THE IMPACTS OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING TRAVEL COURSES ON STUDENT
EDUCATION, PROFESSIONALISM, AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

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ABSTRACT

This research study aims to explore the academic, professional, and interpersonal impacts experiential learning travel courses are having on undergraduate college students. Current research demonstrates that many educational formats do not provide optimal educational outcomes to students. Empirical observations from multiple faculty suggest experiential learning travel courses do provide these outcomes as well as highly impactful lifelong skills. Focus groups with diverse populations were conducted with current students on how experiential learning travel courses (ELTC) impacted their education, career, and interpersonal relationships with other students and faculty. Faculty were surveyed on their perception of how students were impacted by these courses. The research collected from the focus groups was analyzed through a combination of thematic content and narrative analysis. Searching for insightful narratives and recurring themes allowed conclusions to be drawn about the overall academic, professional, and interpersonal impacts these experiential courses have on students. The research hypothesis of this study is that experiential learning travel courses will positively impact academic, professional, and interpersonal aspects of students' lives and these aspects will interact with each other as well. The research aims to provide a better understanding of how experiential learning travel courses are impacting the lives of students who participate in such courses.

Keywords: experiential learning travel course, experiential learning, college students, university students, education, professionalism, interpersonal relationships, cultural relativism

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Current research demonstrates that many educational formats do not provide optimal educational outcomes to students. Empirical observations from college faculty suggest experiential learning travel courses (ELTC) do provide these outcomes as well as highly impactful lifelong skills that can benefit students. The main goals of ELTC are to combine service and learning objectives into a structured format that promotes engagement in the community. These courses can also be defined as "a form of experiential learning in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development" (Braunsberger & Flamm, 2013, p. 2). These courses also aim to engage students "through a wide variety of hands-on experiences" and "students learn to apply and integrate their knowledge and skills, collaborate with others, take initiative, and develop a mindset for success and service" (Weller & Saam, 2019, p. 87). Essentially, these courses focus on learning outside of the classroom by applying knowledge to real-life situations and equipping students with additional knowledge and skills that may not be obtainable in traditional face-to-face classroom environments.

Student Travel Motivations

College students often travel for a variety of reasons during their college experience. Students may study abroad, travel during breaks, or participate in courses that have a travel

component. On average, youth travelers aged 18-30, spend $1000 to $6000 per trip and youth travelers stay longer than the average tourist, averaging 50 days (Marques et al., 2018, p. 87). As of 2018, "higher education has been shown to be the best performing sector, not having lost any of its attraction during the economic downturn" (p. 87). Travel motivations for students often vary based on the country in which they live and "adventure-seeking or longing to discover new experiences as part of travel motives is growing" in most countries (p. 87). College students are often looking to travel and providing an opportunity to travel while completing course credits, gaining knowledge from course concepts, and working with a small group of peers presents as a desirable opportunity that aligns with students travel motivations.

A study conducted by Vale and Arnold (2019) aimed to further understand the motivations of students in different countries and how experiential learning affects students' cultural competence. A semester long study including pre- and post- surveys, using the Cultural Intelligence Scale, were conducted with 27 college aged participants. The experiential learning student participant group, and not the control group, were found to have increased knowledge of other cultures and beneficial impacts for their future careers. The researchers found the experiential service-learning opportunity increased the cultural competence of the students who participated in the study. The study also found student travel motivations are impacted by the country in which they live. In the United States, students are most highly motivated by sightseeing and novelty seeking clusters. Sightseers are considered to look to discover new cultures and locations above all and novelty seekers value visiting unique touristic places (p. 96). Understanding the motivation for student travel in the U.S. can help faculty tailor ELTC to the desires of students. ELTC typically aim to bring students to a culture or region in which they

have never visited and teach course concepts related to the region. ELTC also allow students to

explore the region and visit a variety of unique touristic places within the region.

Table 1. 1 Student Travel Motivations by Country

Distribution of respondents' countries by cluster.

Country	(1) Explorers	(2) Soft Explorers	(3) Sightseers	(4) Novelty Seekers	(5) Avoiders	(6) Functionality Seekers	(7) Tourism Lovers
Brazil	15.0%	7.3%	13.8%	22.9%	11.6%	14.4%	15.0%
USA	10.1%	12.6%	31.2%	23.1%	3.5%	10.1%	9.5%
Portugal	11.9%	9.7%	33.2%	27.6%	1.9%	4.5%	11.2%
Spain	7.3%	6.9%	37.6%	26.6%	7.3%	9.2%	5.0%
Pakistan	23.5%	13.0%	7.2%	11.7%	6.8%	19.2%	18.6%
India	30.0%	10.9%	8.4%	8.0%	4.4%	16.6%	21.7%
Thailand	15.0%	25.7%	5.5%	5.2%	6.9%	16.0%	25.7%
Malaysia	17.0%	14.2%	12.7%	9.8%	6.9%	17.2%	22.1%

Vale and Arnold (2019) systematically categorized students' motivations to travel based on seven clusters. (p. 94). Explorers (1) emphasize the challenge and enjoyment of traveling and soft explorers (2) equally value travel reasons except for knowledge improvement. Sightseers (3) hope to explore new areas and cultures above all and are not focused on challenging their abilities or experiencing a feeling of belongingness while traveling. Novelty seekers (4) care little about tourism motives and value challenging their abilities and experiencing a feeling of belongingness. Avoiders (5) have no interest in tourist activities while functionality seekers (6) look to make business connections, meet with friends and family, or increase their education. Tourism lovers (7) are largely interested in the tourist activities provided by the region (p. 96).

Travel motivation varies by country, age range, and personal desires; however,

understanding the general motivation behind student travel can ensure faculty are meeting these

desires. In the U.S., travel is motivated by tourism activities or the desire for feelings of

belonging and challenging personal abilities. ELTC can provide students in both the sightseers

and novelty seekers clusters with the opportunity to fulfill their travel desires because students

work in small groups, engage with the community, and travel to tourist destinations in the region

they are visiting.

Chapter 2

Why do ELTC Matter Today?

