Forced Pivots: Reimagining Travel Courses Due to Pandemic Disruptions

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Abstract

Scholars have long demonstrated the numerous benefits to students of participating in experiential learning courses. These factors help justify the substantial additional work that these courses take to organize and execute, on the part of both professors and administrators. When it comes to travel courses, particularly international travel courses, the advantages and costs are perhaps at their highest levels. Given the advanced planning and arrangements required for these courses to run successfully, these trips must justify their financial and time costs by providing unique experiences that are hard or impossible to replicate in a traditional classroom. So, what happens when a global pandemic, such as the Covid 19 outbreak, disrupts these carefully laid plans? Can any of the benefits of these courses be simulated effectively without bringing students to the field? If so, which elements can best be translated or mimicked, and how can this be done? What lessons could these transitions provide for other on campus courses which may be cheaper and more accessible to a larger number of students? This paper will consider each of the individual and combined benefits of travel courses and potential substitutions for each component. While fully replicating these experiences is likely impossible, a thorough consideration of potential surrogates for these complex elements can help ensure that professors and institutions are better prepared to pivot in the case of future pandemics, and as a bonus can also provide insights to help integrate similar elements into other more generally obtainable educational experiences.

Overview

As colleges and universities continue to develop new programs and opportunities to prepare their graduates for an increasingly globalized world, many schools have introduced and expanded on their offerings of short-term travel courses over the past few decades. A record 347,099 students from American Universities studied abroad for credit in the 2018/2019 academic year, the majority of whom were on short-term programs.[1] These short-term travel courses are designed to bring students into direct contact with different peoples, cultures, and sites while providing less disruption to standard academic progress than students imagine would be the case if taking a full semester away. Countless studies have shown the value of international experiences for students, but frequently students are concerned about the time and effort that programs that are a semester or longer will require. This is especially true of students in fields like laboratory sciences where the perception is that the course plans and the specific and inflexible order to take them are difficult to alter. Students have shown their preference for shorter duration programs through their own selections of study away programs, with enrollment in short-term study abroad programs (less than eight weeks in duration) accounting for more than 62% of all American study abroad students in the 2018/20109 academic year, the last full year before the Covid-19 epidemic. [2]

But short-term programs have not just grown because of what they are not. In addition to these practical considerations that have made these programs attractive for students and administrators, short-term programs also have unique advantages over longer experiences, including the high level of focus and intensity built into their structure. Instructors and students can maintain an extended focus on a single subject for the full duration of the instructional day for perhaps a couple of weeks, but this cannot be replicated across a full semester when other

[1] Institute of International Education. (2022). "Detailed Duration of U.S. Study Abroad, 2005/06 - 2020/21" Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange. Retrieved from https://opendoorsdata.org/
[2] Ibid. 62.2% of all students based on adding together the sections for "8 Weeks or Less During Academic Year," "January Term," "Summer: Two to eight weeks," and "Summer: Fewer than two weeks."

courses and commitments will get in the way. Short-term programs therefore allow for unique educational opportunities when thoughtfully planned and implemented.

The obvious positives of the model do come with some notable drawbacks, however. The largest one generally mentioned is the high level of additional work that planning and implementation for these courses requires from both professors and administrators. While this work can pay off in terms of learning outcomes, it seldom is a money maker for the institution, so travel courses face pressures to demonstrate their worth in other measurable ways. Coupled with this, another clear drawback to the model are the added costs for participants of these trips. Unless an institution has raised significant funds to cover expenses, students will be paying many thousands of dollars for these experiences on top of their standard tuition, putting these experiences out of reach for many students.

