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**IF IT'S DAY 15, THIS MUST BE SAN SEBASTIAN:  
REFLECTIONS ON THE ACADEMIC LABOUR OF SHORT TERM TRAVEL  
STUDY PROGRAMME**

**So, are you guys jetting off to Spain again this year?**

This is a question we frequently hear from colleagues in the hallways around our offices as the spring of each year approaches. Sometimes, the question is asked with some envy, by colleagues finishing up stacks of grading and heading into a season of research and conferences. More often, it's asked in a way that sounds both curious and incredulous, as though they can't quite believe that we get paid to spend three weeks in Europe.

With our titular nod to the 1969 film *If It's Tuesday, This Must Be Belgium*, we acknowledge that this is how many of our colleagues see the short term travel study program that we have offered through the University of Calgary since 2007. From the outside, it might look as though our travels through Spain with 27 undergraduate students resemble a highbrow Contiki tour, where travelers know their present location more by day of the week than by physical surroundings. That perception is rooted, at least in part, in the way that the program is "sold" to students. We pitch the program as an exciting and efficient way to take three senior courses in a condensed time frame, all while enjoying the culture and lifestyle of a foreign country. The program isn't marketed to students as the rigorous, academically challenging, experiential program of inquiry-based learning that it is – this is not the way one "sells" education in the neoliberal university.

Travel study programs have something of an image problem, it seems. As creators and instructors of one of these programs, we know the academic labour that goes into developing, planning, marketing, teaching, and assessing a travel study program. Former students frequently tell us that they worked harder during that three-week program than they thought they possibly could, and that the learning that happens "on the road" sticks with them. This is the story of study abroad that motivates us and gives us great pride, but it is not the story of study abroad that is most often told. Universities position these programs, when presenting them to students (and the parents who fund them), as great opportunities to globalize their degrees, graduate sooner, and make themselves more marketable to prospective employers throughout the world. Subsequently, and, perhaps, not surprisingly, many academics come to see travel study programs as money-makers, rather than examples of the "serious academic labour" expected of tenured and tenure-track faculty members. And so, those of us who see these programs as a key part of our pedagogical practice are looked upon, amidst playful comments about taking our students on vacation with us, as not taking our careers very seriously.

Our understanding of the place of our work within the neoliberal university is, to be frank, constantly shifting. We acknowledge that our own relationships with the neoliberal university are complex. We are two junior academics who were educated as students and came of age as professionals in the neoliberal university. In some respects, it is all we know. We often hear senior colleagues lament about the “good old days” of the university, when, they say, the liberal arts were the core of the university and students seemed interested in “learning for learning’s sake.” Certainly, we can share their anxiety about how our university is moving toward a more corporate model of administration, or, as Amsler and Canaan (2008) describe it, “rationalized economic logics” (p. 2). We can see the ways in which time-consuming intellectual labour, on the part of both students and faculty members, is sometimes rushed for the sake of more efficient productivity. We understand the danger of universities mirroring the free market economy and are often uncomfortable working in an educational institute that is described by Gordon (1990) as an enterprise, where students are treated as consumers and faculty are expected to become service providers. As universities become more like the free market, and are expected to focus more on “skills” and less on “thought,” we move further away from preparing students to contribute to what Giroux (2008-09) calls the “crucial public sphere” (p. 46). We recognize the tension inherent in a travel study program like ours; we firmly believe it to be our most pedagogically valuable work, but in our recruitment efforts, we rely on precisely the neoliberal rhetoric that we criticize in this essay.

In many ways, it is this tension that drives our contribution to this journal. Framed by questions we often hear from colleagues about travel study programming, this reflective essay examines the labour of short-term travel study programs by engaging head-on with the (mis)perceptions surrounding travel study that circulate in the twenty-first century neoliberal university. By reflecting on our experiences developing and teaching these programs, as well as our experiences justifying our work to well-intentioned colleagues and department heads, we hope to paint a picture of academic labour that has significant value and is significantly undervalued.

