get permission from parents for activities they normally are allowed to do without asking at home will see this as a cultural difference if their own parents do not require exactly the same behavior. They complain about a loss of freedom, whether it's simply the lack of a public transportation system that forces them to depend more on the host family or coping with a new set of rules imposed by the host family.

“My parents warned me on the need to ask permission instead of letting them know, whenever I wished to do anything independently of the family. ... I felt weird, because this was a new situation for me. I was never used to ask permission to go out with friends. I thought that leaving information about where and who I was with would be enough; I eventually adapted to it, but it's still hard for me to address to them just for asking permission to commute.”

### **Style of Communication**

The AFS students also reported difficulties related to the style of communication. About 17% of those answering this question reported this kind of problem. Feelings can be hurt if communication is direct and blunt, and the student expected indirect communication, or communication may be lost if the style is indirect and the student expected to be told directly. A different expectation about the level of emotional content in communication may also create problems.

For example, this student was at first confused that the host mother used the host siblings as intermediaries rather than communicating directly.

“I didn't know I was supposed to say goodbye to her every day before school, or that I was not allowed to cook something unless it was for the whole family because of energy costs. And these things too, I heard from my [host] mother *THROUGH* one sibling or another. ”

Another student felt excluded because of a lack of emotional content in the host family's communication.

“On several occasions, it appeared to me that there was no communication between the [host] family and me, especially at the

emotional level ...I often felt excluded from the family. ... My family [back home] is more accustomed to displaying their emotions, whether love or anger, etc. ...my parents always let me know what they feel for me.”

### **Intercultural Debate**

Almost 15% of the students reported an issue that revolved around political or social opinions and an intercultural debate. For example, the student may encounter verbal attacks against his or her country or culture, or may become involved in a fierce political debate that highlights differences in cultural values.

“My host family has different political opinions from me, and they approve the war, which I cannot understand and accept. ...I kept my opinion to myself, but I was shocked about the radical views of my host mother.”

While the vast majority of cross-cultural incidents reported concerned issues or conflicts with the host family -- usually with one or both of the host parents -- issues related to an intercultural debate could also stem from encounters with classmates or other host national peers.

“One day in school a boy in my class started making bad remarks about Americans and our culture. At first I was very upset and mad. I didn’t understand how someone could say something so mean when I was sitting right there.”

Students reported feeling mocked for being “American” or “Brazilian,” and criticized for failing to greet a friend with a kiss. In some cases, the AFS students were asked “stupid” questions by their peers, and concluded that the host culture classmates knew very little about their home countries.

### **Social Disconnection**

A type of problem students faced that they attributed to cultural differences was an inability to connect emotionally to members of the host culture. This led them to believe that the host culture was not as warm or affectionate as their own culture. They missed the friends and family who understood them, and the intimacy they established with them. The new culture is judged as superficial, artificial, uncommunicative, cold and unloving. About 13% of the students reported this kind of problem.

“Having friends, I mean, real friends, the kind who call you for shopping or going to a movie, or just for doing anything. There were two people here who invited me to go out and they were just 4 times in all. .. I continue to be ignored here. I missed my friends and [had] a little depression crisis.”

### **Relationship Issues**

Also about 13% of the students reported some problems with a specific relationship, typically with a member of the host family but it could also be with someone else from the host community. These conflicts, which the students attributed to cultural differences, typically involved feelings of jealousy or power struggles.

“The ‘problem’ which I have pinpointed after some reflection is: my host sister (9 years old). ...She is always yelling/swearing if she does not like something, does not want to do something. In any case, it seems to me as if I were the cause of it; meaning that it has become worse since my arrival...the last month was really extreme.”

### **Troubling Situations**

More than 11% of the students experience a troubling situation in the host culture that is difficult for them to understand or accept. They feel the situation encountered is shockingly different from what they would have experienced at home, and the impact of these incidents is felt strongly by the student for a long time. Those reporting these situations may try to make sense of the situation by referring back to their own cultural context or to stereotypes they have of the host culture.

“At a birthday party, a female classmate smeared cake into my face. It seems that in America people do that just for fun at birthday parties. I said that one shouldn’t play with food, and her boyfriend countered and asked me why. To that, I said that other people are going hungry while we play with our food. But he just didn’t want to understand. Americans don’t have as good a sense of waste as we do. Probably because of the ‘when it’s used up we always have more’ mentality.”

“I noticed that the money purse that I had had was missing. So I went back and looked for one but did not find it. The purse had about \$30 in it. I went back to my high school and reported the event to the office, which was reported to the high school office also. After a week, an empty purse was returned to me. Since I dropped it, it was my fault, but it was my first experience of stealing and it was shocking for me. Some Japanese steal money, and there may be very little cultural difference regarding that, but I felt disoriented since it happened among the students I was friendly with during the school-related games. I thought such a thing would not happen in Japan.”

### **Foreign Language Difficulties**

Some 6% of the students reported issues related to misunderstandings because of the language. Since the majority of the students were hosted in the United States and many students began with a basic conversational ability in English, the number of problems caused by foreign language misunderstandings may be somewhat lower than it would be for students hosted in countries where the language is not commonly taught outside the host country.

“It is quite stressful to study in a different culture using another language. At around 4 months after entering the school, I started to understand the content of talk a little bit at last; however, I just listened and could not do anything.”

## **Responding to Critical Incidents**

Each type of difficulty encountered by the students can provide an opportunity for intercultural learning, but in many of these cases as reported by the students it was not possible to identify a clear outcome of the critical incidents or to determine what specifically was learned. Several of the cases reported were not in any way “resolved” at the time the students wrote. However, some patterns emerged on ways in which students found solutions or explanations to their problems, and about actions or strategies that they themselves used to improve the situation or to avoid problems. While students found solutions to their problems in some cases, not all outcomes advanced the students’ intercultural development.

### **Mediation: Getting Help Resolving the Problems**

Though 88% of the AFS students reported that they had received support in the host country, in only a few of the incidents reported by the students we did not find any mention of the student seeking out help from AFS. In both cases the situation became more comfortable for the student but the information is too limited to draw conclusions about actions taken by AFS volunteer liaisons or counselors.

“By that time, I did not know my counselor, then I asked to talk to her, looked for her and said I was feeling very bad and needed to talk to her. Then, she came home. I said I wanted to change family, but she asked me to give it some time. She said it was too early and that she would get in touch with me within 15 days. However, things began to get better and better and I never talked to her again.”

“My host mother and I had a talk and tried to find a solution...it did not work out...we argued...she left the room, slammed the door and told me that I have to live somewhere else. Then I spent a weekend with my AFS liaison. Since then things are better.”

A bit more information can be found in the case of a student who had a relationship problem with her host sister and was able to receive support from the host mother, even as they agreed to a family change:

“I could not bring myself to talk about the subject, so I wrote a letter to my host mother stating that I was sad to see my host sister so unhappy. We had a long conversation and decided that I could move out when I wanted to. This I did already soon after New Year’s. My host mother was very understanding and supportive.”

Using a written letter to help her communicate in a thoughtful and organized way was an innovative strategy used by this student, and was not reported by any others, but mediation within the host family helped other students resolve their issues. While one student was initially upset by the host mother’s use of the children in the family as intermediaries instead of raising her concerns directly, the intermediaries were effective in enhancing the student’s understanding and in helping the relationship to develop in a positive way. Another student turned to her host father as a mediator when she had problems in her relationship with her host mother, due in part to the indirect communication style her host mother had employed:

“I had long intense conversations with my [host] father, and now he has talked to my [host] mother, and everything was straightened out. Now she tells me things to my face which makes everything much easier, and I think that we have a good communication and on top of that a super relationship, as we have really become fond of each other and respect each other. The cultural difference is that it was embarrassing for her to tell me my mistakes to my face, because that is impolite in her opinion. For me, however, [it’s] much better. I think that this was a difficult and important experience for both sides, but which definitely helped me to understand and respect her.”

