



EVALUATION OF THE YOUTH EXCHANGE & STUDY PROGRAM

FINAL REPORT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	1
Program Description.....	1
Study Description	2
<i>Figure 1: Data Collection Timeline for Each Annual Cohort of YES Students (2003-8)</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Table 1: Response Rates for the Three Surveys among YES Cohorts 1-4.....</i>	<i>3</i>
Conclusion.....	7
I. Study Description	9
<i>Figure 1: Data Collection Timeline for Each Annual Cohort of YES Students (2003-8)</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Table 1: Response Rates for the Three Surveys among YES Cohorts 1-4.....</i>	<i>10</i>
II. Learning and Understanding	12
Views on the U.S. Government, Democratic System and Economy.....	12
<i>Table 2: Increased Understanding of the Politics and Government of the U.S. by Cohort</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Table 3: Increased Understanding of the Economy of the U.S. by Cohort</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Table 4: More Favorable Views of U.S. Politics, Government and Economy by Cohort</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Figure 2: Views on the U.S. Democratic System and Economy over Time.....</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Figure 3: Views on Whether “most Americans are wealthy” by Cohort over Time</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Figure 4: Views on Whether “the U.S. is a democracy that works well” by Cohort over Time</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Figure 5: Views on Whether “the U.S. provides equal opportunity for all” by Cohort over Time.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Figure 6: Views on Whether “the U.S. has laws/regulations that protect the individual” by Cohort over Time</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Figure 7: Views on Whether “Americans enjoy freedom of the press” by Cohort over Time</i>	<i>17</i>
Views on Individual Rights and Equal Opportunity.....	19
<i>Figure 8: Views on Individual Rights in Society by Cohort over Time.....</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Figure 9: Belief in Importance of Individual Rights over Time</i>	<i>22</i>
Views on Americans.....	24
<i>Table 6: Increased Understanding of the Culture of the U.S. by Cohort</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Table 7: Increased Understanding of the People of the U.S. by Cohort</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Table 8: Views of the American People by Cohort</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Table 9: First Thing that Comes to Mind when Thinking of the U.S.</i>	<i>26</i>
Views on Their Own Countries	30
<i>Table 11: First Thing that Comes to Mind when Thinking of One’s Home Country</i>	<i>32</i>
III. Personal Growth and Development of Leadership Skills	33
<i>Table 12: Participants’ Assessment of Improvement in Leadership Skills.....</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>Table 13: One Most Important or Useful Skill/Knowledge Acquired from the Exchange Experience</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>Table 14: Things liked best about the exchange experience</i>	<i>35</i>
Usefulness of YES Program for Acquiring Skills	36
<i>Table 15: Gains in Skills by Cohort</i>	<i>36</i>
Sense of Confidence and Empowerment.....	37
<i>Table 16: Increased Sense of Empowerment Over Time.....</i>	<i>38</i>

Table 17: Increased Sense of Empowerment by Cohort Over Time.....	39
Table 18: Increased Sense of Empowerment Over Time among Males and Females.....	39
IV. Changes in Behavior.....	41
Figure 10: Participation in Organized Clubs/Activities by Cohort over Time	41
Figure 11: Participation in Activities/Clubs over Time	42
Table 19: Participant Involvement in Clubs/Activities by Cohort	43
Figure 12: Cohort 4 Roles Played in Clubs/Activities	44
Table 20: Comparison of Participant Roles Played in Activities by Cohort.....	44
Community Service Involvement.....	45
Table 21: Community Service Involvement by Cohort.....	45
Communicating New Understanding of the United States.....	48
Table 22: Sharing Information about U.S. by Cohort.....	49
Table 23: Positive Impact of Sharing Information by Cohort	49
Maintaining Contacts through Involvement in Alumni Activities	50
Table 24: Participation in YES Activities by Cohort.....	50
Figure 13: Cohort 4 Participation in YES Alumni Activities	51
Table 25: Frequent Participation in YES Alumni Activities by Cohort	51
Teaching Americans about their Culture and Societies.....	52
V. Links	53
Table 26: Weekly Contact with People Met on the YES Program by Cohort	53
VI. Levels of Satisfaction with Exchange Experience.....	54
Table 27: Levels of Satisfaction with Exchange Experience	54
VII. Challenges Returning Home.....	56
Table 28: Difficulty of Returning Home by Cohort.....	56
VIII. Conclusion.....	60
IX. Demographic Information	61
Table 29: Cohorts 1, 2, 3 and 4 Participant Demographics	61
Table 30: Cohorts 1, 2, 3 and 4 Media Ownership/Access	62
Table 31: Cohorts 1, 2, 3 and 4, Survey 1 – Percentage of Fathers with Secondary Education or Higher.....	62
Table 32: Cohorts 1, 2, 3 and 4, Survey 1 – Percentage of Mothers with Secondary Education or Higher.....	62
Appendix I –YES Participants by Country, Cohort and Exchange Organization	63
Appendix II - Exchange Organizations.....	64

Executive Summary

Introduction

In June 2003, the Evaluation Division of the Office of Policy and Evaluation in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) in the U.S. Department of State engaged InterMedia Survey Institute to conduct an evaluation of the **Youth Exchange and Study Program. YES**, as the program is known, is an innovative, year-long high school student exchange program established in the aftermath of September 11, and sponsored by ECA. The evaluation, commissioned by the Evaluation Division, assessed the impact of the exchange experience on the YES students' attitudes and behavior over time. Its implementation also involved a unique collaboration between the Evaluation Division, InterMedia and the grantee exchange organizations. The final evaluation report documents the effectiveness of this ECA initiative in achieving its goal of building bridges of mutual understanding between Americans and people in countries with significant Muslim populations.

Program Description

The Youth Exchange and Study Program is an educational exchange program established in October 2002 by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. The YES program provides scholarships for secondary school students (15-17) from countries with significant Muslim populations to spend up to one academic year in towns and cities throughout the United States. Students stay with American host families, attend high school, engage in activities to learn about American society and values, acquire leadership skills, and help educate Americans about their countries, cultures and customs. Since 2003, more than 3,480 students from more than two dozen countries have participated in the YES program.

The YES program aims to promote mutual understanding and respect between the people of the United States and the participating partner countries, with the following specific goals:

- *To provide the opportunity for young people in selected countries to learn more about American society, people, institutions, values and culture;*
- *To enhance American understanding of foreign students' countries and cultures;*
- *To provide the opportunity for young people in selected countries to learn more about civic rights and values and to view their own countries from a distance;*
- *To develop leadership skills while in the United States they can use when they return home;*
- *To support program participants in putting the knowledge and skills acquired during the exchange program to good use in their home countries; and*
- *To foster personal ties and institutional links.*

Study Description

InterMedia Survey Institute, a Washington D.C.-based research and evaluation organization, conducted a longitudinal evaluation study of YES participants from June 2003 through August 2009. The evaluation aimed to measure the program’s stated goals in terms of the following four outcomes:

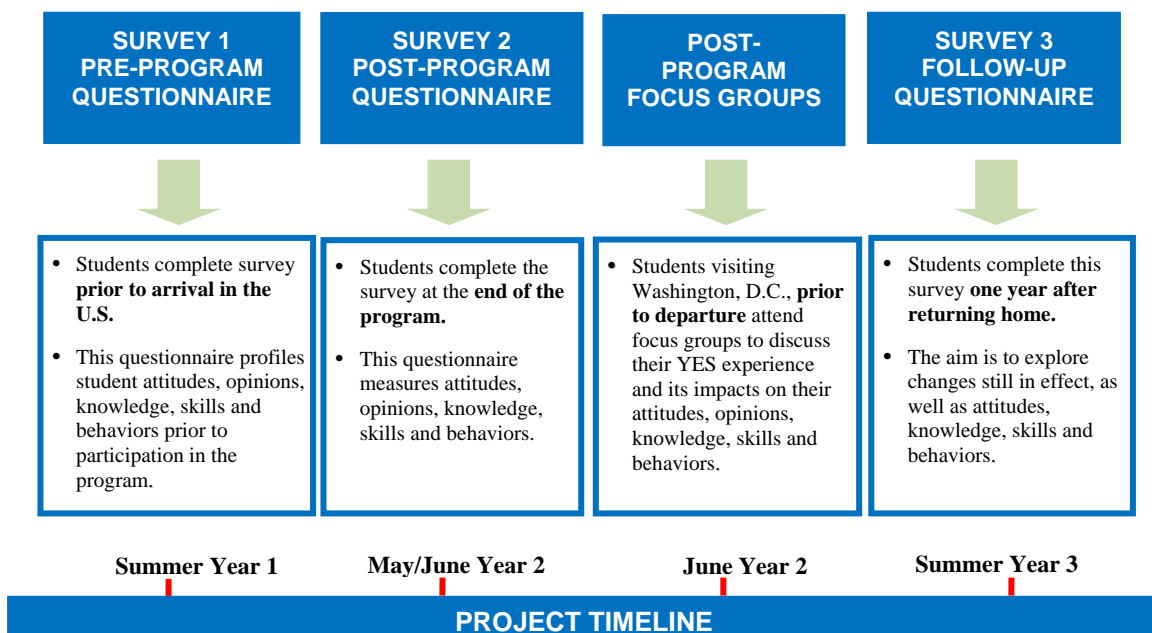
- *satisfaction with the exchange program*
- *learning and understanding*
- *behavioral changes*
- *personal linkages*

The evaluation used both qualitative and quantitative methods to explore how the YES students perceived themselves, their outlook and opinions, their attitude towards Americans and the United States, and the rights and responsibilities of individuals in society. For each annual cohort of students, data was collected at three different stages over an approximate two-year period:

- *At the beginning of the program and prior to arriving in the United States (Survey 1, using hard copy questionnaires)*
- *At the end of their one year of study in the United States, but before returning home (Survey 2, using an online questionnaire and several focus groups)*
- *One year after returning home (Survey 3, using hard copy and online questionnaires)*

The data collection timeline for each YES annual cohort was as follows:

Figure 1: Data Collection Timeline for Each Annual Cohort of YES Students (2003-8)



The response rates to each of the three surveys among the four YES student cohorts were as follows:

Table 1: Response Rates for the Three Surveys among YES Cohorts 1-4¹

Cohort #/years	Total # of Students at Start of Program	Respondents to Survey 1	Respondents to Survey 2	Respondents to Survey 3 ²
4 (2006-8)	642	642 (100%)	359 (56%)	316 (49%)
3 (2005-7)	619	592 (96%)	411 (66%)	344 (56%)
2 (2004-6)	434	360 (83%)	308 (71%)	192 (44%)
1 (2003-5)	161	161 (100%)	126 (78%)	118 (73%)
Total	1856	1755 (95%)	1205 (65%)	970 (52%)

The exchange organizations implementing the YES program were responsible for administering the hard-copy questionnaires for Survey 1 and contacting the students to complete the questionnaires for Surveys 2 and 3. The exchange organizations were grouped into three consortia headed by AFS-USA, American Councils and AYUSA International, along with IRIS and Nacel Open Door. (See Appendix II for a detailed list of the implementing exchange organizations.)

All data collection was done in English because participating students were proficient in English. Nevertheless, the language was reviewed for simplicity and lack of jargon to ensure high understanding.

The YES students came from more than 26 countries spanning South Asia, Southeast Asia, Africa and the Middle East. (See Appendix I for a breakdown of YES participants by country.) The YES students in Cohorts 1 to 4 were relatively evenly split between young men and young women; the majority were Muslims, from capital or large cities and from well-educated and well-to-do families. (See Section IX, Demographic Information, for a detailed profile of the YES students.)

