Following is a collaborative report that students who went to Costa Rica in December 2018 wrote for a presentation to ASG:

A brief summary of the key takeaways from the experience:

While on this trip, we learned a lot about the differences of culture and lifestyle in Costa Rica. We grew in knowledge and strengthened our education in many different aspects.

Through Cross Cultural Solutions we were provided with multiple opportunities to immerse ourselves in the culture. These opportunities included food, dancing, parades, coffee, pottery, Spanish lessons, and many other activities which allowed us to interact with the people there. We participated in several cultural activities such as the Festival of Lights and the Elder Home Fundraiser.

At the daycare we were able to work with the children and provide a supportive and healthy environment for them. We did this by building a wash station and painting inspirational murals. The focus of one of our projects was to create a vibrant mural that would not only catch people’s eye, but also educate the students at the same time. We thought it would be more beneficial for the kids to allow them to receive further education in this creative way. Even though we went there to help the children at the daycare, they ended up helping us more than we helped them. We were not expecting this outcome, but it was really amazing to see how much the children impacted our stay there and played a key role in furthering our own education.

Being immersed in a country that speaks a completely different language can be quite challenging, but the children at the daycare were very helpful in teaching us their language. We also learned a lot at the home-base where we stayed because many of the staff could not speak English. By allowing ourselves to be completely immersed in this lifestyle we were able to gain much more knowledge than we would have otherwise.

Another key takeaway we had was realizing the differences of everyday lives. In Costa Rica we were limited on our water sources and we had to throw our toilet paper in the trash because otherwise it would plug the toilets. By experiencing this, we learned to be more mindful of our resources as well as thankful for what we do have. It is not common to have hot water in homes, so we had to take cold showers every day. This was really an eye opener to us about how lucky we are in the United States.

We also got to see a little bit about the health resources with a few visits to the hospital. The first hospital some of our members visited was very dirty and was in no way close to what we would expect for healthcare here in the United States. The next one they visited was a little better, but the structure was very different than what you would expect in the US.  One of our members waited in the hospital all day long and never had her issue resolved. This was probably one of the biggest culture shocks we faced throughout the trip.

Overall, we were able to take away a lot more knowledge of the Spanish language, the culture of Costa Rica, and even worldly knowledge. We found that the world is really much larger and diverse than our communities at home, yet people are still very much the same.  Most importantly, we stepped out of our own comfort zones and became more aware of ourselves along with everything else going on around us.

What had the biggest impact on you personally?  Why?

As a group, we experienced several different personal challenges*,* and were forced to grow both as individuals, and members of a team.  Being immersed in a different culture, and in situations we were unfamiliar with, we were taken out of our comfort zone, and compelled to view things from a different perspective.   Through daily journaling, we were able to continue to explore our thoughts and reflect on the events of the day.  The journals helped us develop insight into ourselves and helped us consider different aspects that we may not have thought about in the moment.  The benefits of this personal growth will stay with us as we are able to continue to apply what we learned about ourselves and others.

Throughout several situations that felt uncomfortable, we developed the ability to face the challenges, reflect, and create a plan to get through the problem we were confronted with.  This required creativity, communication, patience and persistence.  We utilized our ability to use both compassion and reason in the face of adversity.

Through the many activities and our volunteer-site participation, there were several opportunities where we were each able to individually step up, take the initiative to lead, and learn useful problem solving skills.  As our commitment was usually to the success of our team as a whole, we were each empowered to contribute our own unique talents, and able to value the unique talents of others.  We learned to rely on each other, supporting one another as both leaders and team members.

While on this trip, we were exposed to many different things, including different practices and beliefs, different systems, and new experiences.  This broadened our views, and because we were out of our familiar routines and circles of influence, we were able to develop new perspectives of others and of ourselves.  By taking the Intercultural Effectiveness Scale prior to the trip, and upon our return, administered by Yvonne Smith of CCC, we were able to measure our global and cultural competency.  Being evaluated in areas of continuous learning, interpersonal engagement and personal hardiness, we are able to see measurable growth in several areas. We identified areas that we can personally focus on, to strengthen our ability to interact better with the world we live in as a whole.

We developed a deep gratitude for what we have access to, and realize there is much to learn about environmental resources.  In preparing for the trip, we individually studied different aspects of Costa Rica and the culture, then created presentations of our topics and led discussions.  This gave us a starting point for our learning, but the real learning took place once we were out of the country.  More than facts in a presentation, we were exposed to real-life actions and new attitudes about both the environment and the culture.

This experience in service learning had such a profound effect on each of us, it is difficult to determine which part of it had the most impact.  While creating our e-profiles prior to the trip, we had no idea how we would be impacted.  We struggled to include meaningful information, because we didn’t know what to expect.  Upon our return, we completed the workbook “Marketing Your International Experience” presented by Ida Flippo of the Global Learning Committee.  Through this tool, we learned how to capture what we experienced and be able to put it into words.  What we discovered; is that you can learn several things from a book or a lecture, but lived experiences change who you are.  This has been an invaluable experience, and we are sure we will be contemplating how impactful this trip was for years to come.  **To sum it all up:  the biggest impact on each of us from this trip is that we left as students and returned as members of the world.**

What is your plan for bringing this information to the team?

We will be presenting the outcomes and learning experiences we received through this trip at the ASG Board meeting. Similarly, we will be presenting to the Board of Education and Global Learning Committee to share the impact this study abroad experience had on all of us. We will also be displaying this information through the Clackamas Print Edition featuring photos by Jonathan Villagomez.