This case is significant in the give and take shown on both sides. The AFS student, eager to resolve the problem, turned to mediation. The host mother also adapted to the more direct communication style preferred by the exchange student. The student also recognizes this as an accommodation to her needs and mutual respect and understanding resulted.

### **Negotiation and Compromise**

Families and exchange students often clash on house rules, particularly when the host family rules or expectations run up against the exchange students’ desire for autonomy, but also in the area of cultural habits and daily life.

“The problem was that I said ‘no’ too often when my host parents ‘ordered’ me to do something...I criticized them and accused them of being wrong.”

The ways in which these clashes are handled run a full range of possibilities. Host families may shift to accommodate the needs of the students, as in the example where the host family’s concern for the student who wouldn’t eat their food prompted them to provide bread along side the Chinese meal.

Some host families simply do not push the student to follow their expectations and rules. Another student seemed to realize that her host family did not really approve of her visits to friends living in the *favelas*, but since the family was not insistent with this as a rule, the student determined to mostly do what she wanted to do.

“They don’t express themselves clearly; I can see that it bothers them, but then they only say “if you think so” and let me go, unless it is really too dangerous, then they say “another time.” Actually, I always do what I want, unless they appear to be extremely hurt because I don’t heed their good advice this time, and then I won’t do it for once. . . . it is difficult to make a decision when you don’t get a yes or a no, but always have to decide yourself whether to give in or do what you want and risk hurting someone. Meanwhile, I give in only rarely, for if they cannot tell me a clear ‘no,’ then they must accept that I don’t hear a ‘no.’”

In some of these cases, negotiation brings about a solution according to the will power of those involved, rather than using intercultural sensitivity and respect. Other students are much more sensitive to the host parents’ point of view and able to empathize with them, helping to build the relationship.

“It is really hard for me to get used to it because I can go anywhere I want since I know how to use the public transportation in Hong Kong. Sometimes, I was upset because they cannot take me; but after I think about how difficult for them to take two of my sisters and me for the whole day, I won’t blame them anymore.

“Later, I talked to them about transportation. They explained to me that sometimes I could ask my friends if their parent can take me there and my parents take my friends home so that they can share the transportation and they don’t have to drive both ways. I can feel that they really try their best to help me to get used to the new situation, the ‘cultural differences.’ They also understand I’m from a city, they’re nice to try to understand me!

“Now I understand that Hong Kong is a very big city, unlike here. I need to accept something, which is different from the place that I grew up. There is nothing wrong with United States. It is just ‘cultural differences’. To not have a ride is really inconvenient to me, but my parents and I can solve the problem together most of the time.”

Both in the area of habits and daily life and in the area of autonomy, host parents often set rules or expectations for the students. Several students simply felt obliged to follow the rules set by the host parents once they understood what was expected.

“...when I was told that it is a house rule, I began to think that I just needed to follow it, thus working out the problem. I don’t know if I accepted this rule fully or not, but I am following the rule.”

“I have to accept my family and their rules... I have to adapt. I keep my mouth shut when I think I must tell them that they are wrong with this and that and that I know a better way, I must learn: it is not wrong or right, it is only different.”

However, in other cases a negotiation of rules takes place. Students express their displeasure or disagreement with the rules and manage to negotiate a mid-position that they accept, not always happily.

“One problem I had after I changed host families was that my new family went to church regularly and wanted me to go with them. .... After a period of time and a few conversations my host family and I figured out a compromise. I did not have to go every Sunday, but at least at a few. I was satisfied with this compromise and it works well. The problem then was that they wanted me to dress up when we went to church. I did not see the point in that and we had an argument over this theme where I in the end just dressed up, because it was the easiest way to solve the problem and it is only for a few Sundays.”

Whether the student simply obliges the host parents and obeys the rules, or negotiates a compromise of some sort, it is not clear that these students always advance their understanding of the host culture or their sensitivity to cultural differences. They “adapt”

to the situation and change their behavior, but not with a real appreciation of and participation in the host culture. The student who did not want to go to church is simply finding a way to achieve some of his own objectives by giving in to the demands of his host parents without altering his perspective.

Not all negotiations are with the host parents. With host culture peers, sometimes a different type of negotiation led to a real dialogue about cultural differences. AFS students sometimes will directly confront clashes and misunderstandings they have with their peers. One American student engaged in a debate with a classmate on the notion of “American Culture” which was being critiqued and was able to create an understanding. Another female student from Europe faced a very delicate situation with a Latin American boy who had learned of her past sexual experience and assumed she was also available to him. This student was able to confront the boy directly in a way that effectively defused the situation.

### **Defensive Stereotyping & Experiences of Cultural Differences**

Several students “resolved” a misunderstanding or confusing situation by using a stereotype of the host culture to “explain” what happened. Their reaction to the situation is defensive and polarized. People from the host culture are seen as tied to their national characters, and difficulties in forming friendships or outright conflict may be seen as inevitable because of these differences:

“... as far as the cultural differences that may have caused this problem, I believe that they were 1) the German language and an intrinsic kind of people, 2) the Germans do not have the same kind of affection as Brazilians, and the most logical one is the differences in culture. There is no way out of conflict. It’s about lives, thoughts, routines, weather, all completely different than ours.”

“I think the reason for this is that Americans are different; they are very superficial, not really warm-hearted. When you meet an American, he is very nice, but only for the first conversation. As soon as you try to get closer to him, it becomes difficult. He will not ask you when you want to do what. It is you that makes the first step. I think that this is exactly the opposite in Germany. It is more difficult in the beginning, but as soon as Germans have become used to something new and like it, they will come and then you have good friends.”

But for another student hosted in Germany, describing difficulties with her host sister, the situation is similar:

“But I think that this is all because of the German way of being. She says that she will never strike up a conversation with me. I am the one who is supposed to strike up a conversation with her, and several other things.”

Beyond the personal relationships and the “warmer” home country as opposed to the more “superficial” host country reported by several, students still tend to compare the “superior” way of being in their own culture with something not as good in the host culture.

“I think the Germans and Americans grow up very differently and are conditioned by different things. My inclination is rather to ask questions and not to accept everything people tell me. My host family is different there, rather the opposite, with much patriotism and no desire to change things. I think that this is ok up to a certain point and that you can probably only respect the opinion of others.”

Some students have a more complex sense of the cultural differences they encounter and present more nuanced comments about the differences between the home and host culture. They may try to balance good and bad features, or put their generalization into the context of the host culture.

“Americans value one’s own feelings and emotions more than others’. Sometimes this produces wonderful results; on the other hand, I think that it could hurt someone.”

“Here, the prevailing machismo society treats women as sex objects and sometimes even young people remain influenced by this practice. Knowing customs different from those of other countries, seeing a foreign woman surely [puts together the ideas of] freedom and independence with availability and immorality. This is also due, as far as I understand, to behavior on the part of many tourists that often supports this attitude.”

### **Avoidance**

Students also reported ways in which they avoided problems by avoiding topics of conversation or situations that could lead to conflict.

“We never talk about politics anymore (at least I don’t give my opinion).”

“The truth is this is a problem a little easy to overcome because my relationship with the family is fair or good when we don’t talk about religion or related subjects.”

### **Coping Strategies**

Both among students with “no problems” and those who presented issues or conflicts they had encountered, it was common for students to explain a personal coping strategy that they used to help them in their dealings with the cultural differences they encountered. This is typically some outlook they have, an inner strength, or an attempt to accept cultural differences non-judgmentally. Repeatedly we see students reciting as a mantra, “It’s not right or wrong; it’s just different,” which seems to be the universally given advice by AFS volunteers to the exchange students. One student made a conscious effort to detach herself from the influence of her home culture by not calling home. Another student carefully watched his own reaction to a hectic situation in his host family.

“I tried to react in this situation in a calm and relaxed way, to cause no further excitement and to be as social as possible. Besides that, I had to

adjust to the situation to avoid expressing even more dissatisfaction with the behavior of my host mother.”