This report presents the final findings for the evaluation of the first four cohorts of YES Program covering the period 2003 through 2009. The report aims to compare and contrast the results across the four cohorts, as well as to provide overall insights into the effectiveness of the program against its goals of increasing knowledge and understanding, developing leadership skills and fostering linkages as well as satisfaction with the program.³ It examines how participants' thinking has evolved over time, and how they have made use of the skills and knowledge they acquired while in the United States.

¹ Response rates differ because the exchange organizations had various levels of success in collecting the data from the participating students, the number of students and the start and end of the programs fluctuated somewhat, and because of the challenges of collecting data among young people who resumed their busy lives and/or relocated after the program. Numerous efforts were made to increase response rates (e.g., incentives, prolonged online survey period, repeated reminders, etc.).

³ The wording of questions in the pre-program survey (Survey 1) given to the first cohort was slightly different than that in subsequent surveys, due to a revision of the survey. In most cases, the wording was similar enough to allow for comparison across surveys and among cohorts. However, in a few cases, a question was changed so that the data were not directly comparable with the results of subsequent surveys. These differences are explained in footnotes throughout this report.

Overall Evaluation Findings: Achievement of Program Goals:

The evaluation of the impact of the Youth Exchange and Study (YES) program on the first four cohorts of students indicates the success of the YES program in achieving its six main objectives. Overall, the program was an exceptionally positive experience for the vast majority of participants and the benefits of the experience remained in effect one year after the participants returned home. This factor alone highlights the overwhelming success of the YES program in achieving its objectives.

The findings highlight that the YES participants from all four cohorts and from 25 countries emerged from the program with:

- A deepened and more nuanced understanding of the United States, their own countries, as well as the roles and rights of individuals in society;
- Greater tolerance for other peoples and cultures;
- Much improved leadership and communication skills, and
- A sense of empowerment that they can affect change in their communities and beyond.

The potential longer-lasting impact of the YES program is illustrated by the finding that one year after their programs ended, the YES participants from cohorts one through four remain committed to becoming more involved in and working for change in their home communities, to influencing the views of those around them about American society, and to remaining in touch with their host families and friends.

For each annual cohort of students, data were collected at three different stages over an approximate two-year period:

- At the beginning of the program and prior to arriving in the United States (Survey 1)
- At the end of their one-year of study in the United States, but before returning home (Survey 2)
- One year after returning home (Survey 3)

Objective 1: To provide the opportunity for young people in selected countries to learn more about American society, people, values, culture and institutions.

- Nearly all of the YES students reported that their stay in the United States increased their understanding of U.S. politics, government and economy. Many were impressed with the functioning of democracy and the level of freedom and equality in the United States. At the same time, they gained an appreciation of the difficulties the country faces, yet admired the U.S. society's ability to discuss and work toward solutions of their problems.

- Upon completing the program and a year after returning home, a large majority of participants had a “more favorable” view of Americans as a result of their YES experience. The most important thing they felt they learned about Americans is that they are friendly, kind, helpful, open-minded and tolerant. Many commented on how friendly and welcoming Americans are to foreigners, such as YES students.
- Living in the United States dispelled many of the negative stereotypes of Americans and U.S. society that participants had before their exchange experience. For example, many participants were surprised by the diversity of the American people, were impressed by how hard Americans work, and were taken aback by Americans’ limited knowledge of the world. In addition, the percentage of survey respondents believing that “most Americans are wealthy”—a preconceived notion often developed from watching television and movies—dropped substantially from the first survey to the third.

Objective 2: To enhance Americans’ understanding of foreign students’ countries and cultures.

- Although the evaluation did not involve data collection among Americans in the YES students’ host communities, it is evident from participants’ responses that their frequent interactions, discussions and other modes of sharing information about their home countries and cultures left a lasting impact on their American counterparts. In addition, the frequent continued contact participants had with their host family and friends served to only continue to deepen Americans’ understanding of their exchange students’ societies.

Objective 3: To provide the opportunity for young people in selected countries to learn more about civic rights and values and to look at their own countries objectively.

- Large majorities of the four YES cohorts entered the YES program with a strong belief in the rights of the individual in society, and their time in the United States only strengthened these beliefs. In particular, the percentage of survey respondents who considered the rights to adequate housing, to practice any religion, to travel freely and to access information “very important” increased substantially from Survey 1 to Survey 2, then increased even further in Survey 3.
- Similarly, although most Survey 1 respondents in all cohorts believed in equal opportunity for all prior to participating in the YES program, many were more inspired after witnessing how American society puts these beliefs into practice. In particular, the percentage of respondents who “strongly” believed that religious and ethnic minorities and people with disabilities should have equal opportunities increased substantially from the first survey to the third.
- Spending a year abroad caused the YES students to reflect on their own societies. YES participants emerged with a clearer vision of—and stronger views on—the positive and negative aspects of their own societies. The consistently reported having a greater sense of

pride in their countries and cultures, but also a greater awareness of their societies' shortcomings—such as underdevelopment and lack of community service—as well as a determination to change them for the better.

Objective 4: To develop leadership skills while in the United States they can use when they return home.

- Throughout their year in the United States, YES participants acquired new skills and knowledge that they have been able to apply in their home countries. Given that nearly all of the YES students arrived with relatively high levels of skills and knowledge for their age, these gains were all the more impressive. In particular, participants cited their communication and leadership skills among the most important of those they acquired during the YES program.
 - YES participants across all cohorts reported increased self-confidence and a sense of empowerment. In fact, nearly all survey respondents in every cohort reported an increase in their self-confidence during their year in the United States (in Survey 2) and further increases in self-confidence in their first year back home (Survey 3). Once back home, the majority of participants in Survey 3 strongly believed they can influence others and affect change in their communities, even more than in Survey 2.
-

Objective 5: To support program participants in putting the knowledge and skills acquired during the exchange program to good use in their home countries.

- YES participants in all cohorts returned home eager to put their skills to good use by improving their communities and societies, and a large majority (approximately 80 percent) followed through by performing community service in their home countries. For example, many participants turned their strengthened belief in the rights of people with disabilities into action by volunteering with disabled people in their home communities. Others have used their new leadership and money management skills to help organize events and raise funds for good causes.
- Although many of the students reported playing leadership roles in organized clubs or activities before entering the YES program, they said they were even more likely to help plan activities, lead events or train others after completing the program. As an example, a full third of Cohort 4 participants doing volunteer work at home have taken the initiative to “create a community service event” in the past year, even more than did so in previous cohorts.
- In addition, participants have used their improved communication skills to inform friends, family and community members about the United States and its people in an effort to break down negative stereotypes. The great majority of Survey 3 respondents believed these efforts have been successful, in that the people around them now have more positive and nuanced views of the United States and of Americans.

Objective 6: To foster personal ties and institutional links.

- Most of Survey 3 respondents reported participating in organized YES alumni activities as a way of maintaining contacts and links with fellow participants and working together to act upon common values they developed during the program. Not only did they enjoy attending social gatherings, workshops and lectures, but many participants also have collaborated on community service projects and have participated in recruiting future YES participants.
- A majority of Survey 3 respondents stayed in touch with their host families and American friends in the year after their exchange experience, as well as kept up with their teachers, fellow YES students and other foreign students they met in the United States. Furthermore, approximately one-third of respondents have had someone from their YES experience—host families, American friends, YES participants or other people they met—visit them since the end of the program.

Conclusion

The evaluation of the first four cohorts of the YES program clearly demonstrates the success of the program in meeting its objectives in terms of 1) increasing learning and understanding about the United States; 2) strengthening leadership skills; 3) promoting greater involvement in community and organizational activities, and 4) fostering long-lasting memories and ties between the students and those they met during their exchange experience. The longitudinal nature of the study allowed us to witness and record how YES participants have developed and grown as individuals, as well as how their views on and understanding of the United States have evolved.

The findings highlight that the YES participants emerged from the program with an improved and more nuanced understanding of American society and culture, with greater tolerance for other peoples and cultures, with much improved leadership and communication skills, and with a sense of empowerment that they can affect change in their communities and beyond. The potential longer-lasting impact of the YES program is illustrated by the finding that one year after their programs ended, YES participants from Cohorts 1 through 4 remain committed to becoming more involved in and working for change in their home communities, to changing the views of those around them about the United States, and to remaining in touch with their host families and friends.

In sum, the evaluation showed that from their pre-program orientation through their exchange year in the United States through their engagement in alumni activities, the YES students exhibited considerable and lasting changes in their understanding, attitudes and behaviors with regard to the United States and their own roles in their home communities. The impact of the program is best illustrated by the words of the participants themselves:

I started to reflect on something about all the different YES students I met. What I reflected on gave me back some hope and joy and a sense of togetherness. The YES program unites us all under one umbrella. It defines a common goal for us. I realized that under the YES program, we all have the same aim and objective to work on, and that is “promoting peace.” Although we are people of different colors, we are one and share the same goal! Indeed, different colors, one people!

I. Study Description

The Youth Exchange and Study Program (YES) is an educational exchange program established in 2003 by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. The YES program provides scholarships for secondary school students (15-17) from countries with significant Muslim populations to spend up to one academic year in towns and cities throughout the United States. Students stay with American host families, attend high school, engage in activities to learn about American society and values, acquire leadership skills, and help educate Americans about their countries, cultures and customs.

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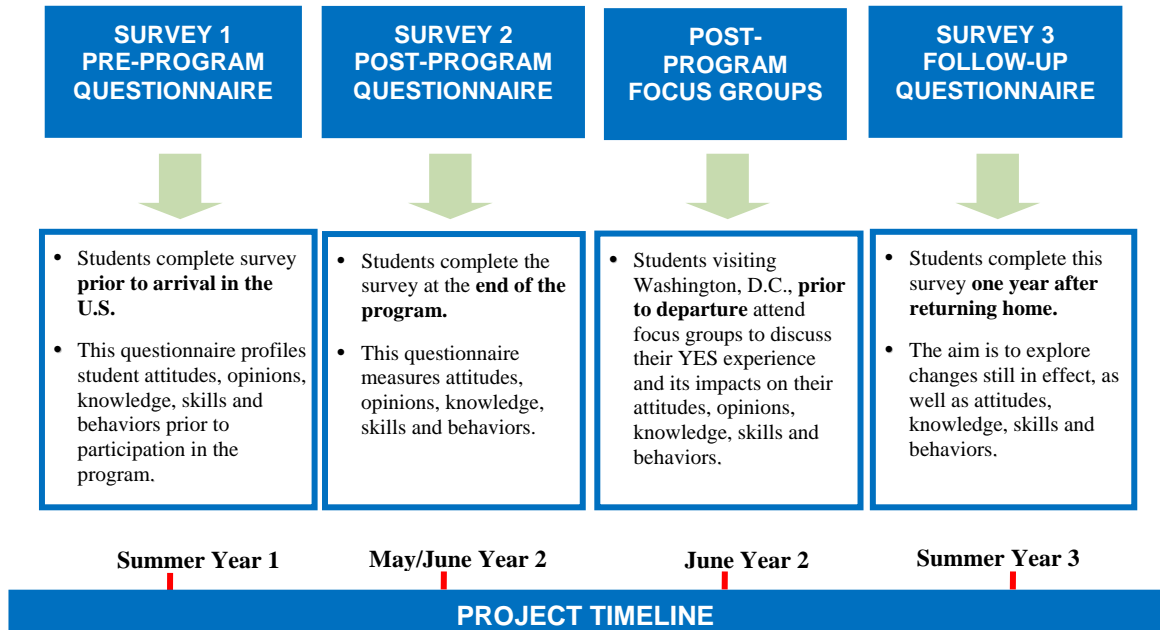
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⁴ Response rates differ because the exchange organizations had various levels of success in collecting the data from the participating students, the numbers of students and the start and end of the programs fluctuated somewhat, and because of the challenges of collecting data among young people who resumed their busy lives and/or relocated after the program. Numerous efforts were made to increase response rates (e.g., incentives, prolonged online survey period, repeated reminders, etc.).