These issues are important to consider on both the individual and institutional levels when weighing the value of short-term travel courses. But the focus of this paper is none of these known issues which have been covered alongside the benefits of study abroad programs in formal and informal discussions at length.[3] Rather it is the fact that travel courses not only have the sunk costs discussed above but are also particularly vulnerable to disruptions that can come about due to conflict, natural disasters, or disease. While insurance can mitigate some of the financial risks, when a trip must suddenly shut down or pivot due to international or domestic changes, what are the options for salvaging the other elements of these unique programs in a way

[3] A full list of the literature on travel courses is too wide to cover here, but a few representative pieces include: Benjamin-Alvarado, Jonathan. "Internationalizing "Engaged" Learning: Enhancing Travel Study in Cuba." *Journal of Political Science Education* ,Vol. 11, no. 4 (2015): 483-493; Kroll-Zeldin, Oren. "Dual Narrative Learning: Experiential Education in Palestine/Israel." In Harris, Rachel S. et al, *Teaching the Arab-Israeli Conflict*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press (2019); Conway, John R., "The Value of Off-Campus Travel Courses," *Bios*, Vol. 68, No. 1 (Mar. 1997), pp. 50-52; Gillespie Joan, Lisa Jasinski and Dana Gross (eds*), Faculty as Global Learners: Off-Campus Study at Liberal Arts Colleges*. Ann Arbor: Lever Press. (2020); Chernega, Jennifer Nargang and Aurea K. Osgood, "Bringing Students Into a Discipline: Reflections on a Travel Study," *College Teaching* Vol 60, (2012); Mizrahia, Terry, Roni Kaufman and Ephrat Huss, "Asymmetric Learning in a Short-term, Macro-oriented International Students' Exchange: An Exploratory Study," *Social Work Education*, Vol 36, No 8 (2017); Barkley, A. and M.E. Barkley, "Long Term Knowledge from Short Term Study Abroad in Brazil and South Africa: Facilitating Effective International Experiences," *NACTA Journal* , Vol. 57, No. 3a (2013).

that provides a similarly meaningful experience for the students? That is what we are discussing here.

Travel courses can run into various issues that affect their ability to function as planned, but the Covid-19 pandemic provides a singularly important case of an international disruption which affected all levels of education, and thus is the primary focus here. In a matter of a few short weeks, colleges and universities around the world shut down, sending students and staff home from campus to complete the spring semester via online forums.[4] For travel courses scheduled for that spring, their core pedagogy, intensive group travel, was off the table. By the next year, 2021, almost all courses still remained grounded and unable to travel, due to health concerns and border closures. According to the Open Doors reports on international education for U.S. institutes of higher education, in the 2019/2020 academic year 49,789 students studied abroad in short-term programs during the academic year or in various programs during the summer (most of which was in short-term programs), a sharp decline from the 225,266 in similar programs the prior year.[5] The number studying abroad in short-term programs during the academic year then dropped again, this time by more than 98%, to 869 students for 2020/2021, with a slightly larger but still relatively small group of 8,421 being able to take part in summer programs of various sorts that year.[6] It was not until 2022, two full years into the pandemic, that some courses began to return to a more normal means of operation, but even these had to adjust to meet the new realities.

For the purposes of this paper, I will explore how a course could be adjusted to meet the various stages seen during the Covid 19 pandemic while maintaining its major learning objectives and attempting to recreate, as best as possible, much of the field experience. I will use

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[4] Abigail Johnson Hess, "How Coronavirus Dramatically Changed College for Over 14 Million Students," *CNBC*, March 26, 2020. https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/26/how-coronavirus-changed-college-for-over-14-million-students.html; Williams June, Audrey, and Jacquelyn Elias. "What Higher Education Has Endured for the Past Year*." The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 11, 2021. https://www.chronicle.com/article/what-higher-education-has-endured-for-the-past-year.

[5] Institute of International Education. (2021). Open Doors 2010-2021: Fast Facts. Retrieved from https://opendoorsdata.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Fast-Facts-2010-2021.pdf.

[6] Institute of International Education. (2022). Open Doors 2022: Fast Facts. Retrieved from https://opendoorsdata.org/fast_facts/fast-facts-2022/.

as a model my own course which focuses on the Arab-Israeli Conflict and Coexistence as a means of grounding the discussion. This course was taught in the field in May of 2019, the last cycle before the pandemic, so it was not directly impacted by the March 2020 shutdowns. But by using a recently run and fully planned and executed course as the model it is easier to dive into the details of each component and its pedagogical attributes to best consider potential substitutions. This course is expected to return to the field this spring (2023), and while it is hoped that few of the substitutions discussed here will be required to be implemented this year, thinking through each as part of the overarching course planning process should allow for a smoother pivot if any changes prove necessary.