The self-awareness of these students and their reflection on the situations and contexts in which they find themselves seems to be a positive development related to intercultural learning.

### **Problem Solving and Learning**

One of the tenets of AFS is that experiential learning involves problem solving and that crisis has value in intercultural learning. It is disappointing that many of the students who provided journals did not also provide a complete set of IDI assessments so that we could look at their journals in light of their known developmental level in intercultural sensitivity. What are offered here, then, are observations about the relationship of these critical incidents and intercultural development.

Although some students who did not provide post or post test IDI surveys may also have developed their intercultural competence, among those for who we have information, we note that only one of the students with “no problems” at mid-term advanced substantially in his intercultural development during the experience. Though he reports no problems, this student also wrote about a coping strategy he used whenever he was annoyed and how he calmed himself by looking for the positive aspects.

At the other end of the scale, a few students wrote journals full of complaints about the restrictions that had been placed on them by AFS and the unfairness of their particular situation. These “difficult” students also were among those who showed substantial development. Similarly, a few students who related a particularly difficult episode or relationship with a host family member also showed enormous strides in intercultural development. Another student who learned substantially reported feeling unloved by her host family at this phase, and struggled with the host culture’s less overt level of emotional expression in communications.

That said, we know that not every crisis or difficulty leads to learning. The crisis must cause the student to reflect on his or her own culture and values. Some issues students report are simply not important enough for students to reflect or worry much about them. Issues about food differences or habits for greeting people may fall into this category. For example, in following the IDI assessments of the Japanese student who learned to stop bowing, of the German student who had trouble adjusting to Chinese food, and of the U.S. student who adapted to greeting friends with a kiss we found no improvement over time in these student’s intercultural sensitivity.

When students “win” at a negotiation, or do what they wish, ignoring the expectations of the host family, it does not seem to add to their intercultural learning. Two cases come to mind: the student who determined to visit her friends in the *favelas* as long as her host family didn’t specifically say “no,” and the student who negotiated with his host family’s rules on attending church. In both cases the “negotiations” did not include an empathetic respect for the host family’s cultural values and neither student showed advancement in their intercultural sensitivity over the course of the study.

## Reverse Polarization?

From the overall results of the IDI analysis, we know that many of these students show tendencies to view their own country cynically and to polarize cultural differences by seeing another culture or other cultures in general as superior to their own. While this tendency could be found in other phases of the journals, the mid-cycle “critical incidents” because of their topic, tended not to elicit student comments showing reverse polarization except to a limited extent among those students who reported having “no problems.”

“I never had any trouble with my host family, never, not even a minor one. I never had a fight with them and they never had a fight with me. It’s the perfect family. Sometimes I see some cultural differences, but these differences were never a problem. I only learn from them.”

This is consistent with the notion that exchange students viewing the world from a perspective of reverse polarization do not present any “problems” for the host community or for AFS. According to the Developmental Model of Intercultural Learning, in order for students with this reversal perspective to move beyond the polarization of cultural differences, they need to see the two cultures as more similar and to give up their romanticizing of other cultures at the expense of their own.

As will be shown later, by the end of the experience, a number of students are starting to become more appreciative of their home culture.

## EXPERIENCE OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

From the pre test results, we know that over 1/3 of the AFS students begin with a “reversal” experience of their host culture and that 55% begin with “minimization” as their primary mode of experiencing cultural differences. One might suppose then, that upon arrival in the host country, students who minimize cultural differences might report seeing more similarities while those who have the more polarized outlook on cultural differences would report seeing more differences. However, for our participants, the AFS experience clearly brought the cultural differences to their attention. When students in the early weeks of their exchange were asked whether they noticed more similarities or more differences, twice as many reported noticing the cultural differences. Some students clearly see lots of differences. As one US student in Italy noted, there were “MORE DIFFERENCES!!! I don’t know any similarities off the top of my head; I really need to think about this one!” At times, when students are highlighting cultural differences at the beginning of their experience, their observations are broad, judgmental, and all-encompassing:

- “Everyone is much more relaxed about life.”
- “They are a lot more patriotic than we are.”
- “Eating habits leave a great deal to be desired judged by German standards!”
- “The young people here in Ecuador are totally dependent on their parents, not very advanced in their intellectual development (I have that feeling at the moment).”
- “I think the biggest difference is that people here approach each other openly and offer help in every situation in life.”
- “People here are more outgoing and enthusiastic. Their life is simple and comfortable.”

- “The Germans are very independent people. They can manage to do things without other professional people’s help. We are not that way in Brazil.”

The range of differences noted by students is very broad. Food and patterns of eating and drinking are frequently mentioned, as are relationships within families and among friends. This student provided one of the longer lists.

“Differences I've experienced:

- They are very reserved when it comes to strangers, but very, very touchy and open to their friends
- They eat very differently
- They aren't as rushed
- It's ok to wear the same thing for a few weeks without washing it
- They drink more bubble water than distilled
- They are a lot more environmentally concerned
- They ride bikes a lot more often
- Most people are in pretty good shape
- Smoking and drinking is a much lighter issue, everyone smokes
- School is very different, a lot less stress is put on the students
- Nudity is very free here and not considered bad, you see nudity in a lot of advertisements
- The landscape is different
- The architecture is different
- Everything is smaller
- Most people have limited internet access, if any.
- They like their jeans tight, which isn't a bad thing
- Tradition is VERY important
- Religion is not
- When buttering a piece of bread, it is best to put half the carton on”

After this lengthy list of differences, however, the student goes on to consider how the cultures may be similar, which clearly reflects the tendency common in the students to minimize the many differences they find and look to what’s “basically” the same in the cultures.

“... its hard, because life is basically the same here, one goes to school, comes home, does an after school activity or goes out with friends or does homework and then watches their favorite shows before they go to bed. Then they do it again until the weekend comes...etc...The Routine is all the same. So those are all I can think of, though how to say this...that basic life is the same, its the little things that are different. I've noticed more cultural differences, but I think that's because you don't always notice the similar things, if you get what I mean, because they are always like that to you.”

This same minimization tendency is, not surprisingly, found among those who report noticing more similarities between home and host cultures. The differences they do notice are dismissed as trivial or unimportant.

“No cultural differences! Everything is pretty much as I had imagined; for that reason there are a great many similarities...aside from the typical things: everything is larger, supermarkets are open 24 hours.”

“I would say the cultural differences between Europe/Austria and the U.S. have their limits, because both belong to so-called “Western” culture. There are also the small details that differentiate the cultures from one another. ... But I would also say that at this point in time, I have experienced more similarities than differences. The food is (aside from fast food) pretty much the same, the living arrangements are very similar to those in Europe, and family life is also pretty much the same (even if women here have perhaps more equal rights than in Europe), the attitudes on life are fairly similar to those in Europe (even if work may count even more here than in Europe). I know that when one looks at the list above, one might think that I have after all experienced more differences than similarities, but I must say that life here is lived fairly similarly to how it is in Europe, just with small differences; for that reason I would count it more toward the similarities, because on the whole it is more similar than dissimilar.”

A variation of this question was asked again, toward the end of the year to elicit the students’ experiences in viewing cultural differences: “Do you feel it is more important to pay attention to cultural differences or similarities living in your host culture? Please explain.”

A fourth of the students who selected this question stressed the importance of the commonalities among cultures, with some students urging this as a means of building peace. Some felt that focusing on similarities was needed to have friends. These students’ outlook is one where differences can be dangerous and minimization is necessary.

“I think we have to leave aside the cultural differences, because if we focus only on the differences that could generate conflict, on the contrary, if we see the similarities in several cultures we could reach to an agreement, everything in good terms. Because in the world we live the cultural differences are huge and that is why there is so much violence, people don’t see the similarities and the fact that we are all the same.”