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This report presents the final findings for the evaluation of the first four cohorts of YES Program covering the period 2003 through 2009. The report aims to compare and contrast the results across the four cohorts, as well as to provide overall insights into the effectiveness of the program against its goals of increasing knowledge and understanding, developing leadership skills and fostering linkages as well as satisfaction with the program.⁶ It will examine how participants' thinking has evolved over time, and how they have made use of the skills and knowledge they acquired while in the United States.

⁶ The wording of questions in the pre-program survey (Survey 1) given to the first cohort was slightly different than that in subsequent surveys, due to a revision of the survey. In most cases, the wording was similar enough to allow for comparison across surveys and among cohorts. However, in a few cases, a question was changed so that the data were not directly comparable with the results of subsequent surveys. These differences are explained in footnotes throughout this report.

II. Learning and Understanding

Among the most important successes of the YES program were participants' increased understanding of the U.S. political and economic system; their deepened insights into American society, people, culture and values; and their strengthened beliefs in the rights of an individual in society. The extent of their learning was all the more impressive given that most of the students came to the United States with a relatively good understanding of American society and relatively strong beliefs in individual rights. Over the course of the YES program, the students were able to dispel many of the stereotypes they had about the U.S., and better distinguish between the myths and realities of American culture. They developed a much more mature and nuanced understanding of a country quite different from their own, appreciating and admiring the strengths of the system, while also accepting the inevitable problems and shortcomings. As a result of their YES experience, they felt closer to U.S. people and society and were able to reflect on the similarities and differences between the United States and their home countries.

Views on the U.S. Government, Democratic System and Economy



After their year in the U.S., a large majority of YES student participants across all cohorts reported having an increased understanding of politics, government and economics in the United States. As shown in Tables 2 and 3, more than 90 percent of respondents from all four cohorts reported having “a lot” or “a little” better understanding of the U.S. government, democratic system and economy. This increased understanding remained consistent between responses to survey 2 and a year later to survey 3.

Table 2: Increased Understanding of the Politics and Government of the U.S. by Cohort
Percentage of Survey 2 and Survey 3 respondents with “a lot” and “a little better” understanding

	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	Average
Survey 2	92%	96%	95%	95%	95%
Survey 3	92%	96%	98%	95%	95%

Table 3: Increased Understanding of the Economy of the U.S. by Cohort
Percentage of Survey 2 and Survey 3 respondents with
“a lot” and “a little better” understanding

	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	Average
Survey 2	92%	97%	95%	95%	95%
Survey 3	90%	98%	96%	96%	95%

As a result of their increased understanding and their exchange experiences generally, the majority of participants responding to Survey 3 reported having a more favorable view of U.S. politics and government and of the U.S. economy than before coming to the United States. As illustrated in Table 4, an average of six to seven out of 10 respondents from all cohorts improved their views of the U.S. politics, government and economy after their exchange experience.

Table 4: More Favorable Views of U.S. Politics, Government and Economy by Cohort
Percentage of Survey 3 respondents with “more” and “much more favorable” views

	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	Average
U.S. politics and government	61%	55%	65%	68%	62%
U.S. economy	59%	68%	73%	72%	68%

On the whole, there were only subtle changes in the respondents’ views on specific aspects of the U.S. democratic system and economy. Taking Cohort 4 as an example (see Figure 2), there was consistency across the three surveys among those agreeing (“strongly” and “somewhat”) with the following statements:

- The U.S. economy provides a good living for its citizens
- Americans enjoy freedom of the press
- The U.S. has laws/regulations that protect the individual
- The U.S. provides equal opportunities for all
- The U.S. is a democracy that works well

The largest change was in those agreeing that the United States has “an economy that provides for its citizens.” This was likely because Cohort 4 participants were responding to Survey 3 during the economic downturn in the summer and fall of 2008.

However, although the impression of the U.S. economy and the general economic well-being of American citizens changed most sharply among Cohort 4 participants, the responses of the other cohorts illustrate this is an area in which many of the YES students arrived with a stereotypical view of American wealth. Figures 2 and 3, below, show almost all of the YES participants learned that the United States is an economically diverse society with its share of economic difficulties.

Figure 2: Views on the U.S. Democratic System and Economy over Time: Percentage of Cohort 4 respondents who “strongly” and “somewhat agree”

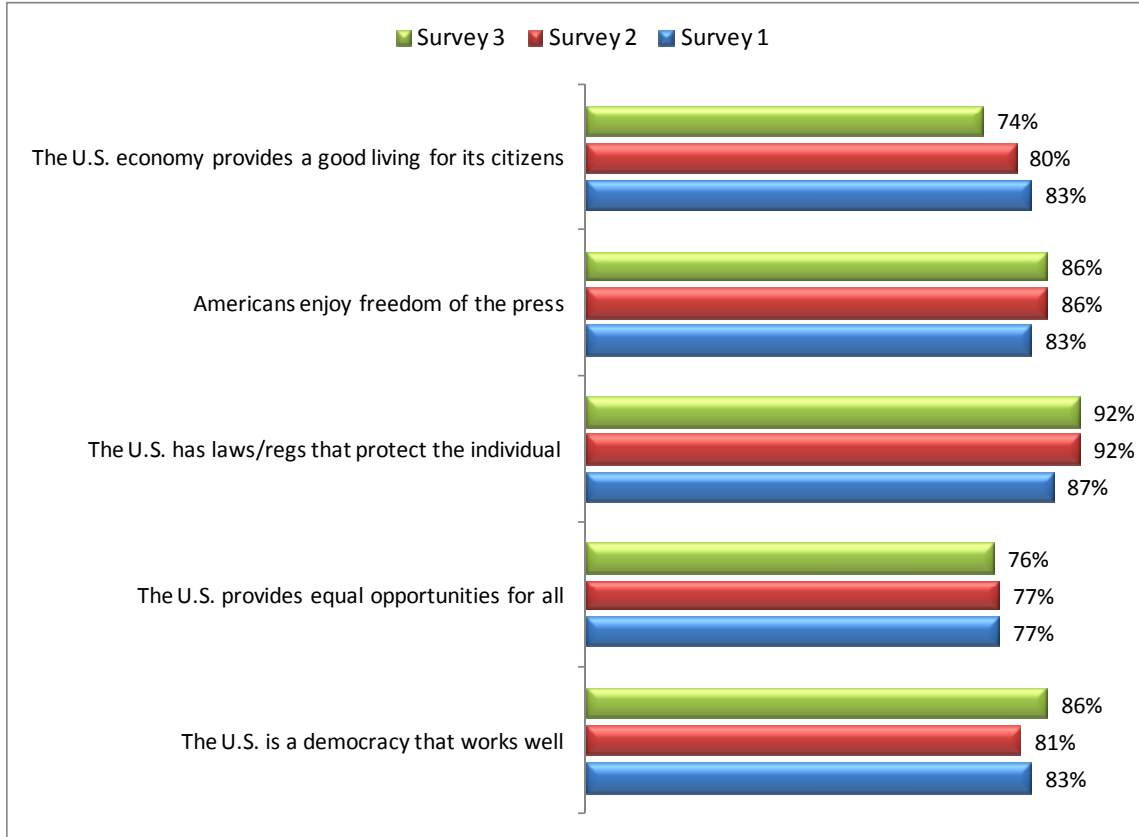
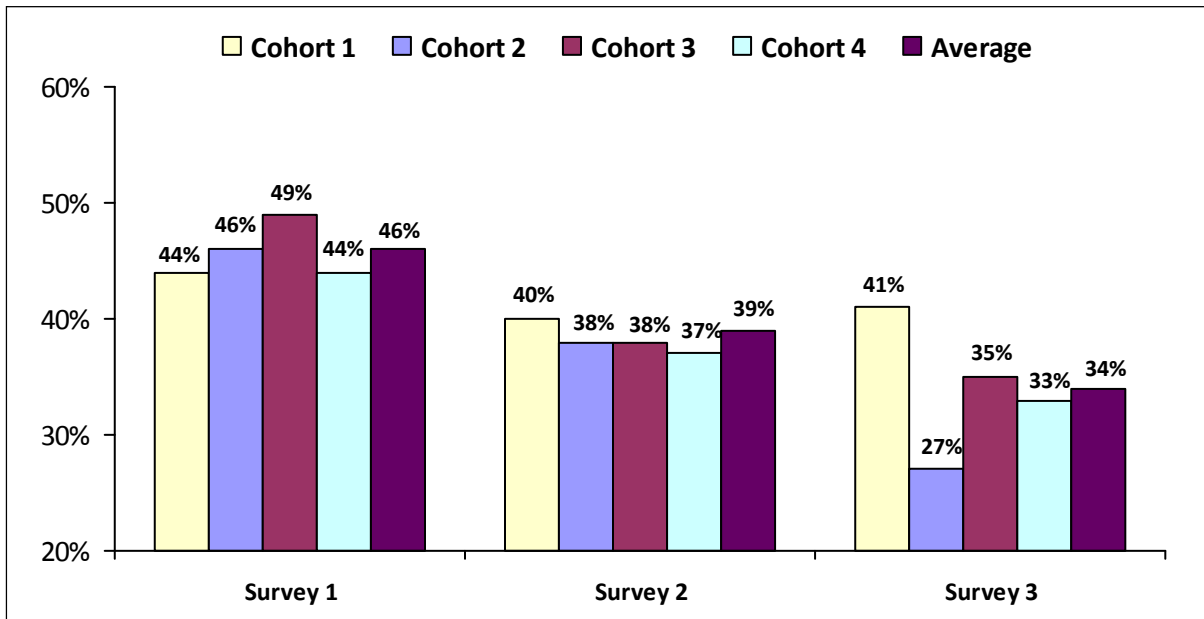


Figure 3: Views on Whether “most Americans are wealthy” by Cohort over Time Percentage of Survey 1, 2 & 3 respondents who “strongly” and “somewhat agree”



The following quotes from focus groups with YES students on the eve of their return to their home countries illustrate their more realistic understanding of the U.S. economy, particularly among those from Cohort 4 whose stay coincided with the start of the recent economic crisis. At the same time, their comments reveal their belief in American resilience and hard work that will help overcome the economic downturn.

I learned that the U.S., like any other country, has good and bad things. The United States is not a land where money can be obtained in the blink of an eye; it is just like other countries with its strengths and weaknesses.

[I learned] that not all Americans are rich like we see in the movies.

I thought the U.S. was the richest country in the whole world, that everybody lives happily and that their lives are easy, but this YES program changed all my thinking.

Even though it's one of the largest economies in the world, the local people living there are still simple.

The United States is a great country which comes from their hard work and willingness to step out of their downfalls and the negative economy.

It's a good place to work hard and actually get paid off for this hard work. If you work hard, you will get better opportunities. Even when times are bad, I think you can still do well in America.