Stages of the Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic has had various impacts on teaching at different points, and the evolution has not been linear or universal across institutions, but for our purposes here we will discuss the effects of the pandemic in four main stages. The first, which I will call "Early stage pandemic" or "extreme" was the most dramatic change and came about with little advanced planning. During this stage, each student was isolated, studying on their own from various types of off-campus locations. Courses were taught via both synchronous and asynchronous methods.[7] Most of the courses in this time had been designed for in-person delivery and had started out the semester in that manner before they were quickly retrofitted in whatever manner the instructors were able to under the circumstance.[8] During this stage the key changes of note are that students for the most part could only participate in the course virtually and at least in the very beginning of the pandemic in 2020, students were sent to their homes around the world, and thus synchronous course offerings were not always possible since participants were suddenly in

[7] Crawford, J., Butler-Henderson, K., Rudolph, J., Malkawi, B., Glowatz, M., Burton, R., et al. (2020). COVID-19: "20 Countries' Higher Education Intra-period Digital Pedagogy Responses," *Journal of Applied Learning Teach.* 3, 1–20; International Association of Universities (2020). "The Impact of Covid-19 on Higher Education Around the World,". https://www.iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau_covid19_and_he_survey_report_final_may_2020.pdf.

[8] Courses that began the semester as online-only faced new challenges as well, but generally required less drastic changes to the course structure since they had been designed with methodologies that could largely continue despite the disruptions.

different time zones and may not have had reliable access to the internet. For the purposes of discussion here, we will focus on the pure online nature of this time-period as the major pedagogical change and will discuss both asynchronous and synchronous options, since a future shut down might not follow the full pattern of this one, and both proved viable options for some courses.

During Stage 2 of the pandemic, most students had returned to campus and classes that were in person prior to the pandemic largely returned to that format. Here it was possible to plan for group activities, but not to conduct international travel. This period included different operating procedures depending on the semester, school location, and school policies. But we will discuss here the situation in which traditionally structured classes are able to meet in person, but where students may miss class more than would have been the norm pre-pandemic due to illness, and classes are still affected by some health restrictions, such as masks being needed much of the time. This was the situation for at least the 2020/2021 academic year, with most institutions remaining in this stage throughout much or all of the 2021/2022 academic year as well.[9]

Most institutions reached Stage 3 by the fall semester of 2022, and some did prior to this. During this stage classes were largely functioning in a normal manner, although some masking or other restrictions were often still in place. For our purposes the most important change from stage two is that travel courses began to operate again, with added restrictions. Courses planned for this time needed to be built with the assumption that things could still revert to the earlier situations with some or all of the limitations in place earlier in the pandemic, or could develop into a different phase with new and novel restrictions introduced, but many of the elements of pre-pandemic travel courses were once again able to function so long as instructors, institutions, and participants remained flexible and willing to adapt as needed.

[9] Baron Cadloff, Emily. "As Provincial COVID-19 Restrictions Are Lifted, Universities Must Figure out How to Proceed" *University Affairs,* May 9, 2022; Nadworny, Elissa. "Colleges Ease COVID-19 Restrictions as Fall Semester Begins for Millions of Students." *NPR.org,* August 16, 2022; Saul, Stephanie, and Anemona Hartocollis. "Some Colleges Loosen Rules for a Virus That Won't Go Away" *The New York Times,* January 16, 2022; Schwartz, Natalie. "A Wave of Colleges Drop Mask Mandates Following New CDC Guidance" *Higher Ed Dive,* March 2, 2022;.

Stage 4 will entail a full return to the pedagogical realities as they existed pre-March 2020. This would mean virtually no travel restrictions, required masking, or other impediments. Some believe we have already reached this stage, but since waves of the pandemic have still broken out during the fall 2022 semester, it is too early to firmly place us here, when noting the significant uncertainty that still affects course planning. While it is hoped that my course this May will operate within Stage 4 conditions, it is not possible to be sure this will be the case.