In contrast, about a third of the students felt it was important to look at the differences more than the commonalities. As one student practically pointed out, “You travel to a different place because of the differences; otherwise you might as well stay home.” Students felt that understanding the differences would help you understand what you needed to know to integrate better in the host culture. Some added an explanation that noticing cultural differences didn’t exclude you from the host culture. “Focusing on the cultural differences does not immediately mean that you cannot integrate or adapt to the foreign environment,” was one such explanation. Another student pointed out,

“You want to be careful that you respect the people and doing that of course means respecting the culture. So you have to make sure that you don’t offend people and that you know how the system works to get by without trouble.”

The largest group clearly thought it was important to focus on both the similarities and the differences for a more complete understanding. “Every culture has advantages and disadvantages, and only when you have seen both sides can you gain a clear picture of this culture.” Learning was a common feature for these students, but one student

separated a personal need for familiar, similar aspects on the one side balanced by a need to learn something new.

“I feel it is important to pay attention to both. If I didn't notice the similarities, I don't think I could find myself very easily. One thing a person needs when away from home is the presence of familiar things. But to be able to grow and learn about a culture it is also very important to notice the differences and accept them.”

### **Major Areas of Cultural Differences**

As students were about to return home, many selected the question that asked them to comment on cultural differences they had experienced between their own culture and the host culture in terms of the values, the way people behave, or the way people think. As in the early stages, some students produced long lists of differences, but frequently the lists produced toward the end of the year carry more nuances and more depth of understanding than in the earlier responses, showing a progression beyond polarization.. For instance, one student prefaced her list with: “It is hard to answer this question because the statement ‘people in your host culture’ lumps all Americans (in my case) together, therefore I want to make it clear here that the following information does not refer to all Americans but rather to the characteristics of completely different people (yet all Americans) whom I was allowed to meet here.”

Though some students still express some defensive or romanticized reactions to cultural differences, the comments of many students reflect a new understanding gained through the experience of encountering these cultural differences. Though her IDI score at the end of the year shows that this student still holds an outlook that stresses the similarity among cultures, she has learned something important from the differences.

“The cultural differences are many and they range from simple things of everyday life to big differences in the way of thinking, facing the world, and in what is considered important or not. In my opinion, this is what makes the experience much worthier than the language learning. Experiencing moments of differences at each day helped me become a more understanding person. I know better now how to respond to people and understand their ways and why they have them. The cultural differences also made me capable of judging on what is good or bad in my host country or in my own country. It's not always easy, mainly in the beginning, to understand and accept the differences, but now, at the end of the exchange period, I see how much I learned from them and, even if I do not agree with a certain kind of behavior, I learned to understand and accept it.”

In the sections below, we look at the range of cultural differences that the students found at the end of their AFS program and how they reacted to these differences.

### **Relationships**

One of the most frequently mentioned dimensions of cultural differences noted by the AFS students were the differences they found in how people have relationships. Differences that students perceived in friendships were perhaps the most widely mentioned. “Only here have I learned to really appreciate true friendship,” was the

comment of one student who went on to explain that she had a new respect for the way friendship is valued so highly in her home culture after her year with AFS. Another noted that people in the host culture “are much more easy-going in their contact with others.” Another noted that people in the host culture call each other more by their first names than he was accustomed to.

Cultural differences in relationships within the family, particularly the role of parents, were observed by many students. One student observed: “Respect for parents is significantly greater. This is very important to the parents; children are not allowed to rebel against the opinion and statements of the parents and must follow and respect what the parents tell them.” Another student focused on a different aspect of the parent-child relationship: “Here the parents are very open with their children and I really think they have a better communication.”

Not surprisingly, the exchange students were also quick to note differences in patterns of dating, romance, and affection. “I could also notice that a boyfriend will not cheat on his girlfriend and that German dating lasts long; they last for over a year; they’re not affectionate from the beginning at all. You have to court them first and only then they’ll start to become affectionate, will hug and kiss you.” Another complained about the rules that governed male/female relationships in his host community:

“Americans are prudish and overprotective. I’m not saying that this is a bad thing, but a sad one. This starts from curfew and ends in not being allowed to sleep over at a friend’s house (different sex). I never had a curfew in Germany and I was allowed to sleep over at my girlfriend’s house as often as I wanted.”

Students also looked at other kinds of relationships, including how members of the host society related to strangers. A Japanese student commented, “In the U.S., people start to talk to entirely strange people and try to make friends. It seems that in Japan, people don’t talk to strangers.” Relationships at school also were very different for some students. “The teachers could not have been nicer to me.”

## **Food**

As they did in the beginning of the year, many students again mentioned differences they found in the food in their host country. Often “food” is just part of a list of differences they are finding with language and customs, but some focused on attitudes toward food and its place in the culture.

“The food was what impressed me the most really!!! The way they eat here is very different because they don’t eat; it is more like they devour it....!!! I must admit that the food is one of the best I have tried, but it is true that they eat too much, but it is too delicious so it is perfectly fine with me!!!”

“Dining is different. It is not considered a ‘social event,’ an occasion to get together with friends or family; food is often just a matter of sustenance or personal pleasure.”

## **Civic Life: Politics and Patriotism**

It is not surprising that the students of 2002-03 had observations about the political climate they found in their host country. Since about 70% of the students were hosted in the United States, a large number were surprised to find a high level of patriotism and display of the flag in their host communities there.

“The first thing that comes to mind is patriotism: here in the US at every possible and impossible moment there is a celebration of how wonderful this country is, flags are raised etc.”

“What struck me above all was pride in one’s own land and the achievements of the U.S.A. One sees this above all from the flags waving from many houses, from the crowds celebrating Memorial Day, preparing for Independence Day, how the Americans support their troops in Iraq and how they grieved for the astronauts who died on the space shuttle Columbia.”

In spite of the display of patriotism that many students found, students were surprised to find “that Americans are not at all interested in politics,” that “politics aren’t discussed in the family,” or, as one student noted, “What also struck me is how divided the political opinions here!” Another student, who was *not* hosted in the USA, found a different reality in his host country, “Elections here are a lot more spirited. People are cheerful, hospitable and think about politics; it is easy to find people just to have a little chat.”

Students also commented about their host culture’s sense of history, attitudes toward race, the influence of the media on politics, and the influence of religion on civic life in the society where they were hosted.

## **School and Education**

Since all of the AFS students attended secondary school, it is not surprising that they have some reactions to the differences they find in the educational systems and in the importance and role of education in their host and home countries. Some students found school quite challenging, but others noted that their school systems at home were more demanding.

“School is different: here, it is safer and definitely easier than in Italy. In fact, here, I never needed to study, and although I come from another country and speak another language—being in classes with other students, some even older than me—I was one of the best students in all my classes.”

“Here, the teachers do everything to help you succeed. At my school in Germany, they are not really interested in you.”

One student ended the year feeling very satisfied at how hard students work in his home country, but another wondered whether the pressure to do well in school back home came at the expense of spending time with family and friendships, which seemed to be more important in the host country.

## Communication

After living with a new language for a year, the AFS students were naturally proud of their new found abilities, and marveled that sometimes they forgot words in their own language. But more than the language itself, they noticed other aspects of communication that they found different in the host culture, such as a tendency to speak more often, more loudly, or with more gestures. Students learned new manners for greeting people, and discovered different styles of humor also.

“Besides, people have a totally different sense of humor here and joke about things that would not be funny for my people in Germany. Young people as well as the older generations use the same language, the same swear-words and expressions in certain situations. The German language is much more diversified in this respect.”

Students clearly struggled with differences in communication styles that they found, and this sometimes persisted up to the end, even as they had become fluent in the language.

“But even now, I have problems talking to those I don’t know well, and still have some trouble in communicating with them.”

“The fact is that people are more open and willing to talk to you than in my culture. They talk to more people and exchange more greetings with each other than in my home country.”

“I am the kind of person who loves talking to people and joking with them all the time, and the people here are too serious. But, then, after you know them better, they become more open to you.”

## Daily Life

The AFS students noticed a wide range of cultural differences in the daily life of their host country. Topics covered included the attitude toward life they believed characterized the society (“People are much more easy-going”); and family celebrations.