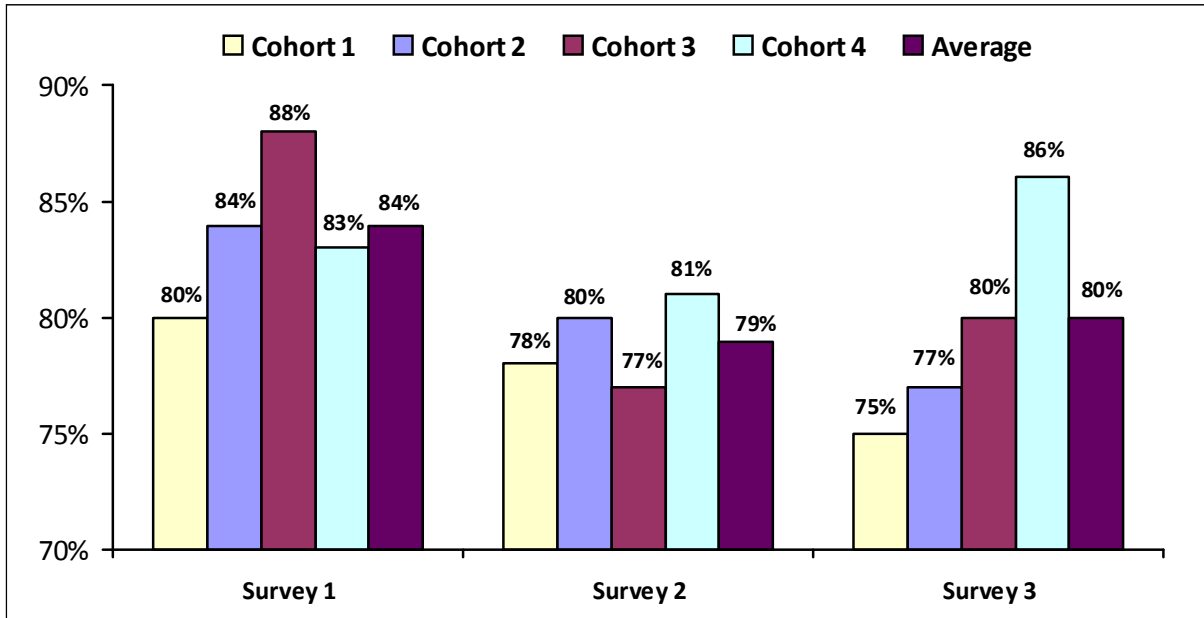
My host family is concerned about how the economy is doing now. They worry because things are getting more expensive and their jobs are not as secure any more.

Even when the economy is not progressing very well, Americans will step up to make the most of the situation they find themselves in.

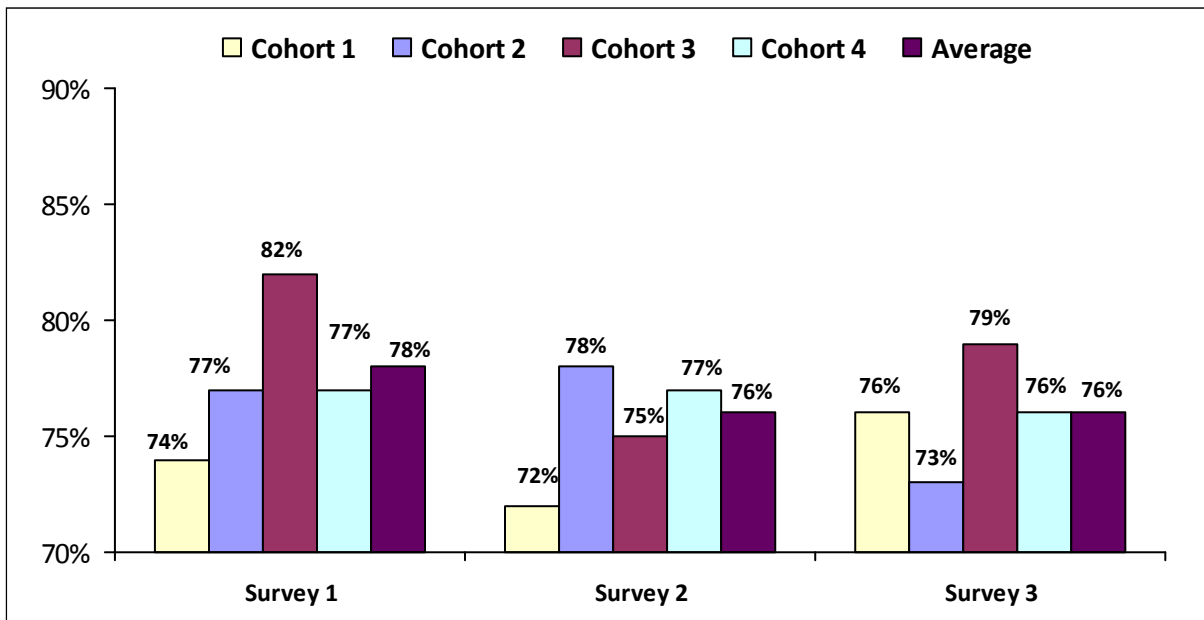
In other aspects of the U.S. political system, a majority of the responses from all cohorts show that participants only improved their impressions of the strength of democracy in the United States. As illustrated in Figures 4 through 7 below, after their exchange experience, a majority of YES participants either maintained or strengthened their agreement that “the U.S. is a democracy that works well;” “the U.S. provides equal opportunity for all;” “the U.S. has laws and regulations that protect the individual” and “Americans enjoy freedom of the press.” The shifts in responses between Surveys 2 and 3 suggest many participants found occasion to compare the functioning of the U.S. democratic system to those at home.

This strengthened view of democracy, laws and freedoms in the United States is further supported because “freedom, equality and democracy” was consistently among the top five coded responses to open questions asking about the first thing that comes to mind when thinking of the United States and how life in the United States is different from life in your own country.

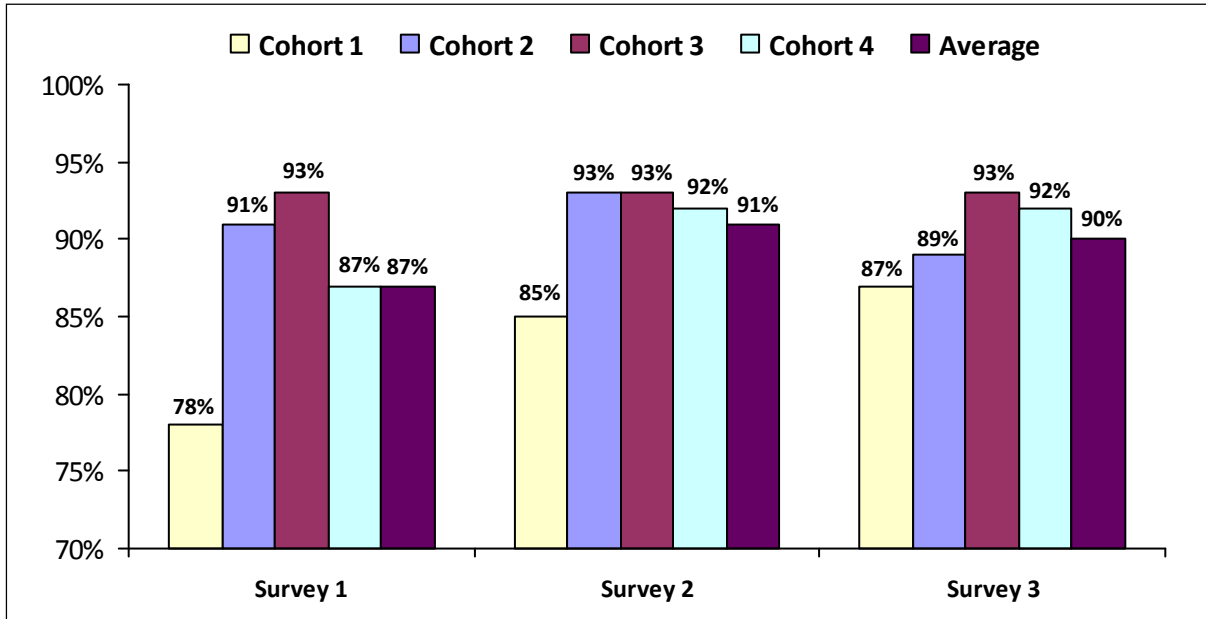
*Figure 4: Views on Whether “the U.S. is a democracy that works well” by Cohort over Time
Percentage of Survey 1, 2 & 3 respondents who “strongly” and “somewhat agree”*



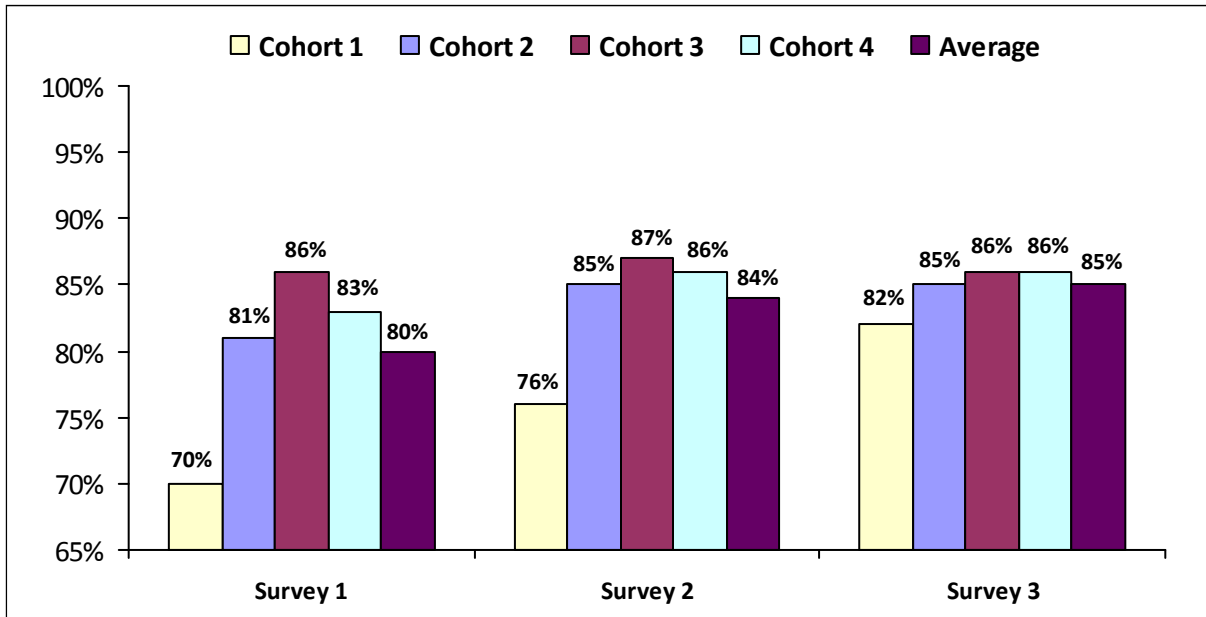
*Figure 5: Views on Whether “the U.S. provides equal opportunity for all” by Cohort over Time
Percentage of Survey 1, 2 & 3 respondents who “strongly” and “somewhat agree”*



*Figure 6: Views on Whether “the U.S. has laws/regulations that protect the individual” by Cohort over Time
Percentage of Survey 1, 2 & 3 respondents who “strongly” and “somewhat agree”*



*Figure 7: Views on Whether “Americans enjoy freedom of the press” by Cohort over Time
Percentage of Survey 1, 2 & 3 respondents who “strongly” and “somewhat agree”*



The following quotes from various open questions in the surveys illustrate how YES participants responded to seeing the democratic system in practice during their time in the U.S.:

The United States is a well-balanced democratic country. The balance of power in its government is very well placed.