In the sections below, I will discuss potential ways to simulate aspects of travel courses, using my course focused on travel to Israel and the West Bank as a model. The discussion will primarily be on substitutions suitable for stages 1 and 2, since these were the most restrictive period and the alterations made to adjust to these conditions could still be used during later periods as well.

Background: The 2019 Course

The travel course under discussion here was designed to give an overview of the intricacies of the Arab-Israeli Conflict and how the conflict affects the day-to-day lives of the inhabitants of the region today. It focuses on both the big political questions and histories as well as on elements of the conflict that are less frequently the concern of political science classes, such as the complex web of interpersonal relations that can be seen across the various societal divides. Unlike most trips to the region, this course has been meticulously designed to bring in a wide array of perspectives and experiences without taking sides in the ongoing political debates. While absolute balance is probably impossible in such a complicated area, students are taken to a variety of sites important to different communities and their narratives of the conflict, and are exposed to a plethora of voices from diverse political, ideological, religious, ethnic, and cultural groups. To do this the trip includes visits to locations that cross political and communal divides,

spending two and half weeks covering much of the country of Israel as well as areas of the West Bank under Palestinian jurisdiction.[10]

In 2019 there were 15 participants in the program from a variety of majors and backgrounds. We flew together to Israel from Washington DC's Dulles airport, and when in country traveled primary via private bus, with a couple of days designed with the group relying on walking or using public transportation to get around. The accommodations were mostly in mid-level hotels with shared rooms for students, but there were also two nights of homestay with Palestinian families when we were in Bethlehem. Virtually all breakfasts and lunches were together as a group, as were approximately half of the dinners, including a sabbath dinner for the entire group at the home of a Jewish host family.

We visited a variety of traditional/popular tourist sites in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Haifa, Ramallah, the Negev desert, and the Dead Sea region, since many of these are valuable points of reference for the students. But much of the trip was to less touristy sites, such as Arab neighborhoods of Jerusalem, Israeli settlements, Palestinian refugee camps, small villages, border crossings, religious neighborhoods of various faiths, and parks and memorials geared towards the local populations. In many locations, elements were designed to provide interactive and memorable experiences that are seemingly difficult to replicate. After all, the purpose of the course is to leverage being on the ground to enhance student understanding of the issues and complexities in a manner that is generally impossible in a traditional classroom setting. But the Covid-19 pandemic has forced people across fields and countries to reconsider what elements of pre-pandemic experiences could be replicated in some manner if travel is disrupted. The rest of this paper will therefore walk through the specific elements of academic travel courses that seem most meaningful and attempt to find workable alternatives for each of these for when travel to the region proves impossible.

[10] A full overview of the course can be found at: Snow, Jonathan. 2020. "Empowering Students Via Travel: Probing the Arab-Israeli Conflict from the Field." APSA Preprints. doi: 10.33774/apsa-2020-4c6qg.

Site Visits – Major (tourist) Sites

During the trip we visited a wide variety of sites for different pedagogical purposes. Certainly, some of the most important, in terms of both history and the way students discuss their experiences after the course, are also major tourist sites. Because of their popularity, these major sites generally provide more opportunities to explore them via means other than direct first-hand interaction, although none of the virtual options can fully capture the experience of exploring a site in person.

We began the trip in Jerusalem, a 3000-year-old city that is of religious significance to Jews, Christians, Muslims, and others, and also serves as both the center of Israeli politics and the desired capital of a future state of Palestine. We spent more time in Jerusalem than any other location and there we visited ancient and modern sites that are focal points of present society and politics. There is an electricity in the air of Jerusalem that visitors often comment about, and it is a city that is unique in terms of its central importance to so many groups and its blend of the ancient and the contemporary. Many of the major sites here are recognizable even to people who know little about the region, such as the Nobel Sanctuary/Temple Mount, Western Wall, Church of the Holy Sepulcher, Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial, and the Machene Yehuda outdoor market. For each of these locations there are online tours, photos, and sometimes interactive elements that can allow individuals and classes to recreate some of the experience of visiting.