“At home we always celebrate things, like coming home from a year away or something, and being together and sharing things together is very important to us. Here it seems to be a bit different.”

A few students also were surprised about patterns in the use of alcohol and illegal drugs, particularly by teenagers. Some commented on the prevalence of automobiles and television; or on the attitudes about medical practices and beliefs about health that they experienced in their host country. Many students also encountered new attitudes toward religion in their host country.

## IMPACT ON BEHAVIOR, COMMUNICATION, ATTITUDES, & IDENTITY

The AFS experience prompted changes in the students, and at the end of the experience, dozens of the students chose to discuss how they felt the experience had led to new behaviors, communication styles, and attitudes as they adjusted to the host

cultural environment. These students reported on various ways they had changed over the course of the year. “I have become more relaxed when I am with other people,” one student noted. Another, wrote of feeling more accepting of differences in general, and offered this example: “I could say I was a little intolerant towards homosexuality before and now it is different.”

“People don’t notice I’m from a different culture,” reported one student. Others wrote that they had truly become “American” or “Italian.” “I hardly recognize myself! I realize that I am a different person, grown up, more mature,” wrote another student. However, very few students are able to give concrete examples of what it means to make these changes in their behavior. “I just started living like the people here live and do the same things they have always done,” is how one student put it. Another wrote, “I now feel like an American and have adapted exceedingly well.” Such vague statements about their changes in behavior suggest that the students have probably not reflected very much on what they have learned and are likely to be overestimating the extent of their adaptation to the host culture’s way of life. The students, still at this stage in their host country, may not have been able to grasp fully how they have changed; they simply know that they have changed. “I’m sure I’ve changed how I do many things...but I don’t think I will notice until I get back home.”

A few students did note that they were now doing things that would be considered unacceptable back home, but which they saw as appropriate in the context of the host culture. One student mentioned that she discovered it was not appropriate to sit on the ground, so she stopped doing this. Another student who studied his behavior made this comment:

“I think that my behavior has adapted very well. One reason for this, I think, is that I have started to wear the clothes of my host culture. After thinking for a long time that people in Germany and the US dress very much alike, I finally found out that there are small differences in the clothes. The different clothes, I think, are a signal for my conduct and behavior which have changed. The change in behavior also affects the way I communicate, since the two often interact very closely.”

In this case, we know from the IDI profiles that the student who had no defensive reactions before the AFS program had become defensive in his reactions to the host culture as shown right after his return home. However, several months later, the defensive issues were largely resolved again. On the other hand, once home, he showed a new tendency to romanticize his host culture (Reversal) and to focus on the cultural similarities (Minimization). His overall developmental level showed no apparent progress, but the dynamics of his learning are complex and the learning process was undoubtedly not yet completed even eight months after his return home.

In terms of their use of language and communication styles, the students were able to very clearly point to specific ways in which they had changed. They had new ways of greeting friends and family, for instance. They found that even in their native language, they had a new accent or cadence, and new modes of expression. One student commented on the different mentality implied in saying “I have hunger” rather than “I am hungry.” The AFS students became adept at using some forms of non-verbal communication. “I have been able to notice certain gestures that only they themselves make; I now use my hands increasingly in order to explain things.” The students seemed

to find meaning in these changes and presented them as examples of what they had learned.

For some students, making conversation had been a challenge in the host country, not just because of the language but also in terms of knowing how to approach a conversation, and with whom to have conversations, and when. These students also talked about their adjustments as they either learned to talk more or learned how to build a relationship where they could have more open conversations.

### **New Appreciation for Home Culture**

Toward the end of their stay, students were asked, “Has living in your host culture affected your sense of cultural identity?” Beyond all else, students who answered this question wrote about their new found identification with their home culture. “Suddenly it means something to me, when I say ‘I am German.’” They found many things to appreciate in their own culture that previously they had taken for granted. Given the number of students who were struggling with reversal and disaffection with their own culture at the pre test stage, these positive assessments of their home culture and identification with it can best be viewed as good progress in intercultural development for these students. For example, one Austrian student reported that “I am now almost a little patriotic, and think Austria is actually much better than I thought.”

### **A Cultural Bridge**

Some students believed that their experience as an AFS student led them to become a bridge between the two cultures. Many student feel a part of both cultures, and wondered, as they wrote in the last weeks of their experience abroad, how they would manage to keep their new sense of themselves once they were back home. They also seem themselves more as “world citizens” as illustrated by the comments provided by this student: “More than leaving my Costa Rican citizenship to become Italian I have left my Costa Rican citizenship to become a citizen of the world.”

“Even though I didn’t think they would be so different, I had to change my mind. Many things are different. The thinking and the customs and traditions of the people here are different. Once I had learned how the world turns for them, it was interesting, in my view, to make comparisons with my culture and to discover that the world is indeed different.”

## **POST RETURN REFLECTIONS**

After the students had been back in their home countries for a few months, a final set of questions was sent to those participating in the journals project. In their responses, the AFS students describe how they have changed, and offer some insights they have about the experience.

### **Personal and Professional Development**

Students see themselves as having changed as a result of their year with AFS. Though the questionnaires used for the quantitative part of this study did not address the first

level of AFS's educational goals for participants, clearly the personal development they feel they have achieved is foremost in the minds of many students. They describe themselves as more confident, mature, independent, and responsible.

“Before I left I was confused and frustrated with school and my life in general. I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life. Being abroad also gave me greater confidence in myself and my abilities as a person. I am very proud of myself and my accomplishments.”

In addition to their new confidence and sense of independence, several students mentioned feeling calmer, more relaxed around other people. This validates the finding from the quantitative part that their anxiety around other cultures drops significantly as a result of the AFS experience. “I...have lost my fear of many things.” They report being more tolerant of others and more open to people in general. “I also have more tolerance for other people. Inwardly, I have become more peaceful, much more balanced, and no longer as nervous as I often was earlier.” With this comes new ways to interact with other people, a willingness to meet new people, to make new friends. They are more extroverted, and less shy than before.

“I think that I changed quite a bit in the way I interact with my friends and strangers. I am more open in many things and built up an almost completely new circle of friends. I apply different criteria than before when I am judging ‘strangers.’”

Students report being less judgmental around new people, and more open to new ways of doing things. They are also less vulnerable to peer-pressure at home, feeling less need to conform. “I don't care what others are thinking, meaning that I stand by what I am doing and do what I consider right.”

At this stage, many students also found themselves more goal-oriented, and more focused than they had been before they went abroad. “I am aiming at new goals that I want to achieve.” They see themselves are more serious and less superficial.

“I began to see the world from a more serious and realistic perspective. Things now do seem to be achievable to me, and at the same time I can see that not everything happens as we want it to happen.”

We asked the students about their career plans and how the AFS year influenced their future plans. Almost half of the AFS students want to work in a field related to learning about new cultures, new languages, or travel. Some want to work in a humanitarian field where they can help others, and they relate this goal to their exchange experience.

“ I am thinking of continuing my studies with a view to a degree in diplomacy and economics in order to be able to continue to travel and to enrich not only my life but also be able, possibly, to do something in matters regarding relations between people, cultures and nations.”

Several students reported that they plan to continue studying or that they do not yet know what they want to do. A couple of students seem to have no other goals than to return to the host country as quickly as possible.

Some of the students had very specific career goals -- medicine, environmental law, police work, teaching, music, sports. In many cases the students report that these choices are not related to the study abroad experience, but at least in some cases the experience in another culture or the influence of the host family helped the student make their career choices.

### **Reflections on Home Country**

After they returned home, students were asked to comment on the role of their own country in the larger world community. About as many students indicated that their own country had a strong influence in the world as reported that their country played a minor role in the world community. Certainly there are vast differences in the nine countries participating in the study in terms of their political power in the world, and this clearly affected the answers of the students in many cases, but it is interesting to see extremely different reactions among students from the same country. For example, these two German students came to very different conclusions about the role of Germany in the world, both as a result of their exchange experience.