I learned about how democracy works well in the United States. Every person has freedom of speech, equal opportunities and respect for other people.

The United States is a country where people from different backgrounds live together, work together and there is a difference between the American people and the American government that represents them, but it works well.

I have learned that in the United States it is a place where all civilizations and cultures unite to protect each others' individual rights.

The U.S. democratic system and government is so different. If you abuse your child, someone will take your child. In the Philippines, no one cares. The U.S. government takes care of children, elderly, everything. I don't want to say my government is stupid so maybe it's just lack of money.

Views on Individual Rights and Equal Opportunity

Objective: To provide the opportunity for young people in selected countries to learn more about the rights of the individual in society.



Result: YES participants developed a more astute understanding of and stronger belief in the social, civil and economic rights of an individual in society.

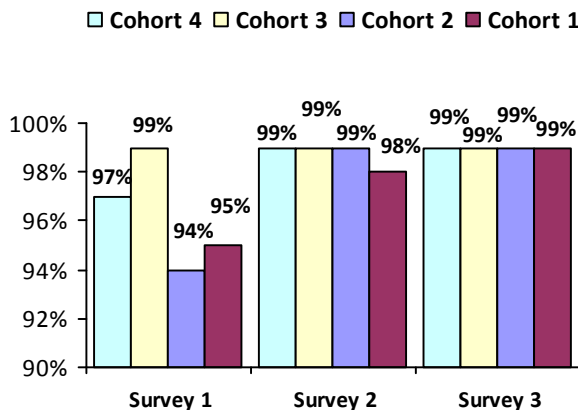
During and after each YES program, participants also strengthened their personal beliefs and values regarding individual rights and equal opportunities for all as a result of their time in the United States.

In all four Cohorts, prior to coming to the United States, most YES students already had a strong belief in the rights of individuals in a society. In fact, with only one exception (“the right to travel freely”), at least 80 percent of all Survey 1 respondents across all Cohorts considered all nine individual rights shown in Figure 8 “somewhat” or “very important.”

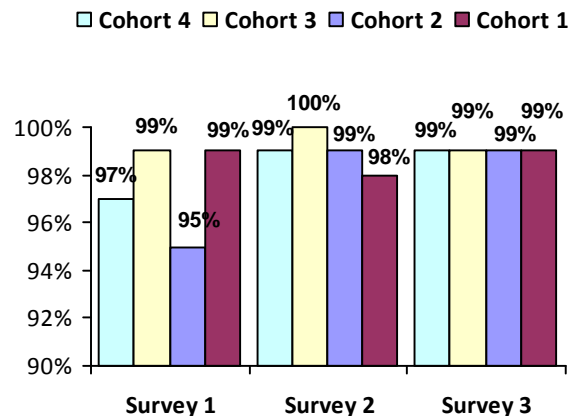
In the case of health care, education, freedom of speech and employment, more than 90 percent of Survey 1 respondents considered these rights to be important before they entered the YES program, and they maintained these beliefs after returning to their home countries.

*Figure 8: Views on Individual Rights in Society by Cohort over Time
Percentage of Survey 1, 2 & 3 respondents agreeing the following rights are “very” and “somewhat important”⁷*

*Figure 8a: Individual Rights in Society:
Receive health care*

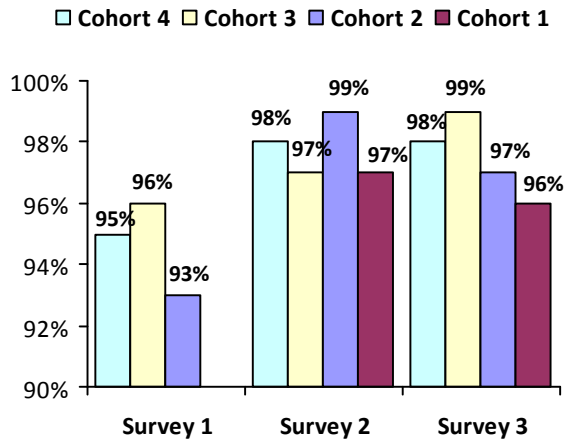


*Figure 8b: Individual Rights in Society:
Receive an education*

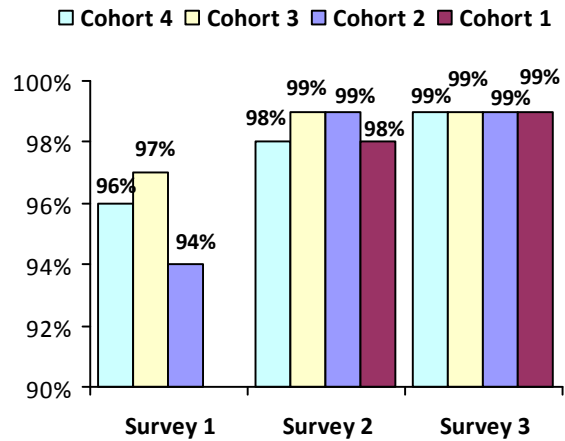


⁷ The survey items asking students to rate the importance of the right to “have a job” and the right to “freedom of speech” were not included in the Cohort 1 pre-program survey and are not displayed in Figures 15d and e, respectively. However, Survey 1 asked similar questions: (1) “the right to speak out or demonstrate peacefully against the government,” which 83 percent of respondents rated as “somewhat” or “very” important, and (2) “the right to a guaranteed income,” which 88 percent of respondents rated as “somewhat” or “very” important. Also, the phrasing of the question graphed in Figure 15f was slightly different in the Cohort 1 pre-program survey: “the right to practice the religion of your own choice.”

**Figure 8c: Individual Rights in Society:
Freedom of speech**

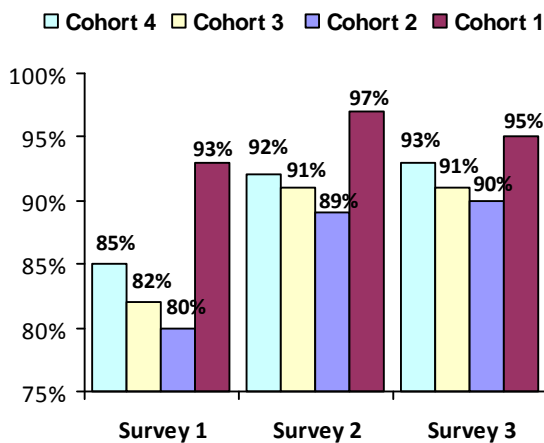


**Figure 8d: Individual Rights in Society:
Have a job**

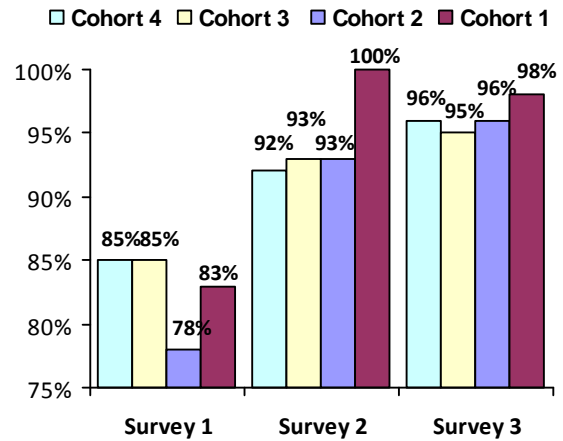


Nonetheless, there was an increase in the percentage of respondents believing in the importance of the right to practice any religion and the right to travel freely, even if a majority considered these “somewhat” or “very important” before taking part in the program. Using Cohort 4 as an example, the number of participants believing in the importance of the right to practice any religion and the right to travel freely increased from 85 percent to 93 percent and from 85 percent to 96 percent, respectively. These increases are even more dramatic when looking at the percentage of those who considered these rights “very important,” as shown in Figure 9: from 68 percent in Survey 1 to 79 percent in Survey 3 for freedom of religion, and from 51 percent to 75 percent for the right to travel freely.

**Figure 8e: Individual Rights in Society:
Practice any religion**

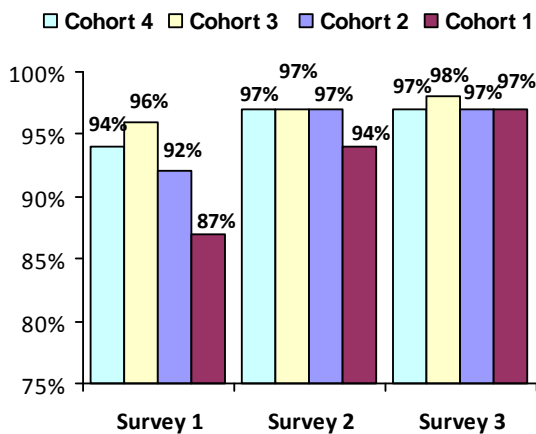


**Figure 8f: Individual Rights in Society:
Travel freely**

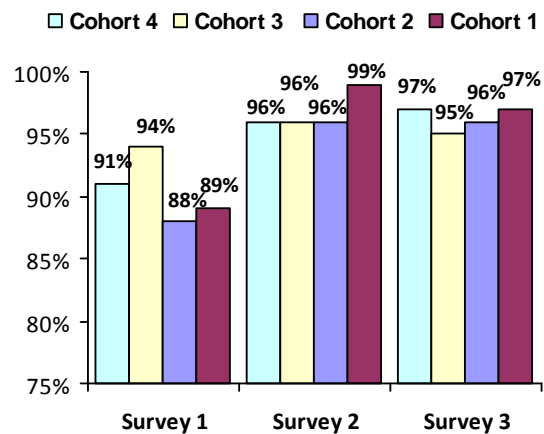


As shown in Figures 8g, h and i, on the whole, there were small increases in all Cohort respondents' beliefs in the importance of the right to access information, to have adequate housing and to be considered equal under the law. These increases are important given the strength of the students' views on these topics before they arrived, and how many participants became more ardent in their beliefs on these issues.

