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Addressing and Reducing Students' Cultural Biases in Domestic and International Service-Learning

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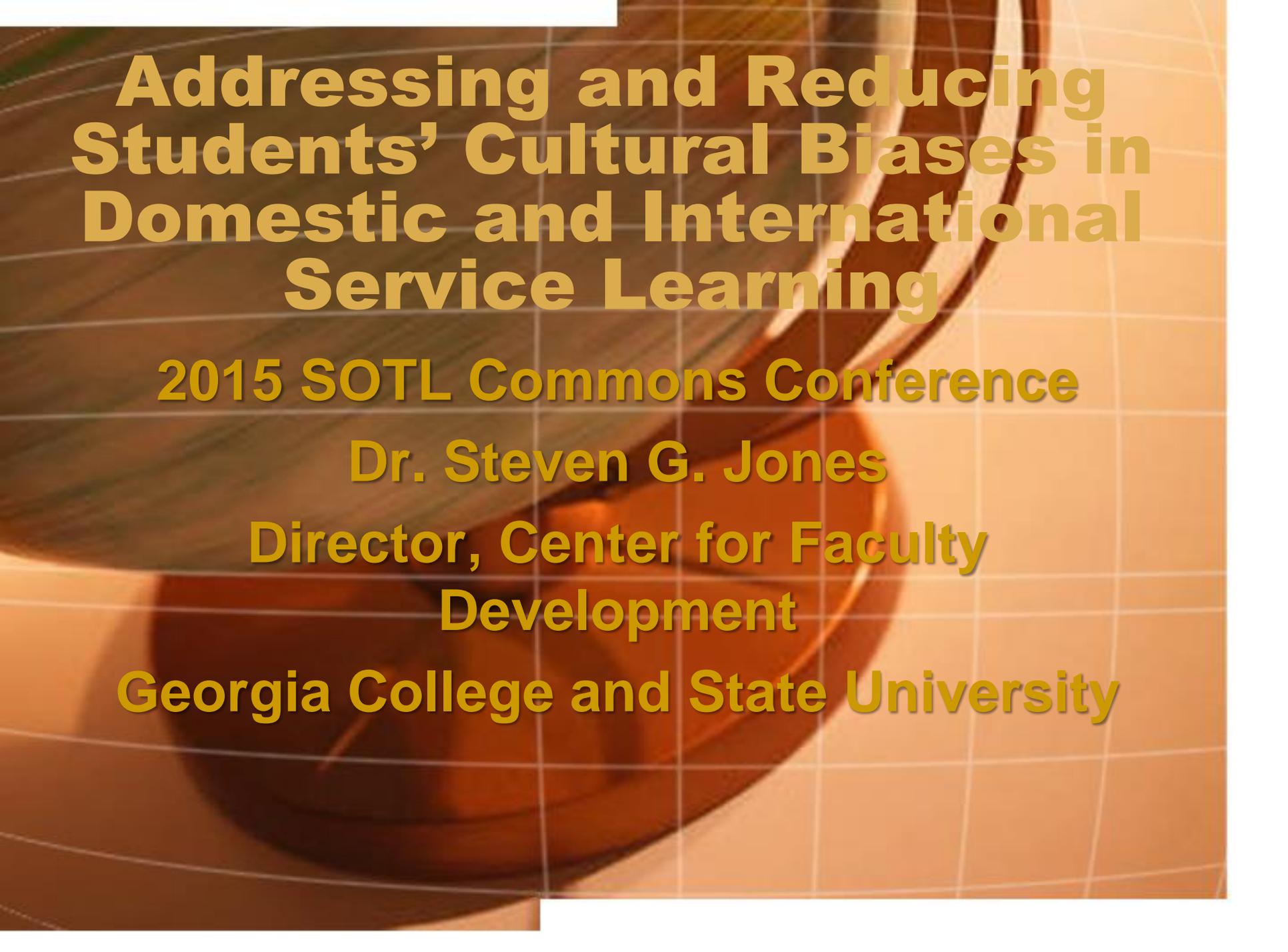
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Addressing and Reducing Students' Cultural Biases in Domestic and International Service Learning

2015 SOTL Commons Conference

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Service-Learning

Service learning is a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students

- a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs, and
- b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility.

(Bringle & Hatcher, 1995)

International Service Learning Defined

A *structured academic experience in another country* in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that addresses identified community needs; (b) learn from *direct interaction and cross-cultural dialogue* with others; and (c) reflect on the experience in such a way as to gain a deeper understanding of *global and intercultural* issues, a broader appreciation of the *host country* and the discipline, and an enhanced sense of their own responsibilities as citizens, locally and *globally*.

The problem with “service” begins with the concept itself, or at least what it’s become. The word is rooted in the Bible. Serve God . . . not the Pharaoh. Serve God . . . not Caesar. . . . It’s about humility, not condescension. But now we understand the concept in a different way. “Giving back,” “giving to others”: this is the language of charity, enforcing ideas of debtorship, disempowerment, hierarchy, and social relations as economic exchange. . . . It isn’t even noblesse oblige, because there’s no “oblige,” no sense of obligation of social duty. “Service” is a flock of middle-class messiahs, descending in all their virtue, with a great deal of satisfaction, every once in a while, when they remember to think about it, upon the miserable and the helpless. . . . So what is the alternative? Not charity, but justice. Deresiewicz, 2014.

