

**THE POTENTIAL VALUE OF SHORT-TERM MISSIONS AS PREPARATION
FOR LONG-TERM CROSS-CULTURAL
MINISTRY AND SERVICE:**

A case study of the internship program of Northwestern College

By

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to use the internship program of Northwestern College as a case study to illustrate the potential value of short-term missions as preparation for longer-duration cross-cultural ministry/service.

Undeterred by terrorism, fuel costs and other obstacles, short-term mission continues to grow. So many people make short-term trips each year that even counting them all has become difficult. An EMQ article in October, 2000 estimated 450,000 short termers sent from North America (Slimbach 441). Roger Peterson, of STEM Ministries, gives a figure of 2.2 million short termers for 2006 (2007).

Individuals, married couples and teams, going on their own or sent by churches, schools and agencies (including many agencies dedicated exclusively to short-term mission) swell the ranks of what has become a multi-billion dollar industry. Although there is not an official standard, today anything between one week and one year is usually considered a short-term trip. By contrast, when I first went to Kenya as a recent college graduate in 1974, short-term mission was 1-3 years (now usually re-named mid-term) and terms of service less one year were rare. Common destinations include inner-city United States, Native American reservations and near neighbor Mexico, but also reach remote and/or restricted access countries such as Cuba, Mongolia and Bhutan and everywhere in between. There is probably no country on earth untouched by short-term missions, including Iraq, Afghanistan and Myanmar.

Twenty-five years ago, nearly half of all short-termers went on to serve long-term. As the numbers of short-termers has swelled, that percentage has plummeted (Corwin, et al 279). Not only has short-term missions declined as a recruiting tool, it has become a vaccinator of thousands who might otherwise be infected with the long-term bug. In addition, many who return from trips as short as one week now consider themselves experts on all things missiological. Consider the following letter:

Dear Mom,

It's the last day of our missions trip, and I thought I would write you while everything is still fresh on my mind. You had asked me about culture shock, but I don't think I've really experienced any because we spent such a brief time here.

I am really tired, though, from having to listen extra hard to figure out what people are saying to me...even when they are speaking English. It usually takes awhile for them to understand what I am saying too.

The missionaries were nice, but I had a hard time understanding how they can have a maid...I mean, that seems kind of unbiblical, doesn't it? The missionaries seem to work

really slow. They haven't seen a lot of results in their ministry, but we sure did! We asked people to come forward at an outreach service in the park, and everyone did!

It was hard to see how little many of the national Christians lived on. We have so much! I gave one of the pastors some money, but he wouldn't take it. That kind of ticked me off... I was just trying to help! I also invited my host family to come visit this year. I'd probably have to pay for their tickets, but it sure would be fun to show them how we do things here. I'm sure they could learn a lot about the way we do ministry and the resources available.

One of the girls my age wanted to write me, so I gave her my address. I spent a lot of time talking with her, and we became pretty good friends. It's amazing how much you have in common with someone from another culture! I hope we can keep in touch.

I'm so glad for this opportunity to come here. I'll try to call you once I'm home and send you some of the photos which explain things better.

*Love,
John*

Much has been written about both the pros and cons on this explosion of North Americans into other places and cultures (Friesen 448-454). The purpose of this paper is to consider the potential value of short-term missions as preparation for longer-duration cross-cultural ministry/service, and specifically, as internship for academic programs in Intercultural Studies/Missions.

Agencies today are often reluctant to appoint a long-term applicant who has not had at least one short-term experience. Clearly it is assumed that these experiences in some way help prepare people for more effective long-term service. Following in this train, schools send students off on any number of short-term trips and grant internship credit for the experience. How do they know what is actually being modeled and learned through these experiences? One of my faculty colleagues in Christian Education constantly reminds students of Howard Hendricks' words, "Practice doesn't make perfect. Practice makes permanent."

It is not that all short-term experiences are bad. Indeed many have been used by God to motivate, raise awareness and even help train cross-cultural workers. The same is true for various study-abroad programs, many of which are also accepted by institutions of higher learning as internship for Intercultural Studies programs. Some of these programs are excellent, such as Houghton College's Semester in Tanzania (Arensen 14-19), and some share similar goals to internship programs, but most are not designed to develop skills in cross-cultural ministry. The question is "How can an educational institution ensure that internship goals are being met by the short-term programs their students utilize?" Internships are intended to allow students to apply classroom learning in real-life situations. Webster's Dictionary defines an intern as "An advanced student or graduate, usually in a professional field, gaining supervised practical experience" (598) Ideally, in addition to skill development, additional learning takes place, plus a growing comfort-level in carrying out expected tasks. In order to do so, the activities being practiced should reinforce the principles taught in the classroom.