As one of the most contested and significant religious and political sites, the Temple Mount/Nobel Sanctuary is a location that students immediately respond to. This is the hill which is said to be the location where Abraham was to sacrifice his son (Isaac or Ishmael) to God, where the ancient Jewish Temples once stood, where Jesus upturned the tables of the money changers, where Mohamed left on his night journey, and where today the Al Aqsa Mosque and Dome of the Rock stand. Access to the site is limited, especially around holy days and when political tensions are high, so it is not always possible to bring groups up, even when physically in the region. But the majesty of the site helps the students quickly comprehend the complexity of the territorial issues and how modern politics interplay with shared and contested histories and cultures, so a visit is well worth the effort when it is possible. Similarly, visits to the Western

Wall and Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the last remaining part of the ancient Jewish Temple complex and the site where most Christians believe Jesus was crucified, buried and rose from the dead, respectively, fully underscore for students the centrality of Jerusalem in world politics and religious thinking. Yad Vashem meanwhile provides a sobering overview of how the tragedy of the Holocaust has shaped the early as well as the present state of Israel, while a visit to the vibrant Shuk (Mahene Yehuda) exposes students to the tapestry of people who make up the city's inhabitants, as well as offers memorable meals from a diverse array of cuisines and traditions.

Because these sites are such popular tourist destinations, there are lots of options available for those who want to get a feel for what it is like to visit them but are abroad or otherwise unable to do so. That said, the ability for an instructor to provide an experience that gives the students a real sense of these sites will vary by how much can be done in a shared manner. Early in the pandemic when students were studying from home, a professor could lead a Zoom lecture and "walk" through any of these sites using a combination of high-quality static pictures available freely on the Internet, 360-degree panoramic images, and even some short pre-recorded videos. The expertise of the instructor could make for an engaging experience, but these sorts of sessions need to be limited in duration in order to keep the students interest level high.[11] In these early days though, with limited advanced planning available and all participants isolated, this was often the best option. During the middle stages of the pandemic, once people were allowed to leave their homes, many tour guides offered virtual tours for groups in which they would walk around a site with a camera, responding to questions from the audience in real time.[12] These virtual tours varied a lot in quality, and if the target site was experiencing lockdown restrictions as well this option would not be available, but it could allow a group to feel like they were doing something outside of the normal Zoom class experience, and it also helps to maintain ties with the practitioners in the field on whom travel courses depend. When

[11] Toney, Scott, Jenn Light, and Andrew Urbaczewski. "Fighting Zoom Fatigue: Keeping the Zoombies at Bay," *Communications of the Association for Information Systems* 48, no. 1 (2021): 10.

[12] See for example the list of virtual tours offered by ITA Travel & Tourism LTD, available at: https://www.amazingjerusalem.com/virtual-tours-in-jerusalem-and-israel/

available, this ability to visually walk through a site together could give a better sense that pictures or prerecorded video of what the real trip would have entailed.

Once classes were able to return to the classroom, the experience of going to these major sites could be mimicked even more successfully than in the purely online setting. Capturing the grandeur of these sites via picture and video is in some ways easier when the group is in one place together. In that scenario the images could be projected onto larger screens, and with the right equipment could feel more like being in a movie theater, which can be more engrossing than the small laptop screens most students would use for Zoom. Perhaps even more importantly, other elements could be added to enhance the experience. Once masking restrictions were loosened, a virtual tour of Shuk Mahene Yehuda, for example, could be accompanied by a sampling of the types of food and drinks sold there, helping to engage some of the other senses that help build memories. While replicating the experience of swimming in the Mediterranean or floating in the Dead Sea would be impossible, a group spa activity involving Dead Sea mud might be practical and a fun way to break up a long day of learning. It is important to remember that part of the experience of being in a country together is the activities that are offered beyond just the core course materials, so when attempting to replicate the experience, adding some of these elements even if they are not related to the major educational goals, could still prove pedagogically worthwhile.