Potential Pitfalls of Domestic and International Service Learning

Elitism

- Focus is on benefits to learners, not community
- Community voice/participation is minimized or ignored
- “the neglect of the inherent power differential between the participants runs the risk of demeaning the host communities, imposing a dominant ideology on disadvantaged individuals and perpetuating oppressive systems” (McBride et al., 2006, p. 310).
- Failure to build relationships built on trust and reciprocity → Failure to build sustainable community partnerships

Potential Pitfalls of International Service Learning, Continued

Imperialism

- “Current international and transnational service programs continue to run the risk of perpetuating the cultural, political, and economic hegemony of ‘First World’ over ‘Third World’ countries, spreading notions of development and underdevelopment.” McBride, et al.
- ISL program/project models American practices and ignores/neglects local expertise

Activity

- Think, Pair, Square Share
 - What specific challenges have you had in addressing your own students' biases in service-learning experiences?
 - Share with a partner, then share with a group, then select one example from the small group to share with the entire group.

Ideational Limitations of ISL- HEADS UP

H=Hegemony

E=Ethnocentrism

A=Ahistoricism

D=Depoliticization

S=Salvationism

U=Uncomplicated solutions

P=Paternalism

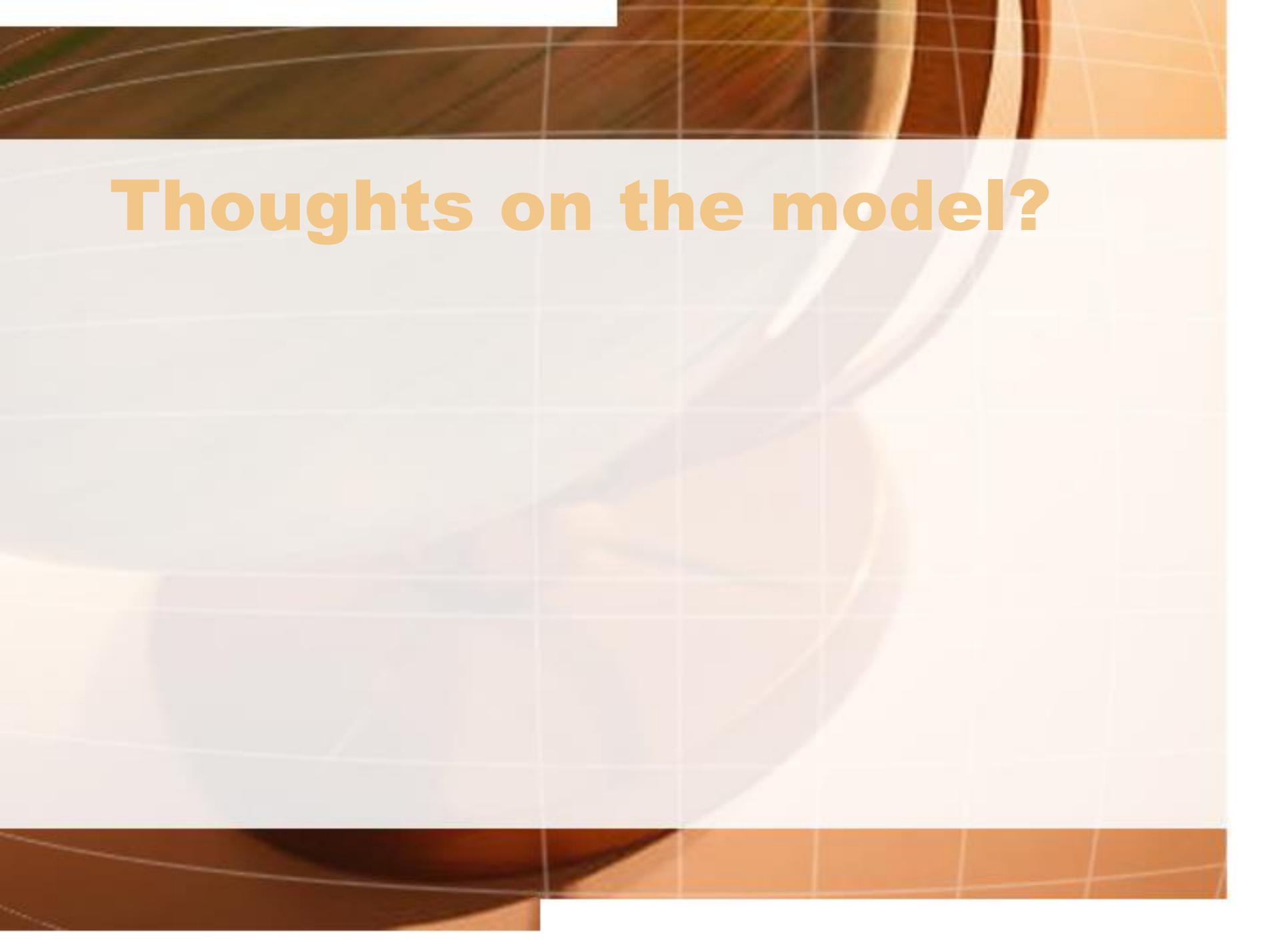
Source: Andreotti, 2012

Activity

- In your group, identify at least three examples of your assigned components of the model and be prepared to share with the larger group.

Activity Results

- H
- E
- A
- D
- S
- U
- P



Thoughts on the model?

Structural Limitations of ISL

- Lack of adequate pre-post departure orientation and reflection
- Inconsistency among ISL programs and 3rd party partners
- Lack of attention to developing partnerships
- Lack of attention to community voice and community impact

Recommendations

1. Develop long-term partnerships
2. Sustain projects beyond a single course
3. Pre-service orientation focusing on helping students recognize their own biases:
<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>
4. Reflection, reflection, reflection
5. Engagement with people outside of the service project
6. Close, frequent communication with community partners
7. Post-service orientation and reflection

References

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- McBride, A.M. with J. Brav, N. Menon, and M. Sherraden. 2006. Limitations of Civic Service: Critical Perspectives. *Community Development Journal*. 41(3), 307-320.