



IUPUI

Why the Hell are We Going? Ethical Concerns during Orientation

An Ethics in Action Case Example

The Scenario:

You are asked to provide a pre-departure orientation on ethical cross-cultural engagement to a student-led service-learning group a few weeks prior to their traveling to Central America. They are traveling under the auspices of an international travel entity of which you know very little. As you present the ethical considerations in cross-cultural engagement, you notice that some of the students, including the student leaders, are becoming uncomfortable. From the questions they ask, you realize that their partner organization is likely violating some of the ethical standards you have just presented.

Your concerns include:

- What are the dynamics at your university that have allowed this disconnect?
- What, if anything, can you do in response to this disconnect?
- How do you handle the student's present discomfort and misgivings?

Finally, one of the students asks, "If what you are saying about the ethics of cross-cultural engagement are true, why the hell are we going on this trip?"

How do you respond to the student?

Questions to consider:

- What does this experience suggest to you about your university's present screening, preparation and global education process?
- How do you help students that are already committed to a questionable trip navigate and learn from the potential ethical conflicts in that experience?
- What resources might you draw upon in our response?
- How might you use the **core principles** in responding to this scenario?

Some Tension Points:

- Power – student autonomy vs. institutional priorities
- Campus policies – determining the location of appropriate monitoring and regulation
- Educator's role – providing ethical guidelines vs. setting ethical boundaries
- Actual Resolution

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One Resolution:

The orientation facilitator replied, “I can’t answer that question for you. My task is to encourage you to examine your motives and determine where they may be ethically questionable. In so doing, I hope to mitigate the harm that might come from unexamined motives in international engagement.” The student seemed to understand and appreciate this reply. The facilitator went on to encourage the group to examine their motives and behavior before, during and after their international experience.

- In retrospect, the facilitator realized the student’s question was the appropriate response to any ethically responsible and comprehensive orientation to international engagement, especially one where there is volunteerism or service learning involved. If an orientation doesn’t provoke this kind of second thought, is the orientation being honest and transparent? Is it frankly addressing the potential for abuse in interactions where the power differentials are significant?

This case example was adapted from: Price, M.F., Leslie, S., Brann, M., Mulholland, J., Christy, L., Custer, J., Brann, M., & Besing, K.L. (2018). Supporting university-wide institutional change in global health volunteerism: A case in progress. Global Service-Learning Summit 5, Notre Dame, April 16th, 2018