“Germany’s role in the world can be classified as relatively minor. When you are in a foreign country for a while, you really realize that there are still so many other countries.”

“I would have never thought that Germany plays such a big role in the world, but in Brazil I realized that it is a very significant country. Many people speak German and other exchange students from other countries learn German at school, which I would not have thought. Also with respect to Germany’s political views, I noticed that they are much observed throughout the world and don’t fade into the background as quickly as other countries’ opinions.”

Students sometimes criticized the role their country has played, talked about the historic role their country has had in the past, or pointed to their country’s unique experiences and specific contributions.

“As Japan alone suffered atomic bombing damage and casualties in the war, compared with other countries, Japanese ideas about wars are different; we communicate the horror of war to other countries. Since it is an affluent country, it is a country which supports developing countries.”

“Costa Rica, despite being so small, has accomplished important performances in the geopolitical scene, for example the importance that we have created about the certificates of emission of carbon at the world forums of ecology, besides the very well known pacific nature of Costa Rica.”

### **Overall Outcome**

At the end of their exchange year, the AFS students report using new insights, new attitudes, better relationships and more confidence. They report being more tolerant towards others, and better able to express themselves and explain different points of view. When we look at the outcomes reported by the students, we see that most related to the AFS educational goals at the level of interpersonal development and relationships.

“My relationship to those around me has changed. Some are now closer to me, others have become insignificant. I have definitely become more self-confident and mature. Everyday catastrophes are no longer so bad; I have learned that there is always a solution.

“I think that I simply see life from a completely different perspective. I see my family, my friends, school, my hobbies, simply everything with different eyes, and have a different opinion about it than I had before my exchange year. I value certain things more than before, and at the same time other things bother me more than before. But in general I have more fun in my life, recognize what is important in life, and can deal with pressure and stress much more easily than before.”

## **SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR AFS**

AFS can be justifiably proud of the impact that the year program has been shown to have in the learning and changing perspectives of young people. The AFS returnees have a much greater intercultural awareness than their friends of similar background who did not go abroad. They have developed friendships with people from other cultures to a much greater extent and they are much more at ease around people from other cultures than those who did not go abroad with AFS. Their skills in the foreign language are on average two levels higher, with almost half of all students achieving advanced or bilingual levels of fluency in the host country language. Their knowledge of the host culture, as assessed by their host families and by themselves, has increased significantly more than would be found had they stayed at home.

What role does the AFS organization play in bringing about these results? In addition to the care taken with screening and placement, and with the logistics of organizing the program generally, AFS emphasizes the importance of orientation and support for the participants and families. We know that virtually all the AFS students attended orientation programs before departure and in the host country. The focus of these orientations may vary from country to country, but AFS relies on standards and policies to ensure practical and emotional support in the adjustment that students (and families) make, as well as providing an educational framework with specific learning objectives. There are volunteers and office staff in the host countries providing support, and 88% of the students in the survey reported receiving this support. Too few (13%) reported attending an orientation in the first weeks after their return home, though others may have attended an orientation some time later. The students were highly satisfied with the program and their parents and host parents also gave them very high ratings in intercultural competence, knowledge of the host culture, and demonstration of the AFS values.

There are also some challenges for the organization. We know that many 18 year-olds, including those in the control group, have a tendency to view the world in dualistic ways. AFS orientation programs often address this, and many of the study respondents who wrote journal essays repeated the refrain, “It’s not right; it’s not wrong; it’s just different.” Students who mentioned this phrase reported that this advice was helpful to them during their experience, and it undoubtedly struck a chord with these students at moments when some defensiveness about cultural differences emerged in the course of their

experience. It seemed to help them suppress a tendency to be judgmental, and increased their feelings of tolerance. And in fact, we see that among the nearly 40% of students who began the program with the more dualistic, polarized reaction to cultural differences, the program had a large impact. On average, the AFS students in this group climbed 8 points on the IDI scale, moving them to a point where they are moving into a more tolerant outlook. Fully 45% of these students were able to move completely beyond the polarization that characterized their initial experience of cultural differences.

However, we now know that over half the students begin the program at a higher level of intercultural development. These students largely view cultural differences as “just formalities” and are much more focused on the ways in which all people are similar. These students even before they leave for the AFS program tend not to be defensive about cultural differences. The AFS program enhances their language learning, their intercultural friendships and social networks, eases their anxieties around other cultures, but does not by and large move them past the sense that cultural differences should be minimized. Some students in their journals even remarked that it is important NOT to focus on cultural differences, for fear of generating conflicts. AFS could help these students move past some of these fears and try to address better the concerns that affect students who are very open and tolerant to others, but who are not yet able to recognize and adapt to the fact that their basic experience of the world is not the same as that of people in another culture. These students are often quite sympathetic to people from other cultures because they see themselves and their own experience in the other people. The next step, to understand the experience of the other culture from its own cultural perspective, may be too difficult for them to achieve in just a year and at their young age, but AFS could do better to ensure that students are encouraged and trained to reflect more on their own culture and the ways in which their home and host cultures are different.

This study helps AFS recognize that students come to the program at different stages of development, and that they have different developmental needs at these different stages. Students who are polarized, we have learned, are in fact much more likely to experience their own culture as inferior and see other cultures as in some ways better than their own. Nearly 40% of the AFS students (and control group) have this reverse polarization as their dominant worldview. Even among those who are at the more advance level of tolerance, many are dealing with feelings of disaffection with their own culture. AFS volunteers can be trained to recognize this “reverse” polarization and use it as a catalyst for discussions about the home culture, helping the students develop a greater appreciation for their own country and culture, helping them move beyond the polarization they are experiencing.

Similarly, volunteers can be trained to recognize when students are minimizing cultural differences. Comments such as “I see no great cultural differences between the United States and Austria” can be opportunities to challenge the students to reflect more on their own culture and to pay more attention to the cultural differences that they regard as less important than the similarities and to understand better how the experience of being “Austrian” is not the same as the experience of being “American.”

To benefit from the findings of this study, AFS should enhance and articulate more clearly its emphasis on intercultural learning. Students and their parents should recognize that developing an increasingly complex way of experiencing other cultures is an expectation of participation in the program. The organization as a whole needs to

adjust the way it addresses the content of its programs to ensure that students and families alike have not just the emotional and practical support and services that they need, but that they are also challenged to move beyond their current level of understanding of other cultures through structured opportunities for reflection and through an intentional focus on intercultural learning. The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity can provide a useful approach to understanding how to address the developmental needs shown by our students, but AFS should also include other ways of understanding cultural differences and should use these and other tools to further the capacity for intercultural communication and understanding among AFS students, families, volunteers and staff.

## APPENDICES

### 1. Full Description of Language Levels

Here is a set of descriptions concerning the degree of proficiency exhibited by the AFS students in speaking the host country language, as evaluated by the host families. Five levels of language proficiency are described.

#### **Level 0: Little or No Language Proficiency**

The AFS student at this level is unable to satisfy routine travel needs and minimum courtesy requirements, ask and answer questions on very familiar topics, even within the scope of very limited language experience, cannot understand simple questions and statements, allowing for slowed speech, repetition or paraphrase.

The student doesn't have a speaking vocabulary that is even adequate to express the most elementary needs; makes frequent errors in pronunciation and grammar, and cannot be understood by a native speaker used to dealing with foreigners attempting to speak the language.

He is also unable to order a simple meal, ask for shelter or lodging, ask and give simple directions, make purchases, and tell time.

#### **Level 1: Elementary Proficiency**

A student at this level is able to satisfy routine travel needs and minimum courtesy requirements; can ask and answer questions on very familiar topics, within the scope of very limited language experience, and can understand simple questions and statements, allowing for slowed speech, repetition or paraphrase.

The student has a speaking vocabulary which is adequate only to express the most elementary needs; makes frequent errors in pronunciation and grammar, but can be understood by a native speaker used to dealing with foreigners attempting to speak the language.

He is also able to order a simple meal, ask for shelter or lodging, ask and give simple directions, make purchases, and tell time.