### **Are you sure this program is even *academic*?**

One of the major misconceptions about travel study programs is that they are glorified vacations or small interjections of formal education surrounded by a heavier focus on leisure or adventure. And indeed, it is hard to fault people for such perceptions given that the cost of study abroad can be prohibitive for some students, and that travel, in general, is often perceived as a leisure activity for the middle and upper classes. But study abroad programs, ranging from service learning programs to research-intensive field schools, are far less leisurely than one might realize.

Generally speaking, according to the 2009 Canadian Bureau of International Education (CBIE) report, study abroad includes participation in “...any internationally based program or experience including exchange, clinical placement, field placement, internship, co-op placement, practicum or voluntary service/work placement offered by a post-secondary institution, of varying durations and places, and for which academic credit may or may not be granted” (Bond, 2009, pp. 9-10). Lewin (2009) argues that universities see such study abroad programs as imperative in developing “global citizens” (p. xv) and that we, as educators, can “orient [study abroad] toward developing critical individuals who are capable of analyzing power structures, building global community, or tangibly helping to improve the lives of people around the world” (p. xv). Engle and Engle (2003) suggest that “focused and reflective interaction with the host culture” (p. 4) is what ultimately separates study abroad from study at a home institution. All of these keywords – globalization, citizenship, community, analysis, reflection – are examples of precisely the pedagogical principles around which our three-week travel study program is built.

Travel study programs are classified by the length of time that students spend in the field. Exchange programs range from one semester to one year, while the shorter “group” travel study programs such as ours usually range from one to six weeks. Exchanges are normally individual programs where a student from a home institution registers in for-credit academic courses at a host university, taught by faculty

members at that university. The short-term group study programs are also comprised of for-credit courses, but taken in a compressed period of time and taught by faculty members from the home institution who accompany the group in their travels.

For a number of years, the longer term programs were considered more academically legitimate. The shorter programs suffered from the misperception that they “...emphasize adventure experience over academic rigor” (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2009, p. 367). Chieffo and Griffiths suggest that it is not the length of stay that determines academic learning outcomes; rather, it is the structure of the programs. Short-term programs are generally not intended to be language or intercultural acquisition programs. There is simply not enough time to accumulate those skills. So, the short-term programs are often anchored in the accompanying faculty members’ disciplines and areas of expertise. Instead of traveling to Spain to learn Spanish, students in a short-term program such as ours focus on studying the impact of globalization and culinary tourism on the food culture of Spain.

Researchers have begun to examine the academic benefits specific to the shorter study abroad programs, as well. Chieffo and Griffiths’ (2003, 2004, 2009) extensive surveys and data collection show that, through short-term travel study programs, students become more knowledgeable about other cultures. As highlighted by Sachau, Braser and Fee (2010) other benefits include intercultural sensitivity (Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, & Hubbard, 2006), understanding globalization (Sutton & Rubin, 2004) and an increased awareness of interdisciplinarity (Lewis & Niesenbaum 2005). Such learning outcomes mean students in these programs are becoming global citizens who are developing skills to understand their world, even in the short period of time spent in the field.

The University of Calgary, like other academic institutions across Canada, sees the value of internationalizing a student’s degree, and has established a unit on campus to support and administer study abroad programs. The Centre for International Students and Study Abroad (CISSA), a unit administered under the portfolio of the Vice-Provost (International), “promotes and administers international programs and develops and facilitates intercultural experiences for both University of Calgary and international students. It promotes international education and awareness across communities” (“About CISSA,” n.d.). A version of CISSA can be found at most major Canadian universities, especially as more and more universities encourage their students to undertake some form of international education. According to a 2007 Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) report, “93 percent of all responding institutions indicated that there was either a high or a medium interest in providing out-of-country experiences for Canadian students” (p. 2). Canadian university administrators are eager to help support such international endeavors; the academic value is now well established, and it is becoming increasingly clear that the public and prospective employers see the value as well.

The CBIE points out that the public is generally supportive of students acquiring international experience, with 71% claiming all post-secondary students should have the opportunity to study abroad (Bond, 2009, p. 30). In that same report, 50% of employers, who are a major interest group in the neoliberal university, indicated that they would “would hire a graduate with study abroad experience over a graduate who did not have such an experience” (Bond, 2009, p. 50). These numbers – particularly those regarding prospective employers – are paraded out again and again to recruit students to travel study programs. In large part, universities and governments are attempting to make study abroad more accessible, with scholarships and bursaries to partially offset the cost to students. The fact remains that the easiest way to sell study abroad programs to students (and, increasingly, their parents) is to talk about the neoliberal hallmarks of marketability and efficiency, rather than the traditional university values of critical thought and inquiry based learning.