Sites that are less tourist focused are generally going to be harder to recreate since there is less demand for images and videos of these locations. This was especially a problem in the early phase of the pandemic since the sudden nature of the shutdowns meant that professors could generally not hire people on the ground to produce new media for classroom use, and partner tour guides were also subject to their own restrictions and could not just go out to these sites themselves either. With advanced planning though, it could be possible to hire a tour guide or other contact in the field to capture images, record video segments, or even to do a live tour of these areas, once conditions allow. This could be affective for some sites in Jerusalem like Ammunition Hill or the contested Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, or for national parks where important battles took place, refugee camps, public areas like Rothschild Avenue, or segments of

the separation barrier with the West Bank. However, some sites would not be able to be explored this way, either because getting someone on the ground there would be impractical, or because of cultural or security restrictions, such as filming Shabbat services or at the border crossings with the territories. In these cases, short fiction or non-fiction films might be a better way to give the students an experience. For example, watching the short 2012 Israeli film *Chasimot* (Borders) which dramatizes the difficult decisions faced by soldiers manning border crossings, is a useful starting point for a discussion about how these young conscripts' actions can lead to various negative outcomes for all involved.[13]

Interactions with Varied People of the Region

Being in the field provides access to lots of experts, both professionals and not, who the students would not otherwise have the opportunity to interact with. Luckily, the pandemic helped make many people feel much more comfortable using communication technology such as Zoom, and this meant that lectures, especially those planned with subject experts, could often be moved to this new avenue with relative success. In some ways, the early pandemic period with every participant signing into the discussion from their own computer could be even more successful for interacting with a guest from abroad than when the class is all together and just the lecturer is virtual, since the individual accounts and separate boxes on the screen can make it easier for the guest to see participants faces and respond to questions. Having those from the region give their talks via Zoom is not without issues though, such as the fact that time zones need to be carefully accounted for (seven hours difference, for example, between Israel and the east coast of the United States). Technology can also be a barrier to some potential speakers, especially those who are in rural areas, have limited internet access, lack the requisite computer hardware, or do not have all of the skills or training to use it properly. Some of the best speakers from the field therefore might not be workable for the virtual lectures, and instructors would need to rely on a combination of their own established connections and those of their extended network to find suitable alternatives.

[13] *Chasimot (Borders),* Maalehvod.co.il, 2012, https://www.maalehvod.co.il/cinema/movies-en/barriers/?lang=en.

While the formal talks are critical for delivering educational content, informal interactions with host families and peers also help build a memorable and meaningful experience for the students. Some of these can also be recreated to work via Zoom, with the same issues mentioned above, along with some other potential challenges. Breakout rooms can provide for smaller group interactions, raising the likelihood of making meaningful connections, but the coldness of the technology will be a barrier for some. Instructors may try to mitigate this and recreate some of the atmosphere of being together in the county by having hosts/peers and students share the same food or drink during the call (like mint tea or regional desserts – see discussion of food in the next section). These informal interactions might also be more successful if they are iterated since that could help relieve some of the awkwardness of initial virtual interactions. But the use of repeated meetings would exacerbate the issue of scheduling and could allow for more technological issues, since each session would require a separate connection between the participants. In some cases, the risks of these downsides are worth it. A series of short meetings like this might be especially feasible for replicating some of the peer-to-peer conversations, for example, since bringing together those of a similar age could mean they are more likely to share technological knowledge, limiting that potential issue to some degree.

Regional Food and Drink

Food provides one of the most important tactile elements of travel courses. As discussed above, professors can leverage this by using food as an added layer of the lectures or informal discussions via Zoom, providing an extra element to make the experience feel more shared. In the later stages of the pandemic, providing this piece is relatively easy, since the participants of the course can be presented with one communal spread of food and drink that mimics things the hosts would likely have on hand. In the earlier stages though, where masking was required or students were isolated, making a shared meal problematic, this could be accomplished if boxes of ingredients could be shipped to the individual students with enough advanced planning, or when that is unfeasible, participants could be given simple recipes to mimic the authentic foods or

drinks. Many cookbooks include some history or cultural background along with the recipes, providing an additional opportunity for learning.