Globalization has led countries and diverse cultures to become increasingly intertwined with one another (Koc & Turan, 2019, p. 241). With the world becoming increasingly multi-ethnic, homogeneous countries are becoming less common, which means there are numerous cultural groups and beliefs coexisting. Coexistence between diverse cultures and ethnicities is essential to the functionality of the local and global communities because globalization will continue to lead further from homogeneous countries (Akhmadieva et al., 2020, p. 22). Students at the college level are often exposed to diverse student populations with young adults coming together from around the world to make up campus populations. Despite this increased exposure to multicultural concepts, universities often lack education on cultural competency and this "leads to misunderstandings and miscommunications with people from other cultural backgrounds" (Tsuji et al., 2018, p. 136). Cultural relativism is a skill that can be learned from experiential learning courses and enable students to better adjust to the exponential rate of globalization. Experiential learning promotes student engagement "in activities that address human, and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development" (Braunsberger & Flamm, 2013, p. 2). These courses are a viable solution that can increase cultural relativism in college students by increasing cultural intelligence, intercultural communication, and decreasing ethnocentric attitudes among students at the college level.

Cultural Intelligence

The ability to adjust to culture-based values and attitudes in multicultural settings is the core of cultural intelligence. Cultural intelligence represents an individual's ability to adapt to differences in cultures, communicate with diverse populations, and effectively work in a variety of different cultures (Koc & Turan, 2018, p. 241-242). There are four core components when considering cultural intelligence: cognitive, behavioral, motivation, and metacognitive. An individual's general knowledge of a culture's legal, economic, and sociocultural values is related to their cognition. An individual's behavioral component focuses on their interpersonal relationships with others and ability to appropriately navigate verbal and non-verbal interactions. Motivation relates to an individual's enthusiasm for positive interactions with diverse cultures and metacognition is how an individual makes sense of and understands their experiences with diverse cultures (Gebregergis, Huang, & Hong, 2019, p. 515). Students who are exposed to multicultural environments, such as a diverse college campus or experiential learning courses, have higher levels of cultural intelligence than students in general.

In a study by Koc and Turan (2018), 377 randomly selected male and female university students were recruited at the School of Physical Education and Sports. Each student completed a socio-demographic information form, cultural intelligence scale, and social skills inventory. IBM SPSS Statistics 20 program was used to code and analyze the frequency and percentage values of the results for the three questionnaires. Comparisons between social skill level (expressivity, sensitivity, or control), cultural cognition, and emotional regulation were conducted through statistical analysis between groups and within groups. The authors hypothesized that students who are more engaged in their education will have higher levels of cultural intelligence and social skills. The authors also hypothesized that students who are exposed to various cultures in an academic setting and can form social relationships with peers and professors would be more accepting of participation in international activities. Findings revealed a significant difference in cultural intelligence for students who received cross-cultural education and communication with individuals with diverse cultural backgrounds. Emotional sensitivity and social

expressivity were emotional and behavioral outcomes that could predict students' cultural intelligence. This study replicates previous studies on cultural intelligence; however, Koc and Turan focused on college students and how emotional and behavioral skills affect and even predict cultural intelligence. This participant group was unique because college aged students are often exposed to diverse cultures with increasing opportunities to study in foreign countries or alongside foreign students. The authors ultimately recommend an increase in student and teacher exchange programs, cultural activities, international study groups and research projects in the educational system - especially at the high school and college level when students are experiencing greater exposure to diverse cultures. Cultural intelligence does not occur in a vacuum and as demonstrated by Koc and Turan, there is a bidirectional relationship between cultural intelligence and emotional, behavioral, and social skills among college students. These skills are greatly impacted by experiential learning courses because students are exposed to multicultural settings in which their emotional, behavioral, and social skills can evolve and ultimately increase their overall cultural intelligence. Experiential learning also provides students with the opportunity to further engage in their education. This engagement is essential to increasing students' cultural intelligence scores and application of knowledge in real-world settings.

Understanding the cultural intelligence scale is essential to knowing where students are lacking in their cultural relativism with others. Koc and Turan found that students scored lowest in the cognitive component, which means students do not have the foundational knowledge of other cultures. ELTC allow students to experience a diverse setting and engage in conversation with multi-ethnic individuals, this can allow students to increase the cognitive component of their cultural intelligence. By understanding the cultural intelligence level of college students, experiential learning courses can be tailored to increase the students' understanding of the four main components. Cultural intelligence is typically measured through a survey, such as the one conducted by Koc and Turan; however, cultural relativism also relates to the concept of intercultural communication which may not be as easily captured through a scaled survey.

Intercultural Communication

Communication between cultures can be difficult due to different values, beliefs, and languages; however, intercultural communication is essential to cultural relativism. This communication is important with the exponential rate of globalization taking place because individuals are likely to meet, work, or engage with diverse cultural backgrounds. Ensuring college students have the confidence and ability to communicate in intercultural environments will better prepare them for post-graduate careers, personal relationships, and provide them with enhanced cultural relativism skills.

Intercultural communication is often prevalent on college campuses due to the variety of ethnicities living and learning in a localized area. Akhmadieva and colleagues (2020) conducted a pilot study by recruiting male and female college students from a college campus. Students were interviewed for 15 to 22 minutes and asked questions about how often and where they interacted with individuals from other cultures, comfort level communicating with diverse populations, and the students' perceptions of cultural differences and similarities. The authors hypothesized that ethnocentric and discriminatory attitudes would be prevalent amongst the student participants. Findings revealed that 26% of students felt uncomfortable communicating with other cultures and 61% of students believed the immersion of different cultural beliefs was important and even beneficial. The authors conducted this study because ethnocentrism is a common attitude that can have negative consequences and with globalization leading to fewer homogenous countries, the trends are not sustainable. By understanding the position of students on intercultural interaction, the authors hope to develop enhanced educational programs to increase how comfortable students feel interacting with other cultures. This research extends previous research on ethnocentrism by examining college students and their perceptions around intercultural interactions in their social networks. Experiential learning can provide students with the opportunity to engage in intercultural communication and help decrease the number of students who feel uncomfortable communicating with cultures outside their own.

There are a variety of reasons college students may not engage in intercultural communication. A major reason could be the increased effort required to engage with individuals who speak different languages or uphold different values. Students may feel increased levels of stress when engaging in intercultural communication or it could be due to ethnocentrism and the belief that their own culture is superior to others (Campbell, 2016). Understanding why students do not engage in intercultural communication can allow courses, such as experiential learning ones, to address these feelings and provide a safe, judgement free opportunities to explore concepts of cultural relativism.