### **So what are you, teachers or tour guides?**

Faculty members who have never taught a travel study program often, understandably, wonder exactly what is involved in taking students abroad. We have been asked if, as instructors, we step into a ready-made tour and insert academic content, and if our time and energy are occupied by logistics and troubleshooting instead of teaching. The role of the instructor in a travel study program is multi-faceted and complex. It requires innovation and flexibility, and constantly pushes comfort zones and boundaries. And, to say the least, it is time-consuming. What looks like a tidy and compact three-week program takes roughly 20 months, from inception to completion, and both spans and exceeds the categories of labour expected of university instructors. In addition to being teachers, we are administrators, organizing and confirming the itinerary, and liaising with tour operators and guest speakers throughout Spain. We are budget managers, ensuring money is available for expenditures while in the field. We are advertisers and promoters, expected, with the support of the study abroad office (CISSA), to take ultimate responsibility for ensuring that our program is full and paid for well in advance of departure. We are the recruiters and the selection committee, interviewing potential participants, and selecting a wide range of students from different disciplines in an effort to achieve both cohesion and diversity. We are curriculum designers for three courses, each designed to emphasize scholarly research and foster collaborative and self-directed learning while in the field. We carefully select readings, seeking out the most up-to-date resources in the ever-evolving field of food studies. We organize and hold both academic and logistical pre-departure sessions in the months prior to our travels. We create detailed course outlines that explain not only the academic expectations of students, but the behavioural expectations as well. We answer questions from students about research topics and reading lists, cultural differences and packing lists. And all of this happens in the 16 months prior to our departure for Spain.

When we arrive in Spain, when the program begins, we teach. While in the field we teach almost every day of the 21 day program; students have one “day off” from class activities each week, but they usually request one-on-one and research group meetings those days. Sometimes the teaching is formal. There are scheduled classes that take place in very informal environments such as hotel salons or community parks, without PowerPoint or chalkboards or other teaching aids often found in the traditional classroom. During these classes we have to navigate an entirely different set of distractions than in the campus classroom. Instead of being distracted by Facebook and text messaging, we are interrupted by political rallies across the pathway from us, or dogs and children running through a group presentation.

These are just the formal class experiences. In a short-term travel study program, for both students and instructors, the learning and teaching never “turn off.” Beyond the formal structured classes, teaching happens incidentally or informally; over lunch with the students, or on the train en route to another destination. It is not uncommon for a student to knock on our hotel room door at 8:00 at night to ask for advice on their research, or for them to sit next to us at dinner and pepper us with questions about Spanish culture. This is particularly true as they delve further into their individual directed research projects, which all students undertake in addition to their two formal common courses. We supervise the independent research projects of 27 students while in the field, guiding and supporting them as they perform primary research in the form of surveys, interviews or field observations. Upon return to Calgary, one of the three courses, evaluated primarily through short daily reflection essays, seminar presentations, and a final exam, is completely finished. The other two courses, which focus more heavily on primary and secondary research, have due dates for papers extending into the summer months. Many students travel on for several weeks upon the end of the three-week program; the university encourages this (once again, value for money), and asks that instructors accommodate requests for essay extensions based on students’ travel plans. Subsequently, we are often meeting with students and grading their work several months past the official end of the program.

This work is intellectually rewarding; we often see some of the best undergraduate research and writing that we have ever encountered. But this work is also exhausting. Adding to the challenge of such a heavy time commitment is the fact that tenured and tenure-track faculty members who choose to teach these

programs are expected to do so in addition to their regular teaching responsibilities. Because these courses are offered in spring and summer, and are not intended to count as part of our regular annual teaching obligations, they are considered “extra to load” and we are paid, per course, at the rate of sessional instructors. When one considers the months of preparation, the hours in the field, and the duration of the assessment period, it becomes increasingly clear that at least financially, faculty members are discouraged from undertaking these programs. When one holds the hours of work up against the remuneration, it isn't remotely commensurate with regular on-campus teaching.