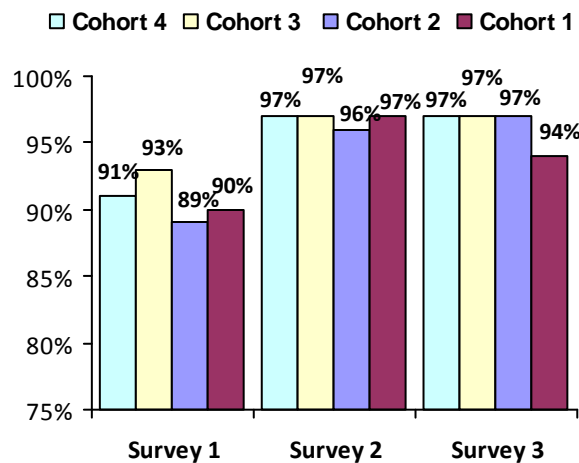
**Figure 8g: Individual Rights in Society:
Access to Information**



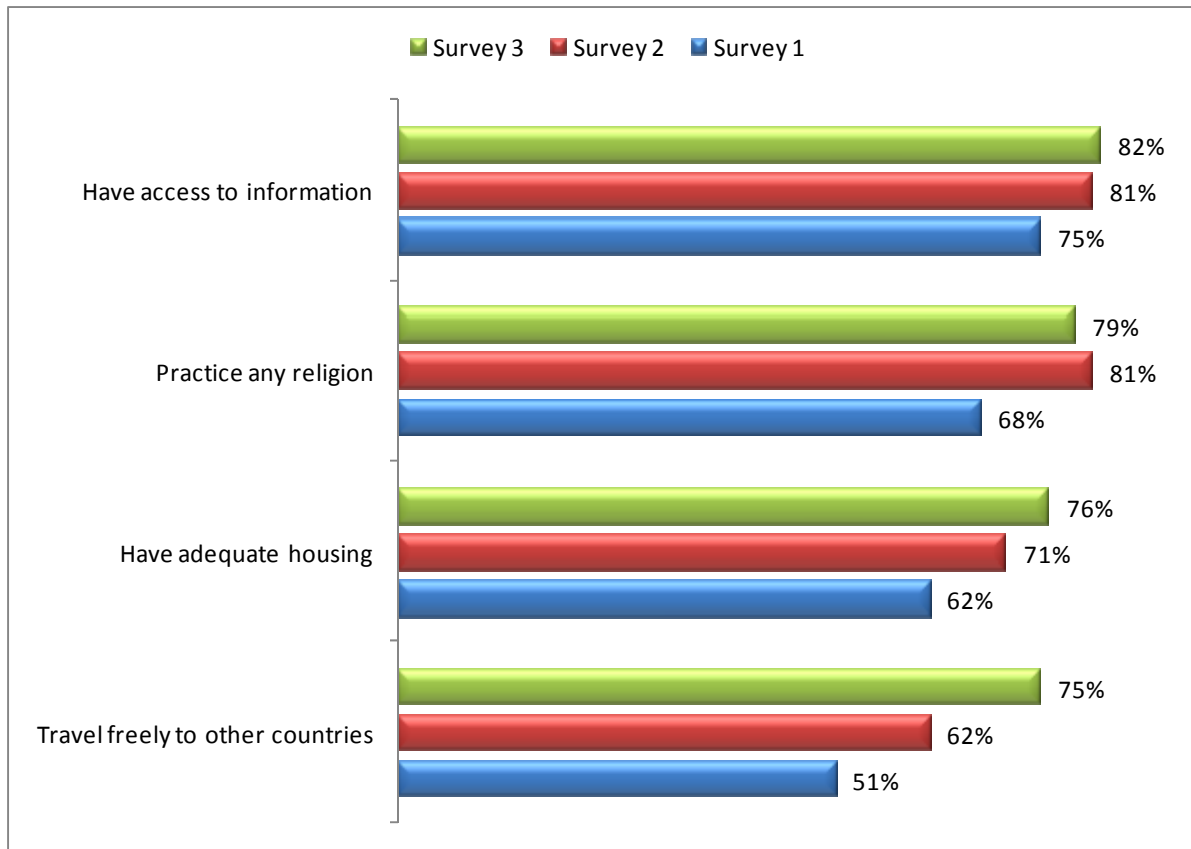
**Figure 8h: Individual Rights in Society:
Adequate Housing**



**Figure 8i: Individual Rights in Society:
Be considered equal under the law**



*Figure 9: Belief in Importance of Individual Rights over time:
Percentage of Cohort 4 respondents assessing rights as “very important”*



For all the rights shown in Figure 9 above, the percentage of Cohort 4 respondents considering them “very important” increased substantially from Survey 1 to Survey 2, and then increased further in Survey 3, a year after participants returned home.

Along with their strong beliefs in individual rights, as a result of their exchange experience, YES participants also developed even stronger beliefs in the importance of equal opportunities for all people to enjoy those rights, regardless of gender, religion, ethnicity or disability.

As was the case with individual rights, the vast majority of Survey 1 respondents across all cohorts somewhat or strongly agreed with all the equal opportunity statements in Table 5 before participating in the YES program. Thus, there was very little change over time in the total percentages of respondents agreeing with each statement.

Even with these small changes, it is interesting to note that the larger jumps occurred between Surveys 1 and 2, with views remaining relatively unchanged between Surveys 2 and 3.

Table 5: Changes in Views on Equal Opportunities by Cohort over Time
Percentage of Survey 1, 2 & 3 respondents who “strongly” and “somewhat agree”

Measure	Survey	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	Avg.
Religious minorities should have equal opportunities	1	94	91	92	90	92
	2	94	96	96	97	96
	3	95	95	95	98	96
People with disabilities should have equal opportunities	1	92	87	88	91	90
	2	95	92	95	96	95
	3	91	94	93	96	94
Ethnic minorities should have equal opportunities	1	93	90	90	88	90
	2	97	94	97	96	96
	3	92	92	96	97	94
Men/Women should equally share family responsibilities	1	89	92	92	94	92
	2	90	96	94	96	94
	3	93	94	97	94	95
Men/Women should have equal opportunities	1	93	92	95	95	94
	2	93	96	96	95	95
	3	94	95	98	96	96

It is also noteworthy that there were more noticeable changes among those who “strongly agreed” with these statements. For example, with Cohort 4, only 68 percent of Survey 1 respondents strongly believed that ethnic minorities should have equal opportunities and 71 percent believed people with disabilities should have equal opportunities, but this jumped to 89 percent and 83 percent, respectively, by Survey 3.

The written comments from some participants illustrate their appreciation for how U.S. society provides equal rights and opportunities to all its citizens, regardless of race, religion or ethnicity.

The United States provides equal opportunities for everybody no matter what background he comes from.

[The most important thing I learned] is that everyone deserves equal rights regardless of religion, background, ethnicity or color.

I have learned that the United States truly believes in equal rights among its people.

I learned while in the United States that everyone should have the chance to live well and be free.

I learned that in America you have equal rights to those around you even if you do not have the same wealth or the same education or the same luxuries.

Views on Americans

Objective: To provide the opportunity for young people in selected countries to learn more about American society, people, values and culture.



Result: YES students report improved understanding of American society, people, values and culture.

Over the course of the YES program, participants continuously cited they were most eager to learn more about American society, people and culture. Many stated that their knowledge to date was based on what they saw or heard in the media or from friends and family at home. As a result, they were curious to learn more about the United States and its people and culture first hand.

Prior to their arrival in the United States, for a large majority of YES students, the main driver for participating in the YES program was “to better understand American society, people and culture.”⁸ In Survey 3, one year after they returned home, nearly all of the responding participants felt they had achieved this goal.⁹ Furthermore, an overwhelming majority of Survey 3 respondents believed the program enabled them to understand Americans and U.S. culture “a lot better,” as illustrated in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 6: Increased Understanding of the Culture of the U.S. by Cohort
Percentage of Survey 2 and 3 respondents with “a lot” and “a little better” understanding

	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	Average
Survey 2	97%	98%	98%	99%	98%
Survey 3	94%	100%	99%	100%	98%

Table 7: Increased Understanding of the People of the U.S. by Cohort
Percentage of Survey 2 and 3 respondents with “a lot” and “a little better” understanding

	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	Average
Survey 2	99%	100%	98%	98%	99%
Survey 3	96%	100%	100%	100%	99%

⁸ In Cohort 4 Survey 1, this was the number one response to the question, “What are your three most important reasons for going to the United States?” with 82 percent of respondents selecting it. This compares well to past cohorts – Cohort 3 (83 percent); Cohort 2 (75 percent); Cohort 1 (not asked)

⁹ In response to the question in Survey 3, “Now that you completed the YES program one year ago, what would you say are the three most important things you gained from your YES experience?” the number one response again was “The experience increased my understanding of American society, people and culture,” with 80 percent of respondents selecting it in Cohort 4, comparing nicely with Cohort 3 (78 percent); Cohort 2 (81 percent) and Cohort 1 (82 percent).

As a result, almost all participants responding to Survey 3 have a more favorable view of American people than they did before they came to the United States. Cohort 1 showed the lowest score yet; even so, eight in 10 held a more favorable view of Americans, with all other cohorts showing scores in the high 90 percentile.

Table 8: Views of the American People by Cohort
Percentage of Survey 3 respondents with “a much more” and “a more favorable” view of people from the United States

	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	Average
Survey 3	84%	96%	97%	96%	94%

Open ended questions on the surveys and focus group responses showed many participants were apprehensive about certain negative aspects of life in the United States that they had learned about mostly through personal conversations, television programs, movies, news and media coverage of the United States.

Before coming here, I thought the U.S. would be like NYC. I came to a small town. It was open farm area. No buildings or skyscrapers. People were friendly and nice [in smaller town]; in a big city, nobody has time for you.

The United States isn't always what is shown in Hollywood movies ... It's not just New York or Los Angeles ... There are small towns like Turpin which are like small dots on the map but make a huge difference in someone's life! The U.S. isn't the usual larger-than-life atmosphere as shown by the media!

[I learned] that people there are much against the stereotypical image of Americans. They show love and care for others as if they are one big family, instead of the expected rowdiness, arrogance and disrespect.

America is so diverse. Yes, I had thought that all Americans were blonde!

Before I went to Texas, I thought everything was going to be just like the Wild West.

Their YES experiences, however, uniformly changed these stereotypes, along with attitudes towards and understanding of American people and society.

[I learned] that the U.S. is not a morally degenerate country; that the media portray it wrongly; that we cannot really judge something unless we see it from a closer view.

I've learned that in general, Americans are nice people...and that we Arab people often have mistaken ideas about them, due to our press, and the same happens to them.

I realized that Muslim nations stereotype Americans as hating Muslims, but it's not true.

[I learned that] Americans respect my religion (Islam).

Participants consistently spoke of the kindness they received while in the United States, not only from their host families but also from the schools they attended, the communities they lived in and other people they met during the course of their year.

You can never generalize anything about Americans. I saw the United States out of the stereotype I've always seen it in [back home] but it looks much better without it.

One thing I learned and appreciated about the United States is the helpfulness of the American people. I realized that if the people of the whole world can learn to be as helpful as the Americans, the world can surely be a better place.

[Americans] are the kindest people I have ever met.

The people of America are very nice. It contradicts with the image of the country.

The positive images of the U.S. the YES students had when completing their year of study are highlighted in the top five responses to the open question in Survey 2: “What is the first thing that comes to mind when thinking of the U.S.?” as shown in Table 9.

**Table 9: First Thing that Comes to Mind when Thinking of the U.S.
Top five open responses from Survey 2
Cohorts 2, 3 and 4**

	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4
Freedom/democracy/equality	24%	31%	27%
Positive attributes of U.S. society/culture	35%	13%	13%
Host family/friends	8%	10%	18%
Friendly/willing to share culture/appreciation of others*	-	15%	15%
Diversity*	-	10%	11%

**These two attributes were not stated in Cohort 2*

Table 10 also shows that the views of Americans from the pre-program Survey 1 to the follow-up Survey 3 were positive with at least 8 in 10 of all respondents in agreement that Americans “are friendly and open.” Agreement with these positive statements about Americans’ openness, outspokenness, and belief they can make a difference once again remained relatively constant before and after the YES program, with the biggest jumps coming between Surveys 1 and 2. It is important to point out that the larger pre- and post-program differences among Cohort 1 respondents is likely attributable to the start of the U.S. war in Iraq at the beginning of their program in 2003.