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Ethnocentrism

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Cultural relativism can be hindered by ethnocentrism or the belief that an individual's culture is superior to others. Ethnocentric behaviors are the "view of things in which one's own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it" (Campbell, 2016, p. 1). College students have often been portrayed or perceived as ethnocentric; however, examining the validity of this perception can provide insight into why college students are portrayed as ethnocentric.

Campbell (2016) recruited 438 male and female students from a management school in New Zealand with an international enrollment of 17% in 2014. Participants completed the Neuliep and McCroskey's Generalized Ethnocentrism (GENE) scale and the Kassing's Intercultural Willingness to Communicate (IWTC) scale and their results were coded and analyzed through the IBM SPSS Statistics 20 program. The author hypothesized that students who scored lower on ethnocentrism were more willing to engage in intercultural communication. Findings revealed that students were not enthusiastic about engaging in intercultural communication on the college campus and felt indifferent towards intercultural communication in their future careers. Campbell conducted this study due to the increasing cultural diversity of college campuses around the world and the engagement of management students in particular with diverse work environments. This study replicated findings on ethnocentrism but extends the research

to the connection between ethnocentrism and intercultural willingness to communicate. Understanding the connection between these concepts provides universities with the necessary information to increase intercultural willingness to communicate. Campbell suggests that increasing students' intercultural experience during college will provide indifferent students with the opportunity to connect and engage with other cultures that will promote enthusiasm around cultural diversity in both the academic and workplace settings.

Engaging students while in an educational environment can increase their feelings of engagement with other cultures and promote a sense of enthusiasm to work with diverse populations. Courses that involve experiential learning components provide opportunities "to help students feel confident and capable of mobilizing their full attention and energy towards active engagement and learning in the process of acculturation while respecting, appreciating and valuing cultural diversity" (Gebregergis, 2019, p. 528). By providing students with an environment to examine, explore, and understand other cultures, their feelings of indifference may change when it comes to ethnocentrism and cultural relativism.

What Can be Done to Increase Cultural Relativism?

College students are not provided with enough experience to increase their cultural intelligence, intercultural communication skills, or decrease ethnocentrism. However, creating safe environments for students to engage with diverse values and beliefs may provide students with optimal multicultural educational outcomes. Experiential learning takes place in real-world settings, outside of the classroom, and this enables classroom hierarchies to be broken down. Students may feel more comfortable expressing themselves in this environment and participate more often than in a more traditional face-to-face classroom setting. Experiential learning courses also provide students with the opportunity to "practice ethical issues on the spot. Understanding and implementing research ethics and anonymity opens a wide discussion on individuality, diversity, individual rights, trustworthiness and … students are

encouraged to find examples and critically discuss them" (Argyropoulou, 2015, p. 16). These courses could engage students in the topic of cultural relativism who may not have had exposure to diverse populations in traditional educational experiences, have expressed feelings of indifference to cultural diversity, or students who have ethnocentric beliefs.

Providing students with the opportunity to increase their cultural relativism is the responsibility of colleges because campuses are typically diverse environments that can naturally foster intercultural communication between students. Globalization has led to fewer homogenous countries and the common theme of indifference or even ethnocentrism towards cultural relativism is not sustainable. By providing college students with a variety of formats to engage in multi-ethnic values and beliefs, students may better adapt to the globalization of the world. Country populations are becoming increasingly diverse and so are workplaces. As students prepare for the careers in their desired fields, it is essential for universities to equip students with cultural relativism skills so students will feel comfortable and enthusiastic about engaging with the multicultural settings they will experience.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU). Procedures were approved by the IRB committee before research was begun. The focus group and survey data were collected anonymously, and participants gave written or virtual consent to participate in the study. The Certificate of Consent clearly documented the procedure of the study, research goals, anonymity and confidentiality, choice to participate, and the right to revoke information at any time.

Participants

The participant population included two separate groups: students and faculty. All participants were recruited through email from SNHU's on campus population. A group of six students who were enrolled in ELTC completed pre- and post- focus groups. Focus groups involve small, yet diverse groups whose reactions are studied about a particular topic. This interview method allows participants to answer questions and help other participants recall new information. During the focus groups participant "comments provide mental cues that trigger memories or thoughts of other participants - cues that help explore the range of perceptions" (Krueger & Casey, 2000, p. 39-40). Alongside focus group participants, 10 faculty who had previously conducted experiential learning travel courses completed the Experiential Learning Travel Courses - Professors survey. These ten faculty participants accompanied over 600 students on ELTC.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

For participants, any SNHU on-campus student who was currently enrolled in or previously completed at least one ELTC could participate in the research. Any participants who were not enrolled at SNHU or a current on-campus student were excluded from the research. A variety of students, at different grade levels, were contacted and asked to participate in focus groups. Focus groups were completed in early March of 2020 and conducting focus groups after the start of the pandemic was not plausible. A shift to faculty surveys, allowed the researcher to gain an additional perspective. Any faculty who conducted ELTC at SNHU could also

participate in the research. Faculty who conducted experiential learning courses but did not involve a travel component were excluded from the research.

Focus Groups

Two one-hour focus groups were conducted in person at SNHU at a round table classroom setting. The responses were recorded using a cellphone and later transcribed. Each participant signed the Certificate of Consent before beginning the session. A moderator read each question aloud and participants responded. The pre- focus group took place a week before the students were leaving for an ELTC. Participants were asked to consider their expectations of the course and discuss the potential impacts they expected from enrolling in the course. After completing the course, the same participant group completed a post- focus group two weeks after students completed the ELTC and asked to consider the impact the course had on their academic, professional, and interpersonal relationships.

Surveys

The Experiential Learning Travel Courses - Professors survey involved text submission, sliders, and a Likert Scale to record faculty perceptions of student's experience in ELTC. Faculty and professors were contacted via email and asked to complete the anonymous survey. The

survey included 10 questions and asked faculty about their perceptions of students' interpersonal

relationships, career goals, and educational outcomes.

Chapter 4

Results

Through narrative analysis, the focus groups and survey results were evaluated to produce a

larger picture of common themes among students.