**You have to think about your career now that you're on the tenure track...do you really think this is the best use of your time?**

Our interest in travel study began in 2004, when, as sessional instructors, we had the opportunity to participate in a non-credit study abroad program in Spain with faculty and students at a local culinary school. We had recently begun teaching a new special topics course on food culture at the University of Calgary and were interested in developing our own study abroad program. We returned armed with ideas and inspiration for the travel component of the program and took the next year to develop the academic content. After meeting with the coordinator at CISSA, and realizing that the process of developing and “pitching” a new program would take roughly 14 to 16 months, we aimed to have our first ‘outing’ in the spring of 2007. We were well-supported in our efforts; although we were sessional instructors without ongoing commitments to or from the university, we enjoyed an excellent relationship with both colleagues and our then Dean, who encouraged us to develop this program for the students in our faculty. Our Dean felt confident that this would be a popular program, and she advertised it vigorously on our behalf, even creating a one-time scholarship to support high-achieving students who were accepted for the program. This support was, in many ways, unsurprising; university administrators recognize the value of short-term travel study programs. Unlike term-abroad programs in which students might pay tuition to another academic institution, the short-term travel study participant pays tuition to his or her own university. The student goes abroad, but the tuition stays home – an ideal scenario for universities that are constantly concerned about recruitment and retention of students amidst growing pressure to increase enrollment.

The development and teaching of this program was treated as a smart and strategic undertaking for two sessional instructors. We enjoyed the work, and even considering the completely disproportionate workload/remuneration ratio, we were pleased that we had secured our employment for another few months. In the year that followed, however, our job status changed, for the better, by all accounts. We both became tenure-track instructors – regularized faculty members who would have a heavier responsibility for teaching than research, but who would nonetheless be on the track to tenured university appointments. At the University of Calgary, a large, research-intensive Canadian university, tenure-track and tenured instructors have a fairly well-defined role to play. In the faculty “trifecta” of teaching, service, and research, instructors have heavier teaching and service obligations, but their research expectations are significantly reduced. The professorial stream, at least on paper, seems to aim for a more balanced division between the three areas of teaching, service and research, but it is widely understood that professors, with their lighter teaching load, are evaluated heavily on research productivity.

Officially and pragmatically, our primary obligation as instructors on a tenure track (one of us is now newly tenured) is to teach. In the Faculty of Arts, for instance, the teaching load for instructors has recently been increased to eight courses per year while professors are asked to teach four. Instructors are expected to perform administrative duties related to teaching and learning, and are expected to maintain currency in the literature of our disciplines, but there is no official expectation that we would regularly research, publish, or present, except in the areas of pedagogical innovation and excellence. This definition of an instructor's role certainly speaks to the emphasis on efficiency in the neoliberal university. Our class sizes increase to save money and serve more students. Research professors (pressured to perform in their own way in this new efficiency model) are expected to seek and obtain outside government and corporate funding that takes their focus away from teaching in order to achieve research success. The

University of Calgary promises undergraduate students that there will be no institutional barriers such as full classes or reduced course offerings that will prevent them from finishing in four years. The role of the instructor — something of a pedagogical workhorse — is becoming vital to ensuring that universities maintain that efficient delivery of course material.

But as anyone who has served as a faculty member in a university with two career streams knows, the pressure to prove oneself intellectually does not disappear simply because one is in a teaching stream. Universities still hold scholarly publication and grant success in the highest regard in evaluating and assessing academic performance. Curious junior colleagues ask us whether we really think that teaching is “all that matters” in our annual merit evaluations as instructors. And well-intentioned senior colleagues pull us aside, especially as we approach our tenure applications, advising us to be “strategic” about our careers by putting labour-intensive travel study programs on hold and undertaking less onerous projects that will more clearly mark our achievements for tenure and promotion. The irony is not lost on us that it is more “valuable” and “strategic” for us to write this article about our travel study program than it is for us to teach our travel study program.