Food can also be a means for adding richness to the group experience beyond the scheduled lectures and informal conversations. Snacks, sweats, drinks and full meals of typical regional delicacies can be provided for participants, ideally with some explanation of the role of each or the histories that explain why they have become part of the cultural tapestry of the area. Ambitious instructors could take this a step further during stages two and three of the pandemic and set up "cafes" with hired staff, either from the region or with some training, explaining the different items on offer. To make the experience even more realistic, the instructor could print menus in regional language(s) or even borrow real ones from restaurants that the group would have visited, since PDF versions are often available online.

In stage three, or possibly stage two, if there are local families from the region available near the college campus, the group might try to recreate some of the aspects of homestays with dinners or coffee at their house. People who have emigrated from the region are not going to have the same recent experience as those currently there, but they could still give a flavor of some of the cultural aspects and tell family stories. If an event at their house is impractical, a visit to campus by the families could be another option, but probably of less value since it would not recreate the hospitality aspect nearly as realistically.

Replicated the Intensity of a Travel Course

From a pedagogical standpoint, one of the key elements of the travel course is the intensity of the travel, and the shared group experience that can be built partially because of this factor. Unfortunately, this element is hard to recreate during the early pandemic phase which includes full isolation. Students, professors, and outside speakers all need to have regular breaks from online sessions, and keeping students at their screens for more than a few hours a day is a dubious prospect. Instructors could still work to build group memories by spreading out the synchronous online sessions throughout the day, with time in between for other assignments, such as readings, films, or perhaps associated cooking projects. But if the students have put aside

a few weeks for the course with the expectation of travel and that is suddenly cancelled, some elements of the intensity could still be worthwhile to try to recreate. One way to do this would be to have some group events during times that a normal class would not meet, such as at night. While during a normal semester requiring attendance to an event during off hours might be problematic, doing so during the lockdown period might conversely provide a sense of shared experience and feeling that for the students that they are doing something outside of the norm in a positive manner.

During stages two and three, instructors should consider this sort of time shifting and group intensity as an even more viable pedagogical option. Again, missing out on the planned travel will still be a letdown, but there are many courses that already are planned during January and May terms on different college campuses which utilize intensive learning models, so filling the days, and even some evenings, during a 2-3 week non-travel "travel" course is not unreasonable. If the plan is to mimic this intensity with long days though, this is another time when instructors should consider adding some fun cultural elements – films, music, food, sport – that might not otherwise be a part of a typical travel course but would allow on-campus non-travel courses to be more engaging.

What Makes All of this Different from a Normal Course?

I started this discussion by noting that travel courses are, by their nature, resource heavy. These courses have significant costs over a standard classroom-based experience in terms of the additional time and money needed to run them, and the advanced planning and therefore sunk costs that come along with them. The argument for their value then is that being in the field delivers something that a traditional classroom cannot, and that the learning outcomes associated with these courses are worth the considerable extra effort and resources. Any college course obviously runs the risk of being cancelled at a late date in the planning due to under-enrollment, staffing changes, or instructor illness. But unlike standard courses, the major issues involved with cancelling a travel course that has already been planned and booked cannot easily be addressed by simply moving the class to a later date without adding additional labor and likely

monetary costs. Assuming a school has invested in insurance which covers much of the monetary costs associated with cancelling the travel portion, what options do an institution and instructor have to provide an alternative experience if an outside factor, like a global pandemic, causes a cancellation of the trip?

In the spring of 2020, most of these sorts of short-term travel courses were simply cancelled with the hope that they could be offered again in the future.[14] At the time, no one knew how long students would be in isolation or when international borders would reopen. With students continuing their progression towards graduation, the students enrolled in these planned spring 2020 courses often would not have the opportunity to participate in the originally planned travel at a later date (which it turned out was generally two or three years after the initially scheduled course). Could a pivot from the planned itinerary to a virtual, hybrid, or in-person class alternative have provided a better option than outright cancelling the course? The unknowns at the times made it difficult to ensure a proper choice was made then, but facing a similar situation in the future, what could the lessons of the Covid-19 pandemic provide for short term travel courses?