Educational Outcomes Results

The research on educational outcomes supports previous research on the positive impact ELTC

are having upon students' education. Results from both the student focus groups and faculty surveys

determined these courses provided highly impactful education on the course concepts. From the student

focus groups, it was evident that the common themes among students were that the ELTC increased their

knowledge of the region, cultural understanding, transferable skills, better retained course concepts,

gained experience, and even feelings of gratitude towards their educational experience.

Table 2. 1 Focus Groups Academic Student Responses

| Question	Themes	Focus Group
Were your academic expectations for this course met?	Increase knowledge of culture/region	Yes, I feel that visiting the Appalachian region taught me a lot more about the culture than I ever learned sitting in class. I was able to see firsthand the poverty, and remoteness of the area. In addition, visiting civil war sights helped me to better understand how much of an impact these battles had on the war and the fate of our country.
		Yes they were, I feel like I was able to understand the region much better by going there and seeing it and experiencing it. It was amazing to see that one town Cass had no service at all.
		They were exceeded. I had no idea there was so much that could be learned from the region of Appalachia, economically, sociologically, and geologically.
		Absolutely. Each of the professors and the way that the class was run was great and I have learned so much information and had so many experiences that I surely will not forget.
What knowledge did you gain from this course that could help you academically in the future?	Cultural understanding	I now understand that every area of the United States is different, in terms of culture, class, race, income, and how they live in general. As a psychology major, I love to learn about people. Through this course I have learned about a different area of people rather than just the mentally ill or the average New Englander.
		While new perspectives can help you to some degree academically, I feel this course gave more in the way of cultural education than academic education. While I learned a lot about trails and mountainous regions, different cultures of Appalachia, and how geography can affect culture, I didn't find that I learned a lot that could help me academically. I feel like that was not the point of this course though. To me, the point was to experience something you don't see every day, that didn't exactly focus on academics, and that's what I loved.
	Transferable skills	I learned a lot of communication and leadership skills that can be applied to every aspect of schooling and future employment.
How did this course impact your academic goals?	Retained information	This class surpassed my academic goals. In a class, I normally expect to study the material and then forget about it after the test. In this class, I was able to actually understand the material and keep it in my brain. This is because I was there and actually experienced it with all my senses.
	Resume / experience	I thought of it was a field based course and it will look good on a resume, but also it was real life experience too
	Gratitude	This course did not really impact my goals, it simply showed me how much of a gift the education I am receiving is and gave me another reason to keep pursuing that next level of education.

Select student focus groups responses to academic related questions are shown above. Quotes have been analyzed for common themes and grouped based on these themes in the table.

Results from the faculty survey provide additional support to demonstrate ELTC positive impacts on students' education. Faculty rated education as impacting students' education "to a great extent" on a Likert Scale question. The faculty also provided written responses on how they observed students' educational outcomes during ELTC. One faculty member wrote "these experiences make the course

content come alive, that they remember it more, and can apply it." Faculty also observed "much more engagement than in a traditional classroom setting. There's more excitement about course content." The observations of faculty demonstrate the positive impact of ELTC on students' education because students are more engaged with the content, can apply it to real-world situations, and this helps them remember the course content more effectively compared to traditional courses.

Figure 1. 1 ELTC Impacts on Students

ELTC Student Impact
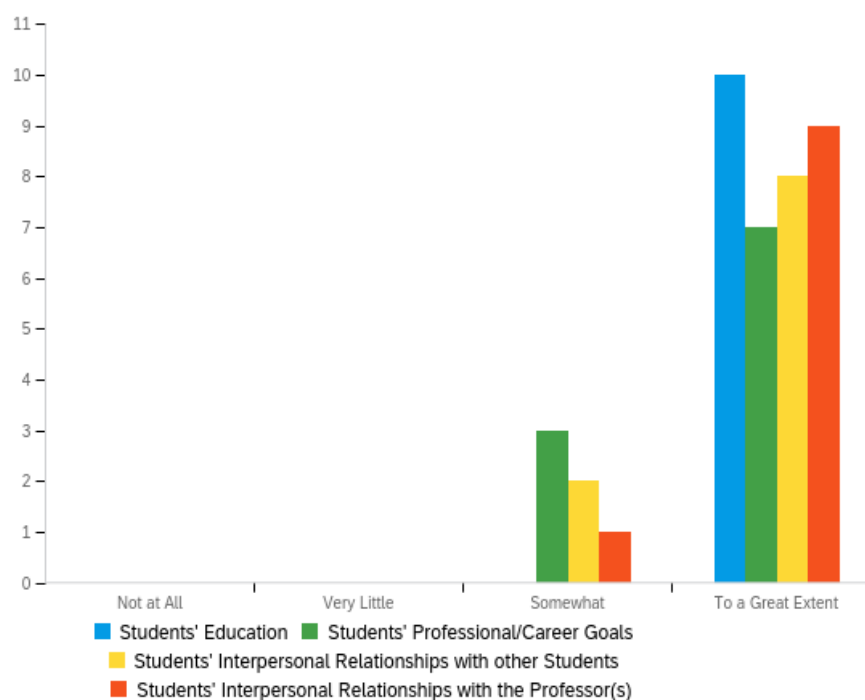
Faculty were asked "Have you seen experiential learning travel courses impact students' in the following areas?" and the results demonstrate that educational outcomes (blue) were considered to be impacted "to a great extent" by all participants.

Educational outcomes from ELTC are clearly having a positive effect on college students who can participate in such courses. However, traditional courses can provide similar results so it is essential

to further examine how ELTC may differ from traditional courses by providing students with an opportunity to enhance their professionalism and interpersonal relationships while traveling and learning.

Professionalism Impacts Results

ELTC provides students with a unique opportunity to bolster their resume with a travel, collaborative, and educational opportunity. Based on the focus groups, students perceived the ELTC as having a positive impact on their professionalism and future career endeavors. Common themes among students included transferable skills and direct or indirect experience based on their major and the course's field of discipline. During the pre- focus group, students expressed that they enrolled in the course for a variety of reasons, one of them being to build their resume and help determine their desired career field for post-graduation. One student was even asked about the ELTC before completing the course because "I have on my resume that I will be going on an experiential learning trip and they've asked me about that and said it's good that I'll be experiencing different populations." ELTC provides students with not only an opportunity to explore their career options and desires but a tangible experience to put on their resume for potential employers to see.