There is a disconnect at work here. Officially, as instructors, our primary role within the university is to teach. But increasingly, as academic units are being asked to “do more with less,” the parameters around teaching are changing. We are expected to teach in fall and winter, as these are the times of highest enrollment. We are expected to teach larger and larger classes in an effort to accommodate the high demand on courses created by increased institutional enrollment targets. We are expected to focus our teaching on the core courses that are required for a student to proceed through his or her degree in a timely fashion. Special topics courses are considered a rare treat, as they don't necessarily fulfill students' degree requirements. Small seminar-style classes are less and less common because they are perceived as too “resource-intensive.” And in the midst of this university landscape, travel study programs taught by regular faculty members are often seen as a poor use of resources at a time when our resources are stretched thinner and thinner.

The rhetoric around career “strategy” doesn't just speak to the ways in which tenured and tenure track faculty members are valued, of course. Travel study programs become programs that are most “suitable” for sessional instructors to whom the university has no obligation, or the most senior, tenured faculty members who have fewer concerns about career progress. For junior and mid-career teachers and researchers, travel study programs meet neither the departmental need to focus on large sections of core courses nor the strategic need to fill our annual performance reports with obvious, tangible markers of career success such as publications and conference papers. The tension is amplified when one considers the official missions, targets, and benchmarks of most Canadian universities. When a senior administration identifies teaching excellence and exceptional student experience as institutional priorities, a travel study program such as ours makes perfect sense. But when budget cuts to faculties and departments demand heavier teaching loads and larger class sizes, small, labour-intensive programs such as ours are discouraged by departmental administrators and unlikely to be rewarded by tenure and promotion committees. The rhetoric of the university says one thing, but the practice of the university seems to say another.

### **Remind me again, why are you doing this?**

At the heart of this tension may be precisely the “image problem” that we spoke of earlier in this essay. Short-term travel study programs suffer from a multitude of misconceptions on the part of senior university administrators, academic department heads, tenure and promotion committees, and faculty members themselves. In marketing the programs to students using the language of efficiency – time efficiency, cost efficiency, programmatic efficiency – those of us who teach and run the programs are perhaps guilty of misrepresenting or, at the very least, pigeonholing them. These are complex, dense, rigorous programs that demand a significant level of commitment from both students and faculty

members, and they take place far away from the academic 'comfort zone' provided by classrooms and technological tools. The academic labour of these programs is substantial, but the programs themselves are seen as somewhat frivolous. This image problem is a very real concern for the future of travel study programs; while the language of efficiency may be appealing to students of the neoliberal university, faculty members are being discouraged from participating, and academic administrators are seeing value only in popularity, not in academic integrity.

The paradox of our argument does not escape us here. We recognize that when we use the language of neoliberalism to promote a program that we believe to be pedagogically valuable, we are complaining about being misunderstood while perpetuating the misunderstanding! We feel distress and anxiety about the state of the university, yet we also take advantage of the rhetoric of the university. In the midst of increasing class sizes, heavier teaching loads, and the constant expectation to "do more with less," we have been motivated to seek out spaces for creative and innovative pedagogy. In some ways, our travel study program, despite being promoted using the language and philosophy of the market economy, offers us a chance to explore pedagogical techniques aimed at preparing students to participate in Giroux's (2008-09) "crucial public sphere" (p. 46). These techniques are extraordinarily difficult to explore in classrooms with 300 students, while teaching four courses a semester. The immersive environment of the travel study program opens intellectual doors for our students and for us. Would we prefer to work in a university environment where inquiry-based learning, small classes, and almost unlimited discussion time were the norm? Absolutely. But we recognize the difference between the university we want and the university we've got, and we choose to build and teach programs that allow us to pursue the pedagogical style we find most stimulating and engaging. We recognize that in doing so, we make sacrifices; our career progress may be slowed by labour intensive activities, and we may fail to actively and vocally challenge the rhetoric of the neoliberal university. But in our programs, with our students, we are doing the work that represents, for us, the very best of what universities can offer.

It may be naive, in the twenty-first century university, to expect a return to the traditional value of "learning for learning's sake," but surely, when international programs and initiatives are proven to meet both the values of the neoliberal university – however problematic they may be – and the values of academic integrity, there should be space for these programs to thrive. The work of these programs is, to be sure, academic labour, but for many of us who teach them, it is a labour of love, and an investment in our students, our academic communities, and ourselves.

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