#### **Level 2: Basic Proficiency**

The AFS student is able to satisfy routine social demands; and handle with confidence, but not with facility, most social situations including introductions and casual conversations about current events, as well as work, family, and autobiographical information.

He can understand the basic meaning in most conversations on non-technical subjects (i.e. topics which require no specialized knowledge), and has a speaking vocabulary sufficient to respond simply with some general statements.

His accent is intelligible, though often quite faulty.

The student at this level can usually handle elementary grammar accurately but does not have thorough or confident control of the grammar.

### **Level 3: Moderate Proficiency**

The student at this level is able to speak the language with sufficient grammatical accuracy and vocabulary to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations, and can discuss particular interests and special fields of competence with reasonable ease.

His comprehension is quite complete for a normal rate of speech.

The student has a general vocabulary which is broad enough that he or she rarely has to grope for a word, with an accent which may be obviously foreign; has a good control of grammar; and whose errors virtually never interfere with understanding and rarely disturb the native speaker.

### **Level 4: Advanced Proficiency**

The AFS student at this level demonstrates he is able to use the language fluently and accurately.

He can understand and participate in any conversations within the range of own personal experience with a high degree of fluency and precision of vocabulary; and would rarely be taken for a native speaker, but can respond appropriately even in unfamiliar situations.

He makes only rare and unpatterned errors of pronunciation and grammar, but can handle informal interpreting from and into the language.

## **2. The AFS Mission Statement**

### ***AFS Statement of Purpose***

AFS is an international, voluntary, non-governmental, non-profit organization that provides intercultural learning opportunities to help people develop the knowledge, skills and understanding needed to create a more just and peaceful world.

### ***The Core Values and Attributes of AFS***

AFS enables people to act as responsible, global citizens working for peace and understanding in a diverse world. It acknowledges that peace is a dynamic concept threatened by injustice, inequity, and intolerance.

AFS seeks to affirm faith in the dignity and worth of every human being and of all nations and cultures. It encourages respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms without distinction as to race, sex, language, religion or social status.

AFS activities are based on our core values of dignity, respect for differences, harmony, sensitivity, and tolerance.

### **3. Technical Analysis**

This appendix is provided for the benefit of those who are familiar with statistical testing and want to review in more detail the statistical findings for the main results of the study. The appendix here consists of extracts from “Assessment of the Impact of the AFS Study Abroad Experience.”<sup>9</sup>

#### **Reliabilities of All Measures**

*How reliable are the instruments used in the study?*

Cronbach alpha tests of reliability were run on all measures used in this study. The following excerpt from Mitchell R. Hammer review the range of reliability for the measures used in the study at pre test, post test and post-post test.

- ◆ Pre test:
  - Individual subscale reliability for the DD, R, M, AA and EM scales of the overall DS scale of the IDI are satisfactory, ranging from .66 (M scale) to .76 (DD scale).
    - Reliabilities of participant self-rating measures of cultural knowledge, cultural similarity, and intercultural anxiety were good, ranging from .66 (cultural similarity) to .82 (intercultural anxiety)
    - Reliabilities of parents ratings of participant intercultural effectiveness (.80) and AFS values (.85) were good.
    - Reliabilities of host families rating of participant cultural knowledge, cultural similarity, intercultural effectiveness and AFS values were good, ranging from .83 (host family rating of participant cultural knowledge) to .93 (host family rating of AFS values)
- ◆ Post test and post-post test:
  - Satisfaction scale in post test (.79) and for the post-post test (.81) were good
  - Generally, all other measures (used in the pre test) maintained similar or better reliabilities in the post test and post-post tests, with the exception of the post test know2 (participant cultural knowledge) which was .62 and post-post test DD subscale of the IDI which was .58. However, these reliabilities, in the context of reliable data obtained from the subjects on the other administrations suggest the scales are reliable and usable for subsequent analysis

Conclusion: Reliability (Cronbach alpha) was good for all measures used in this study. Therefore, the final set of measures analyzed in the study possess strong reliabilities across respondents from six different language communities and nine different countries.

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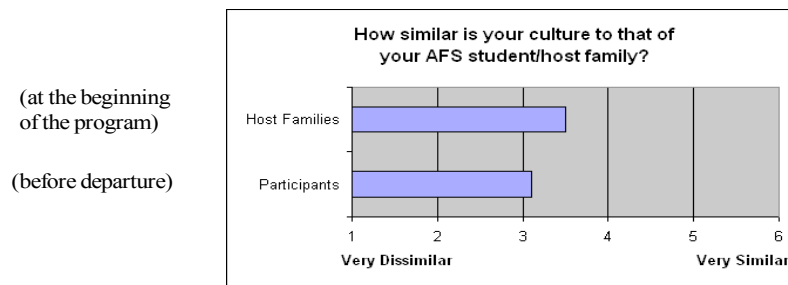
<sup>9</sup> an unpublished report of an independent research study designed and conducted by Mitchell R. Hammer, Ph.D., January 10, 2005. Extracts taken from pp. 34-40 of the report.

## Pre Test Comparisons Concerning Cultural Similarity

*Are cultural differences salient in the AFS experience?*

- ◆ Results on cultural similarity measures indicate both the participants (3.10,  $sd=.80$ ,  $n=519$ ) and the host families (3.50,  $sd=.81$ ,  $n=519$ ) compare their countries generally as not similar,” (1=very dissimilar; 6=very similar) supporting the view that the cultures are culturally different from one another.

## Cultural Differences Characterize the Study Abroad Experience



**Figure 13. Participant and host family ratings of cultural similarity between the two cultures.**

Conclusion: In this study, we obtained objective assessments from both the participants and their host family counterparts concerning culturally-based differences. We find in our study that in key areas of the degree of cultural similarity/dissimilarity (CS measures) in a wide set of cultural and social areas (e.g., political, economic, schools systems, language, medical practices, attitudes, beliefs, and values, communication practices, and customs), that cultural differences are salient to the AFS experience and that AFS students' *are encountering substantial cultural differences during their international study abroad experience.*

### Comparison of Pre Test Measures Between Participants and Control Group

*Are there significant differences in participants and control group subjects on pre test measures? Finding significant differences in initial tests of differences would suggest other statistics should be used that control for (use as a covariate) pre test scores when analyzing differences between the participants and control on post test and post-post-test measures.*

- ◆ Significant differences (independent t-tests) were found on the following pre test measures between participants and control group:
  - Overall IDI Developmental Score (DS):  $t=7.12$ ,  $df=1563$ ,  $p=.000$ ; participants mean=88.57,  $sd=13.37$ ,  $n=1136$ ; control mean=83.10,  $sd=13.96$ ,  $n=429$
  - Self-Rated Assessment of Knowledge about the Host Culture/Another Culture (KNOW):  $t=6.91$ ,  $df=1657$ ,  $p=.000$ ; participants mean=3.54,  $sd=.75$ ,  $n=1252$ ; control mean=3.24,  $sd=.83$ ,  $n=407$
  - Measure of Anxiety around other Cultures: (ANX):  $t=-2.76$ ,  $df=1673$ ,  $p=.006$ ; participants mean=3.34,  $sd=1.01$ ,  $n=1243$ ; control mean=3.50,  $sd=1.11$ ,  $n=432$

Conclusion: Significant differences on three key measures, assessed as pre test, post test and post-post test, were found between the participants and control. For the DS measure, the participants was significantly higher in initial intercultural competence level. This is seen in using both the mean score but also the normative percentile, which shows almost a one standard deviation difference on the DS (pre test) scores between the participants (25%), control (15%), and a full one standard deviation for the DS2 (post test) (participants=30%; control=15%) and DS3( post-post test) (participants=30%; control=15%) measures. For the KNOW measure, the participants was again significantly higher in knowledge about the host culture (self-rated). The participants was significantly lower in intercultural anxiety in pre test scores. Therefore, linear general model with repeated measures using DS scores as a covariate was calculated on these three measures.