Table 3. 1 Focus Groups Professionalism Student Responses

Question	Themes	Focus Group
How might this course impact your professional career?	Transferable skills	In whatever job I end up in, I will now have a better understanding of the history of our country and the different sub-groups in America. In addition, I have gained so much knowledge on how to interact with a variety of different people. I have learned how to relate to all different types of people. I feel this will help me in my professional career so that I am able to communicate and relate to all different groups.
		This class taught me that other people may not have the education level that we do, but it doesn't make them less qualified. There are plenty of people that want to work hard and learn despite not having the best opportunity or environment to do it in. I believe I will be more inclined to pay attention to this if I am ever in the position of recruiting. I also believe that I can take some of the things I learned on this trip into interviews and make connections that way.
		It is something that will look good on resumes and it is that out of the ordinary experience that most people aren't given the opportunity to do.
	Direct experience	I was able to talk with different park rangers and volunteer rangers and see what they thought of working in the different parks they went to. I know for me, I wouldn't want to work in a park like Antietam or Gettysburg. But I definitely did like Cades Cave and the history the family had there
What aspects of this class will help you out professionally?	Indirect experience	My communication skills have greatly improved as well as new knowledge of the different types of backgrounds that people come from. I feel that I have learned how to talk to someone without judging, or offending them. This trip forces you to do that because you are forced out of your comfort zone and forced to interact with people whom you normally would not.
		I believe that I can take this knowledge I've gained and these experiences to connect with potential employers as well as during the interview process.
	Direct experience	Getting out there and talking to all the different rangers and volunteer rangers too

Select student focus groups responses to professional/career related questions are shown above. Quotes have been analyzed for common themes and grouped based on these themes in the table.

Faculty also described the ELTC as beneficial to students' professionalism and career opportunities. In Figure 3.1, it is evident that education and professional/career goals were equally rated as much more impactful in ELTC compared to traditional courses. Faculty's written responses also demonstrated the positive impact of these courses for students. One faculty responded that ELTC "helps them mature and become more professional so they are better able to handle formal career requirements (interviews, etc)." Other faculty commented on how they have seen "great experiences being added to students resumes in many cases."

Figure 2. 1 Professionalism Word Cloud

Faculty provided written responses to the questions: "please explain if you have seen experiential learning travel courses impact students' professional and/or career goals?" The twenty most frequently used words across faculty responses were compiled into a word cloud. The words repeated most often appear largest in the cloud and aims to provide a visual representation of the focus of the written material provided in the faculty survey responses to this question.

Faculty responses focused on students professional and career outcomes. Opportunity, graduation, resume, goals, skill, and travel were common terms in faculty surveys. These outcomes represent frequent themes faculty perceive as being impacted by ELTC in regard to professionalism and career preparedness.

Interpersonal Relationship Impacts Results

Previous research often focuses heavily upon ELTC and their impacts on education and professional or career related outcomes; however, there is far less research on how interpersonal relationships are impacted. ELTC often involves small groups of students working with one to two professors over the course of a few weeks in a different region in which they live. Traveling, eating,

sleeping, and learning within this context often promotes interpersonal relationships to form, change, and develop. Students reported a common theme of communication skills during their ELTC. These skills enable students to talk to one another, with faculty, and even with other individuals students met while traveling with the course.

Table 4. 1 Focus Groups Interpersonal Relationship Student Responses

| Question	Themes	Focus Group
How did this course impact your interpersonal relationships?	Communication	I gained a lot of friendships through this course. In addition, I think spending 24/7 with people whom you've never met teaches you how to treat other people. You can see people's hurt, and a lot of times we will get so close that we let each other in on knowledge that some of our closest friends do not know. From this, I learned how to talk to people, and become more empathetic. Prior to this, I feel that I was unsure how to ask people about their lives without offending. I now feel comfortable doing this which has made me even closer to people, opening up doors for friendships
		I thought this class helped a lot with interpersonal relationships. It can be hard to get out of your comfort zones and interact with different people. This class forced you to do that, and it was very enjoyable. Everyone was so nice and easy to talk to.
		I gained many friendships with people I probably never would have even met if it weren't for this class. I gained close relationships and learned a lot about the other students and professors in this class. I also now have a closer connection with the professors which I think is important and can help me in the future.

Select student focus groups responses to interpersonal relationships related questions are shown above. Quotes have been analyzed for common themes and grouped based on these themes in the table.

Faculty survey responses demonstrated enhanced interpersonal relationships with students and between students. Faculty even reported the impact of ELTC on interpersonal relationships to be much more beneficial than traditional courses. The effect on interpersonal relationships was even considered to be more influential than education or professional and career goals. A faculty member commented on how students' relationships are different during ELTC compared to traditional courses and said "they do

everything together from morning to evening. In the classroom these same students or others like them would balk at even the idea of a group project but once outside of the classroom it is a different story." Not only did faculty find the relationships between students were improved but so were the relationships between students and faculty. Numerous written observations connect higher levels of respect for the professor and levels of engagement with the content. Students "get to know their professor as a whole person during these experiences and I've experienced much stronger levels of respect and connection with students based on them." Students and faculty benefit from the interpersonal relationships formed during ELTC because students enhance their communication skills and build lasting relationships while professors can better connect with their students. Some faculty even commented on being more likely to recommend students for internships or career related experiences because they better understood students' desires.