THE CRITERIA FOR AN EXCELLENT INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

A very real limitation on internship learning in the academic context is time. Internships are rarely more than one semester, and often even shorter. Although it is recognized that the

cross-cultural worker continues to learn throughout her ministry (after 18 years in Kenya I was still learning new insights and skills), it is still desirable that internship opportunities be as effective as possible in preparing people to serve cross-culturally.

In order to do this well, Inter-Cultural Studies internships should:

1. Be preceded by extensive training appropriate to the trip.
2. Engage in real, legitimate cross-cultural ministry tasks.
3. Do so by coming alongside effective long-term ministries.
4. Deal with current trends and issues in mission, e.g. team dynamics.
5. Provide positive models (although it is recognized one can also learn from negative examples).
6. Provide relational mentoring.
7. Reinforce classroom learning.
8. Provide an accurate means of evaluation, both for practical learning and academic assessment.
9. Conclude with thorough debriefing and re-entry preparation.

The above would be challenging even if one had unlimited time and funds available. Since this is rarely, if ever, the case at Christian institutions of higher learning, compromises are required. However, even with these limitations, quality internships can be designed. While certainly not perfect, nor the only way to carry this out, Northwestern College's Intercultural Studies internship program will now be outlined as a case study for trying to effectively meet these criteria.

CASE STUDY OF INTERNSHIP AT NORTHWESTERN COLLEGE

JOHN: Thirty-three years ago when my wife and I were finishing our degrees in seminary, we applied to a mission agency only to be told to work in a church for a few years prior to going overseas. My wife had previously served for a summer in Africa as a short-term worker, but I didn't even own a passport. Two years later we completed the full application with the same mission and received an appointment to serve overseas and made it to France 18 months later for our first 4 ½ year term. Our first term was so different from those of new missionary recruits today for we had very little overseas exposure and had a true baptism in cultural immersion, compared to new missionary recruits today who often have extensive short-term mission experience from their youth.

During our second term we developed a Summer Seminarian Internship in partnership with Denver Seminary for academic credit where I served as Adjunct. Our participants came for three months of language study, working with missionaries, and a children's camping experience

in the Alps. Three couples who came over the first two summers came back for a long-term commitment to missions in France. In 1988, when God led my wife and me to Northwestern College, we hoped that we could be a part of the training of future generations of missionaries to the world.

The Cross-cultural Ministries major was started in the mid-1980s at Northwestern College. The program included an internship as a part of the major, but the actual internship for the major developed over a process of trial and error with early attempts including several two week summer trips to Haiti, Belize, Ireland, and Honduras and a three week trip to Ireland and the United Kingdom. These trips were planned and supervised by various faculty including Communications, Spanish, Cross-cultural Ministries and Christian Education. These short-term mission trips were labeled as an overseas internship, but the training and preparations were very limited and the debriefing was far too casual when it existed at all.

1996 brought the first attempt at a supervised internship integrated into the school year. This included nineteen students, a faculty member and a seventy-nine year-old retired missionary to India. After three packed weeks of course preparation with one professor teaching a Missions History class with an emphasis on William Carey's India, and a Social Stratification course again focused on American, English, and Indian class structures. Then after a two week break for the Christmas holidays, the team went out for seven weeks including a few days in England, five weeks across India, one day in Narita, Japan and a week in Hawaii for and R & R and a very short debriefing. Although the planning was not stellar, and the difficulties were endless, the participants survived with alumni of the internship graduating and going on to live and minister in England, Hungary, Germany, Uganda, Pakistan, India, China, and Japan.

On the first internship the school had invested a portion of the student's tuition to finance the trip. After denying future tuition subsidies, Northwestern College reluctantly sent out a second team of 20 students in January, 1998 to England, France, India, Thailand, Japan, and Hawaii with a great deal more preparation and the Intercultural Studies Internship was finally established. Over July and August that same year, sixteen students, a professor and college staff member led a trip to Israel and South Africa with equal success. By the fall of 1999, the Intercultural Internship became established in its present format.

GARRY: Today the NWC internship trip is an 8 semester hour, two-month overseas short term mission trip during the second half of the Fall semester that is integrated with 8 credits of preparation courses and team building during the first half of the semester. The team of 16-20 students is chosen by application in January, nine months prior to the trip. The team begins to meet weekly during the Spring semester prior to the trip for prayer, initial team-building and fund raising. The College currently provides approximately 25% of the funding needed. Although raising the remainder of the funding is challenging, it is an overall part of the internship experience, since many of the participants will be raising support for long-term ministry after graduation.

Preparation courses include general mission principles and practices; cultural sensitivity; trip-specific background on the cultures and countries to be visited; ministry skills such as testimonies, trans-cultural dramas, songs (often in the local languages) and extensive team-building.