Table 10: Changes in Views of Americans by Cohort over time
Percentage of Survey 1, 2 & 3 respondents who “strongly” and “somewhat agree”

Measure	Survey	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	Avg.
Americans are friendly and open	1	81	87	90	83	85
	2	86	90	90	89	89
	3	81	89	89	89	87
Americans express their personal opinions, even if they contradict those of authorities	1	73	74	79	76	76
	2	79	83	87	89	85
	3	83	84	85	89	85
Americans believe they can make a difference in their society	1	62	72	78	73	71
	2	80	75	75	75	76
	3	81	76	81	77	79
Americans have friends and acquaintances from different backgrounds	1	74	80	85	79	80
	2	80	79	79	79	79
	3	85	77	81	80	81
Americans are friendly towards people of my country	1	55	74	76	74	70
	2	68	75	75	71	72
	3	70	74	74	73	73

Although the figures in Table 10 are fairly consistent across surveys, the high scores from Survey 1 do not always concur with the respondents’ written comments in open-ended questions, which highlighted a stronger sense of negative American perceptions of Arabs, Muslims and/or people of their country prior to coming to the United States. For the most part, these views were dispelled as a result of their experiences in cities and towns across the United States.

Responses to the open-ended questions in Survey 3 concur with the quantitative data in Table 10 and highlight that one of the most important things YES participants reported learning from living in the U.S. is that Americans are friendly and welcoming towards foreigners.

The one most important thing I learned and appreciate about the U.S. and want my country to follow is that America accepts differences. It finds similarities and respects differences, which I think the whole world needs to learn. No matter where you come from or what your background is, you are always WELCOMED and APPRECIATED.

Many different people from different countries are living here together in peace.

They are very friendly and open-hearted toward minorities.

Most Americans have an open mind to different cultures and to people from different cultural backgrounds.

In my school there was a gay guy. The students worked with him and organized an entire presentation on their own and raised money against discrimination, all on their own. I’d never met a gay guy before! He was nice!

Participants' responses to open-ended survey questions and in focus groups also convey how impressed many participants were by the racial and ethnic diversity of American society and how people from different backgrounds seem to live together in harmony and respect each other.

I learned that Americans are not actually what I thought of them before I lived in the U.S. I realize that Americans are friendly people and they're open to different cultural backgrounds. They are eager to volunteer too, which means they love helping other people.

I learned that Americans are willing to open up their doors and hearts to someone of a different culture and to learn more about them.

The United States is a home for people of different backgrounds who are living in peace and tranquility and are equally treated regardless of race, religion and language—tolerance is the most important thing that has brought them together.

The most important thing that I learned living in the States was to respect every culture, every ethnicity and way of life. Making of fun of another religion or ethnicity can cause serious problems, and in return my ethnicity and religion will be made fun of too, because every action has a reaction.

I've learned that not all Americans are racist against foreigners—honestly, before I went to the United States, I was scared of being bullied by American students in school but it's really different when you are there. They treat you with respect and care about you.

In addition, YES participants across all cohorts were consistently impressed by how Americans openly express and discuss their opinions and by their commitment to making a difference in society through community service.

[It] is nice to be able to express your beliefs and thoughts and find [people] who would accept them even if they don't believe the same way.

Americans express their personal opinions. They believe in making a difference either at school or in their society.

Their idea of freedom of expression is as close to perfect as can be.

I learned that everyone should have the chance to live well and free because of their talent and merit, not because of their possessions. I also learned everyone should always be able to express their feelings and opinions in public, without fear.

When asked in an open ended question: “What was the ONE most important thing you learned about the United States while living there?” participants commented as follows:

I learned while in the U.S. that every person can make a change. That we have freedom of speech and everyone has equal rights.

[I learned that] Americans have a real sense of national interests. They think themselves as one nation and work for their country's common goals.

The most important thing [in the United States] was the equality of the individuals, especially the opportunities each individual has. It's also that they want to help each other and will work together to make a difference.

Other changes in YES participants' views further illustrate how their stereotypical perceptions changed as a result of their exchange experience. One such change was in YES participants' views on personal freedoms in the United States. Although a majority of respondents still agreed that "Americans have too much freedom," the number generally declined from Survey 2 to Survey 3. Fewer respondents across all cohorts shared this view a year after returning home (from between 51 percent to 63 percent in Survey 3), than did just after their year here, in Survey 2 (from 66 percent to 67 percent).

The focus groups conducted with departing YES students give insight into the reasons for their views on Americans' personal freedoms. YES participants were sometimes taken aback by the typical American teenage lifestyle, by what they perceived as the casual/informal relationships between teenagers with their teachers, parents and elders in society, as well as by the lesser respect for elders generally as compared to their own societies.

Teenagers have a lot more freedom in the United States than we do in Jordan. However, what is good is that even with that freedom, parents know where they are and who they are with and will always go and pick them up.

I liked how interested teachers in the United States are in the welfare of their students. You are not just another kid in the class; they want to know that you are okay and that everything is okay at home.

It's interesting to me how much time kids in the United States spend at the mall and that their parents do not mind this fact. I guess the nice part is that they will come and pick them up so that they get home safely.

In my country, you would not spend so much time away from your parents and family. Being with your family is very important so America is very different in that teenagers would rather hang out together away from their parents.

Views on Their Own Countries

Objective: To encourage YES participants to look at their own countries from a distance.



Result: Participants developed greater pride in their home countries as well as a keener awareness of their societies' shortcomings and a strong belief in the need for change.

Throughout the program and in each Cohort, YES participants communicated that their year in the United States allowed them to learn about the United States, but it also did a lot to open their eyes and remind them about the values of their home countries. For many, the year away from home made them look at their communities and country through different eyes and also at how it is viewed abroad. Almost all participants were quick to determine that their home countries, not unlike the United States, had positive and negative qualities, but for many it also instilled a sense of pride in their origins and a heartfelt love and appreciation for their native lands.

I realized while I was in the United States that I should be very proud of who I am and where I come from.

I realized how ancient and great my country is, how the people are so kind and have an amazing sense of humor that they can make fun of their problems.

My country has strong family values and respects family values, which is a unique blessing to me.

My country is very beautiful and it has a lot of beautiful places to visit, but on the other hand, Indonesia is still far behind in education.

There are lots of things I should be very proud of about my home country but there are also things that I am not happy about that I should try and do something about.

I used to not appreciate my parents. Now I really appreciate them having been gone for a year.

I learned that my country can develop and become like the United States or even better. We just need to trust ourselves and to work hard.

In all four cohorts, participants frequently mentioned their home countries' rich cultures and physical beauty. Some also became more aware of the importance of family and personal relationships in their societies, as well as their own close ties with family and friends at home. In addition, some respondents became more patriotic as a result of their time away from home.

I realize now that my country is the place I want to be since its culture and its people are the most beautiful and colorful.

I realized how good my country's history and culture is, how it has influenced my life and my personality, and how I had never acknowledged this before coming to the United States.

I realized, while I've been away from home, how important my family and friends are to my life.

I realized how important it is to carry my culture with me no matter where I go. There are people out there who may never know of my culture's existence and the importance it once had.

I realized that people in my home country are very close and care about each other. They stay in touch and they look out for each other a lot.

On the other hand, YES participants were quick to recognize that their home countries were not perfect and, in some cases, were significantly far behind other countries in terms of growth and development. Other areas of concern to participants were the insufficient development of the educational systems, the lack of freedom experienced by citizens of their countries and the lack of community service and/or societal encouragement of working toward the greater good.

I realized that I have issues with the lack of a decent standard of living for people in my home country. The economy is far behind the United States and does not support everyone.

I am a girl and unfortunately in my country, we are treated as if we are second-class citizens. I just cannot accept this fact.

Democracy, transparency and equality are not as apparent as I believed them to be. Minorities in my country do not enjoy similar opportunities as American minorities.

I realized that we have a lot of work to do to make this country prosper, and to compete with other countries. I realized how much we are left behind in the race of development.

I think that my country can go further in terms of economy, education and development.

The Turkish people should be more into the community they live in ... such as forming NGOs.

[I realized that] we should have more community services in our country and give students more opportunities.

The inevitable mix of views and feelings toward their home countries after their exchange experiences is evident in participants' responses to open questions in Survey 2. As shown in Table 11 below, when the students were asked to name the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about their home countries in Survey 2, their top five responses revealed deep appreciation of and pride in their home countries, along with a recognition of the need for change and improvement.

**Table 11: First Thing that Comes to Mind when Thinking of One's Home Country
Top 5 Open Responses from Survey 2 Cohorts 2, 3 and 4**

	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4
Family/friends/home	20%	18%	25%
Need for change/improvement	23%	19%	16%
Greater appreciation/pride/love*	-	13%	11%
Positive attributes of my society/culture	16%	11%	10%
Beautiful/great country	6%	6%	10%

*This attribute was not mentioned in Cohort 2

On a positive note, many YES participants are optimistic about the future and the changes that could come about in their home countries. They are eager to get involved and to do whatever small thing they can to help progress. As a result of their involvement in community services in the United States, they feel empowered to help their countries to build a better future and they want to be part of that change process.

There are lots of things missing in my country right now, like community service, activities for children after school, freedom of the individual. All of these things can be achieved if we all work together.

I realized we all have to work hard to make our home countries prosper. This is not something that can be done alone.

[I realized that in my country] we really need to boost up our confidence and reassess ourselves in comparison with the world.... We are a long way behind global standards.

There may be different countries, but when you look at the core, every country has the same basic spirit, and the difference is how the people use that spirit. My country has the spirit and in ample amounts—what it needs to do is use it to move ahead on the road to progress.

Another beneficial feature of spending a year in the United States was how it helped YES participants gain insight into how their countries are viewed abroad and how these countries stand in the global community. For some, it was enlightening to realize that their countries already had a strong foothold in the global community and are respected by foreigners abroad.

India is an emerging power in the world. It's a challenge as well as a competent partner. I learned this through the eyes of my friends and associates. It was a good feeling to be known and recognized!

I realized that my country is only one small part that builds the world; however, my country has to participate to create a better world.

My country might not be as developed as many others ... but [we] have the potential to make a difference: in our communities, our countries and in this world.

[My country] has every possibility to become one of the world's leading countries.

III. Personal Growth and Development of Leadership Skills

Objective: To develop leadership skills while in the United States that participants can use when they return home.



Result: Participants feel they have gained a variety of new skills, some of which have improved further since returning home. They are confident and feel empowered.

One of the main emphases in the YES program is development of leadership skills through activities such as community service, public speaking, workshops and participant events. The success of this aspect of the program is evident in the marked gain in a variety of leadership and communication skills the YES students achieved throughout the exchange experience. In turn, these new skills have given them greater confidence overall and the sense of empowerment to get involved and affect change in whatever they do.

To illustrate, when asked in Survey 3 to reflect on their leadership skill levels before leaving for the United States compared to now, respondents across all cohorts reported outstanding progress on all skill sets. The greatest leaps lay in their ability to be self-reliant and independent, becoming more flexible and gaining sufficient confidence to speak in public.

Table 12: Participants' Assessment of Improvement in Leadership Skills¹⁰
Percentage of Survey 3 respondents rating their ability as "Excellent"
Average across all cohorts

Skills	Before the Program	After the Program	Percentage Point Increase
Being self-reliant and independent	6%	66%	+60
Working closely with people different from you	10%	63%	+53
Speaking in public	8%	61%	+53
Being flexible	13%	63%	+50
Willing to make changes in your community	11%	61%	+50
Planning for the future	11%	58%	+47
Expressing ideas and feelings	11%	58%	+47
Leading a team and motivating others	11%	56%	+45
Listening to other people's suggestions/concerns	16%	58%	+42
Solving problems	13%	53%	+40
Managing your time	8%	43%	+35
Managing your money	11%	42%	+31

¹⁰ This chart presents results from the question, "How would you rate each of the following personal characteristics and skills BEFORE you left for the United States and NOW that a year has passed?"