Figure 3. 1 Comparison Between ELTC and Traditional Courses
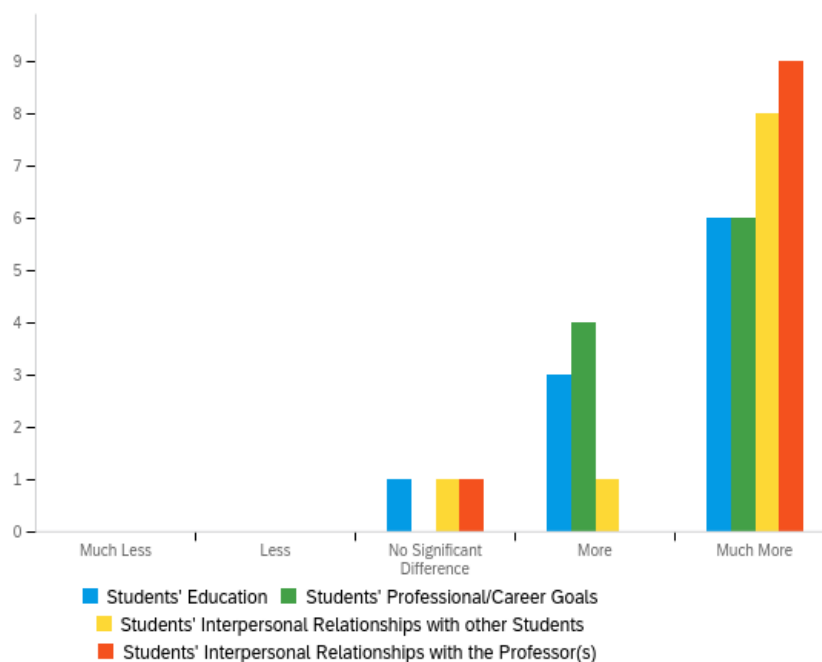
Faculty were asked "Compared to a traditional face-to-face class, do experiential learning travel courses impact students' more or less in the following areas?" and the results demonstrate that interpersonal relationships with both peers (yellow) and faculty (red) were much more impactful during ELTC compared to traditional courses.

Based on the data collected, it is evident that students' education, professional, and interpersonal relationships are positively impacted by ELTC. Outside of these three main impacts, students also expressed greater excitement for ELTC compared to traditional courses and were more likely to recommend ELTC to their friends. The impacts of these courses appear to have lasting impacts on students and observations from faculty further demonstrate these positive effects for college students.

Chapter 5

Educational Impacts

Often, the main goal of experiential learning travel courses is to provide students with an opportunity to apply the information learned in the classroom to real-world situations. Presenting students with these types of courses provides "a structured environment to give back to the community while reflecting on how their academic work is connected to their social citizenship" (Weller & Saam, 2019, p. 88). Increasing student educational outcomes is the overarching goal of college settings and ELTC can provide highly impactful learning environments for students. Students who are provided "with meaningful purpose and the tools for exploration and discovery, they will exceed expectations, create something new and usually quite good, and find the people they want to be" (p. 94). ELTC provides four main modes for students: experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting. These modes are essential to providing students with the opportunities to directly reflect on their immediate experience (Torres & Augusto, 2017). Previous research has demonstrated the effective educational outcomes of ELTC and the highly impactful education they can provide to students.

A study conducted by Torres and Augusto (2017) examined the impacts of experiential learning on decision style, theoretical management, and educational insights. A group of 27 college aged students were given a survey on strategic competencies and decision styles after completing an experiential learning business strategy simulation course. This study was conducted because the researchers believed there was little research on the understanding of how experiential learning courses have different outcomes compared to traditional forms of classroom learning. According to the study, students who participated in the experiential learning simulation had more positive engagement and knowledge of the program as well as increased understanding of applications from the simulation. The researchers also found decision-making styles were not affected as a result of the experiential learning course. This study demonstrates how experiential learning courses can significantly impact theoretical management and increase student's ability to apply their knowledge to situations outside of the classroom and in future career settings such as managerial positions.

Experiential learning courses do not always take the form of travel courses such as in Torres and Augusto's research. However, the educational impacts of these courses are similar. Weller and Saam (2019) conducted programs designed for student and faculty led experiential learning opportunities. After the success of these programs, a new Experiential Learning Academy (ELA) program was put into place. The researchers found the new ELA program created highly impactful courses because faculty were highly involved between student learning outcomes, general education outcomes, faculty professional goals, and departmental outcomes. The researchers also found providing students with experiential learning opportunities, such as the ELA program, allowed for student exploration and students often exceeded faculty expectations in the ELA courses. The researchers of this study had previously conducted other experiential learning programs and were able to implement the research learning from the previous programs into the design of a highly impactful Experiential Learning Academy program. Overall, this study reveals an effective method for implementing highly impactful experiential learning into college campuses.

There are multiple types of experiential learning that can provide students with beneficial education outcomes. Each type of course allows students to be "mindful of one's own direct, immediate experience, observing and reflecting upon the experience and thinking and conceptualizing" (Torres & Augusto, 2017). Implementing course concepts to real-world situations can allow students to make connections that may not take place in the classroom alone. Travel courses provide students with additional opportunities to positively impact their professionalism and interpersonal relationships. It is arguable that "nothing is so theoretical as good practice" and ELTC can provide this opportunity.

Chapter 6

Professionalism Impacts

Professionalism and career preparedness are major goals for college students. ELTC provide students with an intriguing learning opportunity that often keeps students more engaged in the course content than traditional face-to-face courses. Students who can "participate in social-learning experiences develop skills they will be able to use in the workplace and also may be better equipped to evolve into leaders of both for-profit and nonprofit organizations" (Braunsberger & Flamm, 2012, p. 6). Providing students with ELTC can allow students to enhance their career preparedness, gain entry-level competency, and management skills.

College students often report feeling unprepared for their careers upon graduation; however, ELTC could potentially help mitigate some of these feelings. Braunsberger & Flamm (2013) conducted a study to examine the impacts of experiential learning courses on students' civic engagement and career preparedness. In this study, experiential learning was defined as the application of real-life situations and problem solving within the local and global community. The researchers specifically examined service-learning experiential learning opportunities. The

study was conducted because the researchers believed colleges are not adequately preparing students to enter the workforce. A group of 21 college students participated in pre- and post-self-assessment surveys. Students who participated in experiential learning courses strongly believed they were better prepared for future careers compared to students in traditional courses. Students who participated in experiential learning courses also self-assessed themselves at higher levels of personal development, moral development, and civic engagement compared to students in traditional courses, which means experiential learning courses significantly impacted the students career preparedness and civic engagement with the community. With this information researchers and college faculty can better understand how to prepare students for future careers and how to increase civic engagement because experiential learning courses provide students with the opportunity to apply classroom applications to practical, real-world situations.