The itinerary varies each year, but generally tries to involve students in three or four different cultures (usually, though not always, in different countries) along with different types

of ministries (ranging from teaching to evangelism to construction projects) and partnerships with different types of organizations (both U.S. and international mission agencies, national churches, etc.). While it is a tradeoff with greater depth in one location, it provides two advantages: 1) all students on the team have the opportunity to use their gifts, if not in every place, at least in one; and 2) students are able to compare different types of organizations and ministries and assess which they might best fit with on a long-term basis.

Since most sending agencies today are utilizing teams rather than sending out the traditional Lone Ranger missionary, this approach to internship stresses team dynamics and ministry, both in pre-trip preparation and during the internship. Students have to learn to live with others 24/7 for two months. They also have opportunities to develop leadership skills in small group settings throughout the trip.

A professor serves as one of the leaders for the team, along with a co-leader of the opposite gender. While granting teaching load to the professor is a sacrifice on the College's part, the advantage of having someone along who knows what has been covered in the curriculum and can reinforce key lessons as they unfold during the trip is invaluable to the learning experience. Involving the professor in the trip planning helps ensure that appropriate learning objectives are designed into the internship.

Finally, extensive debriefing and re-entry is carried out prior to the team's return home. Follow up activities keep the teams connected, and members of previous teams help in orienting new team members for future internship trips.

CONCLUSION

This approach to utilizing short-term mission for intercultural studies internship is labor-intensive, but Jesus' example of disciple-making goes far beyond classrooms or weekly Bible studies. By God's grace, the results have produced a number of graduates serving in many places around the world, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sudan and Indonesia, among others. Graduate studies, which often follow a mid-term experience of one or more years, have included law school (focusing on international justice), TESOL, community development, Biblical counseling and theology.

Short-term work, whether two weeks or two years, can indeed be effective and pleasing to God. Yes, it can cost a lot of money, disrupt nationals and missionaries, encourage short-term thinking, and inoculate some against career missions involvement. But done well, it can open participants' eyes to the sometimes gritty realities of the world, make them aware of their own ethno-centrism and the gifts and courage of non-Western believers, and spark a lifelong commitment to missions. In the best cases, some real kingdom work gets done, too (Stan Guthrie, quoted in Corwin, et al 191).

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**THE INTERCULTURAL STUDIES INTERNSHIP PROGRAM OF
NORTHWESTERN COLLEGE, 1996 TO PRESENT**

To date there have been about 220 students participate on 12 Intercultural Studies Internships from Northwestern College.

Year	Month	Weeks	Leader	Countries
1996	Jan–Feb	7	Easterling	England, India, Japan, Hawaii
1998	Jan–Feb	8	Easterling	England, India, Thailand, Japan, Hawaii
1998	July-Aug	7	Easterling	Israel, South Africa
1999	Oct-Dec	8	Easterling	England, France, India, Thailand, Malaysia, Hawaii
2000	July-Aug	7	Easterling	Israel, Amsterdam 2000
2000	Oct-Dec	8	Easterling	England, India, Thailand, Malaysia, China, Hawaii
2001 ¹	Oct-Dec	8	Morgan	Belgium, England, Canada, Hawaii
2002 ²	Oct-Dec	9	Easterling	Los Angeles., Japan, S. Korea, China, India, Thailand, Singapore, Hawaii
2003 ³	Oct-Dec	8	Easterling	France, Romania
			Morgan	South Africa Mozambique
2004 ⁴	Sept-Dec	15	Morgan	(and Mathiesen Teaching in Ecuador)
			Easterling	Ecuador, Brazil, Peru, Trinidad, Puerto Rico
2005	Oct-Dec	8	Morgan	England, Romania, South Africa, Mozambique
2006	Oct-Dec	9	Easterling	Japan, China, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Hawaii
2007	Oct-Dec	8	Morgan	Kenya, Tanzania, Romania, Amsterdam, England

¹ Following 9/11 the itinerary was greatly changed due to terrorist threats.

² There were three sponsors with 22 students.

³ This trip was co-led by Easterling in Europe and Morgan in Africa.

⁴ This was an entire semester with 4 weeks of academic work in Quito taught by two different faculty consecutively followed by 11 weeks of internship.

About the Authors

Garry R. Morgan and his wife Connie served for 18 years with WorldVenture in Kenya. He earned his Doctorate in Missiology from Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon and has taught at Northwestern College since 1999 where he is currently an Associate Professor of Intercultural Studies. He recently served as department chair of the Christian Ministries Department. Garry has a daughter, Kristina, who is a senior at Northwestern College and will be participating on the 2007 internship to Africa and Europe.

John F. Easterling and his wife Kathleen served for 11 years with WorldVenture in France. He earned his Doctorate in Ministry from Fuller Seminary and his Doctorate in Missiology from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He is a Professor of Intercultural Studies at Northwestern College since 1988. John has two daughters, Sarah and her son of Roseville, MN and Miriam of Kaohsiung, Taiwan.