During Stage One of a pandemic that causes campus shutdowns and wider restrictions on travel and public activities, the choice is basically to cancel the planned course or to go fully online. It is clear that a fully online experience cannot capture all of the elements of a complex travel course, but as discussed throughout this paper, there are some elements that could be mimicked in a way that could provide a meaningful experience for the students. In such a scenario, if the enrolled students are in the same time zone and have access to reliable high-speed internet, running at least some parts of the course live every day will provide a better group experience than a fully asynchronous design. Using a combination of instructor and perhaps tour guide led Zoom sessions, it is possible to give the students a strong feel for major tourist sites, using a blend of static pictures, 360 degree pictures, and videos. Coupling this with some filmed content, whether a tour guide-led exploration of a site or a film from the region that deals with

[14] See, for example, Valerie Pavilonis, "Study Abroad Cancelled, Campus Activities Shut Down," *Yale Daily News*, April 6, 2020.

topical issues, is a good way to break up the day into manageable sessions. Covering the less-tourist focused sites is a bit trickier, since there will be more limited content freely available, but if the contacts from the region and tour guides with whom you planned to work are able to move about their country, a live-streamed tour covering some of these other sites could sometimes be even more interesting than those of the major sites. This obviously depends on how widespread lockdowns are though, and during the early stages of Covid 19, this would not have been an option for much of the world.

In addition to the content focused elements, it is important to build in elements to spark the use of other senses in order to build stronger memories for the students. Here, adding food and drink via prepared care packages or shared recipes, along with interactive small group sessions with experts or peers from the region, are both valuable ways to help round out the experience. Critical to the overall success of the course will be varying the type of activities throughout the day so that students are both able to feel like they are part of an intensive group activity but also avoid the strain of too much time stationary in front of a computer screen.

Once the isolation requirements are lessened, bringing the group together for a shared classroom experience offers an even greater potential for mimicking the group travel feel than could possibly be achieved during Stage One. Here many of the elements that could be used in the early pandemic period can be used even more effectively, such as by utilizing large projections of the images and videos of tourist sites in a darkened classroom, rather than simply going through them together on small laptop screens. Sessions here can also be a bit longer than in Stage One, since in person is less fatiguing than sitting in front of separate screens, and students can interact with each other more easily. Again, sharing food and drink is a way to add other sensory elements to the experience, assuming it is allowed and possible. Bringing in guests to the classroom, either in person or via video link, is a good way to add the more personal experiences. If there are nearby museums or cultural sites that are related to the course subject or planned travel area, this is another way to add a tangible element. In all, these elements can help build both a meaningful connection to the place that they were supposed to travel to, and mimic some of the group experiences that make the travel memorable.

Taken as a whole, it is evident that these shared experiences in non-travel "travel" courses can provide a meaningful educational opportunity, and might be a useful model for a lower-cost alternative even outside of pandemic needs, but will not replace the distinctive value that can result from traditional travel once that is again available for those who are able to take part. Final data on the number of American students participating in study abroad programs for this academic year is not yet available, but early figures show that 83% of institutions that took part in the spring 2022 Institute of International Education survey of international exchange programs expect an increase in study abroad numbers in 2022/23 compared to the previous year.[15] Anecdotally, the sizable enrollment in Roanoke College's May Term courses for Spring 2023, the first time that a full roster of trips is being offered and where most restrictions to travel are expected to be eliminated, further suggests that students are clamoring to return to the pre-pandemic experiences of short-term travel courses. But the last three years prove that pivoting in the face of forced change is much easier when options to do so have been thought through in advance. The possibility of another outbreak affecting future travel must be accounted for when planning travel courses because some of the elements discussed here are only available if they are at least somewhat planned for in advance of shutdowns. The last truly global pandemic outbreak was a century before Covid, so perhaps we will be lucky and not have to adjust our courses again in such an all-encompassing manner in the near future. But if the time comes, at least the lessons from the past few years can allow for a better substitute for cancelled travel courses than was generally the case in 2020.

[15] Martel, Mirka and Julie Baer, "Spring 2022 Snapshot on International Educational Exchange," *Institute of International Education*, June 2022.