- ◆ No significant differences (independent t-tests) were found on the following pre test measures comparing participants and control group:
  - Measure of Intercultural Networks (ICINTER): ( $t=.13$ ,  $df=1303$ ,  $p=ns$ )
  - Measure of % of Friends from Other Cultures (ICFRIEND): ( $t=-1.30$ ,  $df=1308$ ,  $p=ns$ )

Conclusion: tests of difference on ICINTER and ICFRIEND can be completed on post and post-post test scores. Additional tests are not warranted on these scales.

### **Comparison of participants and control**

*As a result of participation in the AFS study abroad experience, are there significant differences between participants and control group?*

- ◆ Differences in intercultural competence (DS, DS2, DS3 of the IDI) were found, controlling for pre test DS discrepancies between participants and control:
  - General Linear Model for repeated measures was calculated on the post test DS2 and post-post test DS3 measures for participants and control group. Results indicate that, controlling for differential DS pre test scores (DS used as a covariate), significant differences between pre test scores (levels of intercultural competence) and post test scores were found as well as significant differences between pre test intercultural competence (DS) and post-post test scores ( $F=13.18$ ,  $df=1,427$ ,  $p=.000$ ,  $\eta^2=.03$ ). Additional analysis testing for longitudinal effects (DS2 compared to DS3 scores) indicate no significant differences between DS2 and DS3 scores between participants and control (Pillai's trace=0;  $F [1/427]=.03$ ,  $p=ns$ ,  $\eta^2=0$ ). [NOTE: these mean scores, as with other measures, are different by about 1 point from demographic means, which include far more subjects. Because mean scores for these and other

- analyses may be different from means obtained in initial frequency analyses of each measure, for purposes of presentation and graphic representations of the findings, the larger sample means should be used.
- DS participants mean=88.57, sd=13.37, n=1136
  - DS control mean=83.10, sd=13.96, n=429
  - DS2 participants mean=91.63, sd=13.16, n=346
  - DS2 control mean=83.95, sd=13.62, n=84
  - DS3 participants mean=91.25, sd=13.59, n=346
  - DS3 control mean=84.63, sd=13.52, n=84
- Using the larger sample means, we can say that a score of 88 on the DS pre test for participants puts the group in the 26<sup>th</sup> percentile compared to a population (that is, 26% of individuals scored lower in intercultural competence while 74% scored higher). The control group scored in the 16<sup>th</sup> percentile on the DS pre test.
  - By post test, the participants improved their intercultural competence to the 31<sup>st</sup> percentile, indicating an improvement of 7 percentage points and the control remained in the 16<sup>th</sup> percentile.
  - Their post test scores remained the same, indicating the improvement is long-lasting and does not end upon return to home for the participants.

Conclusion: with rigorous general linear model with repeated measures statistical testing, the participants achieved significantly higher levels of intercultural competence as a result of their study abroad experience compared to the control group. Further, these differences remained at the same level (they did not decrease) over time, as reflected in no significant differences in DS3 scores between the of the participants and control group.

- ◆ Differences in knowledge of the host culture (KNOW, KNOW2), self-reported were found, controlling for pre test KNOW discrepancies between participants and control:
  - Univariate ANOVA with KNOW as a covariate were run on KNOW2 for participants and control. Results indicate that, controlling for differential KNOW pre test scores (KNOW used as a covariate), significant differences between pre test scores (levels of intercultural knowledge) and post test scores were found (F=108.17, df=1,516, p=.000, eta-2=.17).
    - KNOW participants mean=3.54, sd=.75, n=1252
    - KNOW control mean=3.24, sd=.83, n=407
    - KNOW2 participants mean=4.92, sd=.89, n=462
    - KNOW2 control mean=3.55, sd=.69, n=55
- ◆ Differences in intercultural anxiety (ANX, ANX2, ANX3) were found, controlling for pre test ANX discrepancies between participants and control:
  - General Linear Model for repeated measures was calculated on the post test ANX2 and post-post test ANX3 measures for participants and control group. Results indicate that, controlling for differential ANX pre test scores (ANX used as a covariate), significant differences between intercultural anxiety pre test scores and post test scores were found as well as significant differences between pre test intercultural anxiety (ANX) and post-post test scores (14.63, df=1,289, p=.000 (Pillai's trace=.003; F [1/289]=.1.00, p=ns, eta-2=.003). [NOTE: again, use means from earlier data; use these means only in stat section]
    - ANX participants mean=3.34, sd=1.01, n=1243
    - ANX control mean=3.50, sd=1.11, n=432
    - ANX2 participants mean=2.30, sd=.81, n=257

- ANX2 control mean=2.63, sd=.80, n=35
  - ANX3 participants mean=2.30, sd=.77, n=257
  - ANX3 control mean=2.78, sd=.88, n=35
- ◆ Analysis of differences between participants and control on intercultural interactions and intercultural friendships. Multivariate analyses of ICFRIEND2, ICFRIEND3 was done, but the n for the control was only two people. Therefore, t-tests were used (independent sample comparisons) in order to obtain minimally valid sample size
- No significant differences (t-test, independent sample) between the participants and control were found on the pre test in percentage of time spent interacting with people from other cultures (ICINTER,  $t=.14$ ,  $df=1303$ ,  $p=ns$ ; participants pre test mean=9.63%,  $sd=11.4\%$ ,  $n=1252$ ; control pre test mean=9.41%,  $sd=7.85\%$ ,  $n=53$ ) or percentage of friends who are from other cultures (ICFRIEND,  $t=-1.30$ ,  $df=1308$ ,  $p=ns$ ; participants pre test mean=10.48%,  $sd=14.98$ ,  $n=1258$ ; control pre test mean=13.23%,  $sd=11.06\%$ ,  $n=52$ ).
  - T-tests comparing participants and control on ICINTER2 (post test) reveals significant differences ( $t=6.86$ ,  $df=516$ ,  $p=000$ ; participants post test mean=46.15%,  $sd=21.91\%$ ,  $n=506$ ; control post test mean=2.66%,  $sd=3.91\%$ ,  $n=12$ ).
  - T-tests comparing participants and control on ICFRIEND2 (post test) reveals significant differences ( $t=9.22$ ,  $df=519$ ,  $p=000$ , participants post test mean=72.35%,  $sd=26.92\%$ ,  $n=509$ ; control post test mean=.58%,  $sd=.79\%$ ,  $n=12$ )
  - T-tests comparing participants and control on ICINTER3 (post-post test) reveals significant differences ( $t=3.84$ ,  $df=733$ ,  $p=000$ ; participants post-post test mean=13.11%,  $sd=14.33\%$ ,  $n=585$ ; control post-post test mean=8.22%,  $sd=12.37$ ,  $n=150$ )
  - T-tests comparing participants and control on ICFRIEND3 (post-post test) reveals significant differences ( $t=7.93$ ,  $df=734$ ,  $p=000$ ; participants post-post test mean=22.77,  $sd=21.27$ ,  $n=586$ ; control post-post test mean=8.48,  $sd=11.58$ ,  $n=150$ )

Conclusion: significant differences exist in both the amount of time the participants spent with people from other cultures at the end of the study abroad experience (post test). This is not surprising as the AFS students were living overseas. The same applies for the post test intercultural friends findings. The main findings here concern the question, do participants students spend more time interacting with people from other cultures and maintain a greater percentage of their friends from other cultures after they return home? The answer, is definitely yes! For the participants, their pre test ICINTER was 9% (control was also 9%). Upon return, the participants ICINTER was 13% while the control actually dropped to 8%. Thus, the participants maintained a more intercultural network of interactions than their control counterparts.

Similarly, the participants percentage of friends from other cultures before they went overseas was 10% (the control was 13%, but this is not a significant difference). Again, upon return home and being home for at least two months, the participants percentage of intercultural friends increased to 22% while the control group dropped to 8%. This is a significant increase in establishing deeper relations across cultural boundaries as a result of the AFS experience.

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