Knowing that students can feel unprepared to enter the workforce, Spanjaard and Stegemann (2018) aimed to explore how college students can be better equipped with the necessary skills to be ready for work upon graduation. This research was conducted because the researchers believe many students struggle in the workforce due to a lack of opportunities to examine and participate in 'real-world' situations in academic settings. The researchers found experiential learning opportunities provided students with more holistic understandings of their field that would enable them to better develop their career in the future. Students reported that the experience learning trip was useful, that they would likely remember the information, and that it was easier to learn in this format. The opportunity to participate in experiential learning opportunities allowed the students to better understand their personal career goals, improve self-efficiency, and to feel better prepared to enter the workforce upon graduation. Students even rated the experiential learning trip as 4.4 out of 5 for being closer to reality than traditional

courses (Table 5.1). Providing students with an experiential learning opportunity such as this can help students determine their desired career goals and enable students to build the transferable skills that can be used after graduation.

Table 5. 1 Student Feedback on Experiential Learning

Student feedback on field trip.

Student feedback item	Rating (out of 5)*
The field trip was useful	4.3
I will remember what I have learnt from this experience	4.1
It was an easier way to learn	4.1
It was closer to reality	4.4
I felt intimidated in approaching and speaking to retail staff	2.7

Students rated a variety of statements on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the highest rating. Spanjaard and Stegemann (2018) demonstrate the impacts experiential learning opportunities can have on student's professionalism and career outlooks.

A study conducted by Knightbridge (2014) further examined the role of experiential learning in student lives after graduation. The researchers aimed to explore the impacts of experiential learning on entry-level competency development, personal growth, and future impacts for students' careers. Experiential learning was defined as alternative practice education placement for occupational therapy students. A group of 14 students were interviewed on the impacts of their experiences with experiential learning opportunities and their responses were coded for content analysis by the researchers. They found 57% of the responses could be connected to entry-level competency and the courses impacts on the students' preparedness for their future career. The experiential learning opportunities provided the participants with the necessary skills to better understand their future career and the necessary skills they needed to be successful.

Alongside entry-level competency and student preparedness, management skills are another transferable skill that college students appear to lack. Reynolds (2009) conducted a study on the impacts of experiential learning and management skills. Management skills are defined as critical thinking skills that enable students to better lead a small group. This study was conducted because the researcher believed students could better increase their personal management skills through educational opportunities found outside a traditional classroom. Through observations of students participating in experiential learning, the researcher found students highly benefited from experiential learning compared to traditional classroom settings. The most significant impact was found in student social and political values. Overall, the researcher used observations of students before, during, and after participating in experiential learning opportunities and found such opportunities greatly benefited students' management skills after completing the course.

Experiential learning can provide students with numerous opportunities to increase their professionalism and better understand their career goals. Experiential learning can provide students with increased career preparedness, entry-level competence, and management skills. These skills, among others, can better prepare college students to enter the workforce upon graduation. ELTC can provide these outcomes to students alongside concepts of cultural relativism that can further prepare them for the diversity of a workplace environment. Students who can complete ELTC will not only bolster their resume with this non-traditional course but also enhance their skills needed to succeed in their careers.

Chapter 7

Interpersonal Relationships Impacts

Interpersonal relationships are often vastly changed by the college experience due to the new environment, social expectations, and culture of college campuses. Developing interpersonal relationships is an essential skill for college students during their education and is a transferable skill that can aid students after graduation. Effective interpersonal relationships involve "people with adequate social skills [who] can express themselves efficiently, understand others and desire to be perceived positively by other people" (Koc & Turan, 2018, p. 242). As students prepare for their careers in their desired fields, it is essential for universities to equip students with the necessary skills so students will feel comfortable and enthusiastic about developing interpersonal relationships with their future peers, professors, coworkers, and employers. Experiential learning travel courses can be beneficial in building students' confidence regarding interpersonal relationships. These courses promote student engagement "in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development" (Braunsberger & Flamm, 2013, p. 2). The implementation of experiential learning travel courses can benefit students' interpersonal relationships by engaging students in courses focused on group and community work.

A study conducted by Richmond and colleagues (2018) aimed to understand the impacts of interpersonal and intrapersonal experiences of experiential learning through outdoor adventure education (OAE). OAE is defined as courses that provide highly impactful social skills, attitudes, intrapersonal resources, and dispositions through the context of adventure activities such as backpacking or traveling. These courses are taught with the intention of providing highly impactful opportunities for technical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal skill development. A group of 20 high school student participants in OAE courses were interviewed by the researchers on the impacts of their OAE courses. Social connections, leadership abilities, and a stronger sense of personal potential were the most highly

impactful effects of OAE found on students in this study. Students who participated in the OAE courses were found to better excel in their leadership abilities and social connections with others from the course. This experiential learning opportunity provided students with highly impactful opportunities to better achieve social and professional skills that could greatly impact their future careers. The authors created a developmental theory of change (Figure 4.1) based on the findings. There are many similarities between the OAE courses and ELTCs because both are experiential learning that takes place outside of the classroom setting. Students who take these types of courses experience numerous interpersonal benefits from social connectedness to self-efficacy in their leadership development.

Figure 4. 1 Development Theory of Change
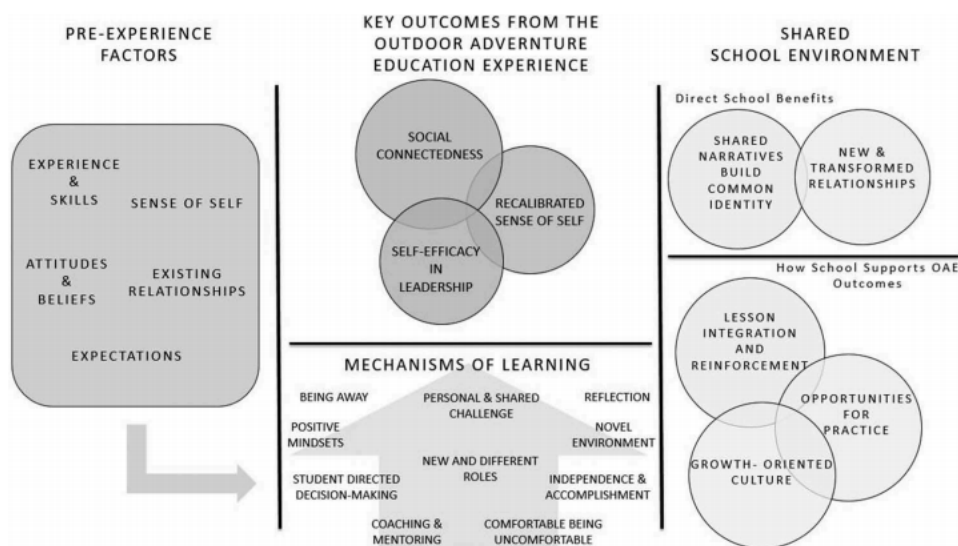
Richmond and colleagues (2018) used this as Figure 1, which they titled "Using school-related OAE experiences to support student learning," in analyzing their findings for common themes among student responses and this analysis led to the development of a theory of change. This theory (illustrated above) demonstrates how shared school related OAE experiences can support student learning. ELTC offer similar outcomes for students because these provide students with the opportunity to travel and experience impactful educational outcomes outside the classroom (p. 5).

Leadership is a valuable skill that can enhance students' interpersonal relationships with others. This skill can also benefit students in their professional and career goals as well as their relationships with peers and professors. Waller and colleagues (2017) examined the impacts of experiential learning on leadership development. This research was conducted because previous findings showed that there is a shortage of applicants who can meet the demands of stressful executive roles that require strong leadership skills. In this study, the researchers examine the effects of experience on memory and learning and how these effects can impact leadership skills in highly stressful situations. A group of 28 participants, ages 26-55, were equipped with heart rate monitors during a two-day experiment that simulates activities that can be used to evaluate individual leadership skills. The participants were also measured using the Learning Questionnaire, State Trait Anxiety Inventory, Lot-R, and the Behavioral Approach Scale/Behavioral Inhibition Scale. The heart rate monitor was used to determine whether participants felt stressed and engaged in the simulated challenging experiences and the study found most were engaged in the simulations. The researchers found this experiential learning simulation of leadership skill is an effective way to prepare individuals for similar real-world situations. The participants developed greater resilience to stress as the study progressed and allowed reflection on personal improvement for future use in individual careers. In short, this research demonstrates an effective experiential learning opportunity that can be used to provide a safe space for individuals to improve their leadership skills before entering the workforce. Leadership skills are an essential aspect of interpersonal relationships because students with strong leadership skills may feel more comfortable engaging in conversations, taking initiatives in groups, and generally interactions with others.

Students' interpersonal relationships may be greatly impacted by ELTC because these courses provide students with the opportunity to work in small groups to enhance their social connectedness and leadership skills. These transferable skills can benefit students' relationships alongside their education and career. Being able to take on leadership roles or connect with others will allow students to form stronger

bonds with the individuals they interact with. Connecting and understanding others will allow students to build a network of individuals that they can rely upon.

Chapter 8

Discussion

The findings reveal students' education, professionalism, and interpersonal relationships are greatly benefited from ELTC. Both student and faculty participants believed these courses were more beneficial than traditional face-to-face classes because students worked in small groups while traveling to regions outside of university settings. Students gained valuable transferable skills alongside lasting relationships and additional knowledge about the region, culture, and course concepts. Many of the skills students develop in these courses are included in the most sought-after skills that hiring managers look for in potential employees. The top five skills include: communication skills, leadership skills, teamwork skills, interpersonal skills, and learning/adaptability skills (Indeed Editorial Team, 2020). Students can develop and enhance these particular skills in ELTC because they are learning in a small team that requires interpersonal, leadership, teamwork, and communication skills to succeed. Colleges that emphasize ELTC for their students can help students feel more prepared to enter the workforce because they will have implemented transferable skills in real-world settings before graduation. Students will also have the chance to include ELTC on their resumes and discuss specific instances from the course where they applied these transferable skills.

Limitations

A limitation of this study is the population size and lack of information obtained about participants demographics. Participants were asked their age, year in college, gender, and major; however,

learning additional information about ethnicity or racial identity could allow additional conclusions to have been drawn. Information about ethnicity or racial identity could also ensure the participant population is representative of the campus population or college demographic statistics in the U.S.

Future Research

Suggestions for future research include examining the role of gender and enrollment in ELTC. Although this was not a focus point in the current study, it was evident that there were more female participants in the ELTC than males. Examining how gender affects student desires to enroll in ELTC could allow changes to be made to include a more heterogeneous population. In addition, long term follow-up on students' education, professionalism, and career goals after graduation could provide additional insights into how students are impacted by ELTC. Future research could also focus on mental health and ELTC. These courses provide students with the opportunity to improve numerous skills and examining the impacts on emotional, behavioral, and cognitive health could provide a more holistic understanding of how students are impacted by these courses.

Future Implications in the COVID-19 Pandemic

The current research was conducted before and during the COVID-19 pandemic and this research can be applied to helping students regain social connections with peers. After spending multiple semesters in isolated virtual learning environments, students may experience difficulties reconnecting with peers, forming new relationships, and adjusting to the college environment. Providing students with ELTC could ease the transition by creating lasting relationships among students and faculty while also providing students with beneficial opportunities to build their knowledge and enhance their resume. Collaborating in small groups and traveling, once travel restrictions are lifted, can allow students to refresh their social

skills that may have been forgotten in the months of quarantine. Considering that "it is undeniable that the restricting measures imposed to contain the COVID-19 pandemic have a severe impact on the mental health of the population. Nonetheless, it is yet unclear what promotes such negative effects. It is possible that these repercussions derive directly from the restrictive strategies and reduced social mobility" (Pedrosa et al., 2020, p. 2). There are undeniable impacts of the pandemic and research on the impacts of social isolation are still being conducted; however, ELTC can be used to help mitigate these negative impacts once it is safe to travel in groups again.

Conclusion

With the world becoming decreasing homogeneous, cultural relativism skills are essential tools for college students moving into their careers. Workplaces are becoming increasingly diverse and colleges bear responsibility for preparing students to enter diverse settings with confidence. Programs like ELTC that can expose students to a variety of cultures and subcultures will be crucial to building valuable transferable skills that can enhance their future careers (Tsuji et al., 2018, p.140). ELTC can be implemented in more disciplines, at other colleges, and in community settings to improve students' education, professionalism, and interpersonal relationships. ELTC are unique opportunities for students to engage in course content within a small cohort of peers and enable learning to take place outside of the classroom setting. Students often spend four-years' worth of college at a desk and enabling students to take travel courses can provide a different experience that can only enhance their overall college experience.

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