Table 12 illustrates the changes in participants’ assessments of their skills as “excellent;” however, there were some dramatic shifts overall in their perceptions of their skills. For most of the skills listed in the table, the percentage of Survey 3 respondents who assessed their current skill level as “good” or “excellent” was approximately double that of those rating their skills at the same levels before the program. For example, in Cohort 4, just over one-third of respondents (39 percent) considered their money management skills “good” or “excellent” before the program in Survey 1, compared with 81 percent who now feel confident in that skill.

Creatively managing my money has allowed me to save some money.

I managed money in my class when we were collecting for a class fund.

I was truly terrible at managing money before I came to the United States. I think it was partly that I was not expected to. This was the responsibility of my parents but when I lived in America I had to learn how to make money last longer.

I got very good at managing money. When I arrived in America first I think I was so taken with shopping and going to the mall I ran out of money all the time. Then I realized I had to be smarter as I could not keep asking my family to send more.

Many of these skills were cited by Survey 3 respondents as the most important skill they acquired from their YES experience.¹¹ Table 13 shows that communication skills—including both expressing one’s ideas/beliefs and listening to others, as well as confidence and determination, independence and self-reliance, English-speaking skills, leadership and open-mindedness rated among the most important skills learned during participants’ exchange experience.¹²

**Table 13: One Most Important or Useful Skill/Knowledge Acquired from the Exchange Experience
Top five responses from Survey 3
Cohorts 2, 3 and 4**

	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4
Confidence/determination	17%	14%	17%
Communication skills	8%	20%	17%
Independence/self-reliance	15%	14%	17%
English-speaking skills	14%	19%	14%
Leadership	16%	13%	10%
Open-minded/flexible	13%	15%	5%

Speaking in public for me is the most useful skill because it actually changed from fear and stress to pleasure and fun.

¹¹ “What would you say is the ONE most important or useful skill/knowledge you acquired from your experience in the United States?”

¹² These figures are approximate due to coding of responses. Many respondents listed more than one skill in their response to this question.

I have learned how to believe in myself and to be more confident about whatever I do and above all I have learned to be more patient and deal with people of different types in different ways.

I improved greatly in my communication skills. I always have had problems speaking and not expressing myself. Thankfully, I don't have that anymore.

The most important skill was that I learned how to express myself more freely.

I learned that I should really listen and put myself in the shoes of the other speaker while [he/she is] speaking instead of thinking of a better answer than his.

I learned to make my own decisions and be confident about them. I think that's one of the things that I would have never learned at home.

The skill of self dependence has helped me in every walk of life, and I have been able to apply it in almost every field of my life.

Now I am depending more on myself and I can do whatever I need by myself, especially if there was nobody around to help me do my own business.

Similarly, as shown in Table 14, among the things YES respondents said they liked best about the overall exchange experience were “self-growth, confidence, independence, tolerance,” and “improving my skills, knowledge”:

**Table 14: Things liked best about the exchange experience
Top 5 Open Responses from Survey 2
Cohorts 2, 3 and 4**

	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4
Making friends/meeting people	49%	46%	54%
Self-growth, confidence, independence, tolerance*	-	16%	25%
American culture, lifestyle	7%	17%	24%
Improving my skills, knowledge	41%	21%	21%
Host family	15%	15%	16%

**Not stated as a response in Cohort 2*

For some participants, accomplishing simple tasks more quickly and with less stress was a major achievement. Time management was, in the past, an issue for many participants (not uncommon among teenagers in any country) so their ability to control their time and schedule better was a major accomplishment for many.

[I learned that] time is a valuable thing. Many things can be done in such limited time, and that can be achieved only by organizing time, people and duties.

I finished my IB diploma in one year instead of the two required years. In spite of having very little time to finish all my projects, I tackled all problems and organized my work and my time. Eventually, I topped my class.

In terms of gender differences, for the most part, males and females felt similarly about the gains they had made during their YES experience. In a few instances, however, female YES students reported slightly larger gains than did their male counterparts in terms of “being flexible,” “speaking in public,” “willingness to make a change in your community,” and “leading a team and motivating others.”

Usefulness of YES Program for Acquiring Skills

In the follow-up surveys conducted in all four cohorts (Survey 3), participants emphasized their participation in the YES program benefited them greatly in many ways. When asked “How useful was your stay in the United States for acquiring the following skills?” at least 90 percent of respondents assessed the program as useful for most skill areas, as shown in Table 15.

Table 15: Gains in Skills by Cohort
Percentage of Survey 3 respondents who felt that the YES Program was “very” and “somewhat” useful for acquiring specific skills

Skills Acquired in U.S. During YES Program	Very/Somewhat Useful			
	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4
Improving English	94%	97%	97%	93%
Learning new skills	93%	95%	96%	97%
Improving leadership skills	86%	95%	95%	95%
Learning to work in a team	92%	94%	95%	95%
Volunteering and community work	92%	93%	95%	95%
Making useful connections	91%	92%	92%	92%
Going to university	85%	85%	90%	89%
Preparing for a job	81%	84%	86%	83%

Interestingly, the percentage of Cohort 4 participants finding their YES experience useful for acquiring skills continued the upward trend of previous cohorts, with 97 percent of respondents stating they found their YES experience useful in learning new skills. Similarly, the program's capacity to teach new leadership and teamwork skills continued to prove very useful to participants.

The YES program's ability to improve English was one of the top five most important skills of the program for Cohort 4 participants. Other skills acquired by participants during the course of the year included computer skills, language skills, domestic skills (cooking, ironing, cleaning, and working). A high proportion of YES participants reported the value of these skills to them after returning home. (More on this can be found in Section IV on Changes in Behavior.)

Sense of Confidence and Empowerment

Another feature of the YES program is to foster self confidence and empower participants. In Survey 1, participants stated a distinct lack of confidence in terms of communication and their value to society. Many had not identified a role for themselves in their communities or in their society and therefore did not have confidence in the value they hold there. They did not believe they had been empowered to be more and had not realized their full potential.

Prior to coming to the United States, less than half of all Cohort 4 Survey 1 YES participants believed they could influence people around them or make a difference in their communities. Only half believed they had choices to make in life or could make a difference to their families. However, after spending one year in the United States, two-thirds of YES participants had realized their value to their families, to their communities and to society.

On a positive note, one year later, when Survey 3 was conducted, these figures were maintained, with 65 percent believing they can influence people around them, 64 percent believing they can make a difference in their communities and more than 70 percent realizing they have many choices to make in life and they do make a difference to their families. Participants from all cohorts commented on their increased self-confidence:

The YES program increased my self confidence tremendously, and now I have little problem when meeting people.

I feel more certain of who I am and what I want to achieve in life, and I have more willpower to go about it.

I have no problems now talking in front of a class or voicing my ideas during group discussions. When it comes to socializing, I can always strike up a conversation with strangers.

Many Cohort 4 participants now strongly believe they can influence others and effect change in their families and communities, as shown in Table 16. In particular, two-thirds (64 percent) of Survey 3 respondents now strongly believe they can influence others, compared to only 40 percent before the YES program. In terms of their family environment, 68 percent of respondents now believe their role in the family is more important and they can make a difference—up 18

percentage points from their opinion prior to coming to the United States (50 percent). There were, however, some reservations that despite their new found confidence, traditions of the past and status within the family will be difficult to change on returning home. Comments to this effect include:

When I returned home, my family and friends found it hard to accept my changes, they couldn't understand that experiences change a person. They didn't understand that I had become more open-minded.... But as time passed, they got my point and accepted my change. They were actually influenced by me.

Some of my ideas have changed while in the U.S. and even though I can influence people around me, it's hard to influence my family and hard for them to change.

I realized that in my country, one doesn't have this freedom of choice. I'm not referring to the freedom given by the government, but more how a person feels inside of his or her family. I realized that society in my country is so close to its individuals that it can urge (or sometimes force) them to follow certain traditions or believe in certain issues in a certain way, [particularly within the family structure].

**Table 16: Increased Sense of Empowerment Over Time—
Percentage of Survey 1, 2 & 3 respondents who “strongly agree”
Average across all Cohorts**

	Average Percentages of Respondents That Strongly Agree			
	Survey 1	Survey 2	Survey 3	Average Percentage Point Increase from Survey 1 to Survey 3
<i>I feel I can influence people around me.</i>	40%	65%	64%	+24
<i>I feel I can make a difference in my community.</i>	40%	58%	57%	+17
<i>I feel I have many choices in my life.</i>	50%	72%	71%	+21
<i>I feel I can make a difference in my family.</i>	50%	70%	68%	+18

**Table 17: Increased Sense of Empowerment by Cohort Over Time—
Percentage of Survey 1, 2 & 3 respondents who “strongly agree”**

	Percentage of Respondents That Strongly Agree			
	Cohort	Survey 1	Survey 2	Survey 3
<i>I feel I can influence people around me.</i>	1	40	67	59
	2	41	60	65
	3	41	62	67
	4	39	67	65
<i>I feel I can make a difference in my community.</i>	1	44	68	73
	2	51	70	70
	3	53	72	71
	4	53	73	72
<i>I feel I have many choices in my life.</i>	1	46	72	62
	2	51	64	66
	3	53	74	68
	4	52	71	71
<i>I feel I can make a difference in my family.</i>	1	37	59	46
	2	36	55	48
	3	44	56	58
	4	41	63	64

With regard to these empowerment statements, there was a more noticeable difference between males and females. As shown in Table 18, female YES students consistently exhibited a somewhat greater sense of empowerment in their ability to influence others, make a difference in their communities and families, and have choices in their lives than did their male counterparts.

**Table 18: Increased Sense of Empowerment Over Time among Males and Females—
Percentage of Survey 1, 2 & 3 respondents who “strongly agree”
Average responses across all cohorts**

Participants who rated Strongly Agree (All surveys and all cohorts)	Total	% Males	% Females
<i>I feel I can influence people around me.</i>	56%	54%	58%
<i>I feel I can make a difference in my community.</i>	52%	49%	55%
<i>I feel I have many choices in my life.</i>	65%	63%	67%
<i>I feel I can make a difference in my family.</i>	63%	62%	65%

As shown in the following charts, the overall percentage of respondents agreeing with the four empowerment statements remained high (at least 80 percent in Survey 3) across all three surveys for Cohorts 2, 3 and 4, with slight increases over time.

The more noticeable changes are in the percentage of Cohort 2 and 3 respondents who now believe in their ability to influence others, which increased from 80 percent to 87 percent in Survey 1, to 90 percent to 94 percent in Survey 3. Similarly, in terms of feeling they have choices to make in life and can make a difference in their families and communities, we saw scores increase from the mid/high 80 percentage points to the low/mid 90 percentage points.

In open-ended comments, respondents gave examples of how they have influenced others and made a difference in their families and communities back at home:

I told people about what I learned [while in the United States], which greatly changed their views about the people of America.

I now feel that I am a vital part of my family concerning decision making.

When people talked to me, I [believed that I] would impact them in a positive way.

At first when I came back, I had difficulties within my family in being understood; they were not used to hearing me voice my opinion so at first they did not accept that but now they see I can contribute and make a difference to our family.

IV. Changes in Behavior

Objective: To support program participants in putting the knowledge and skills acquired during the exchange program to good use in their home countries.

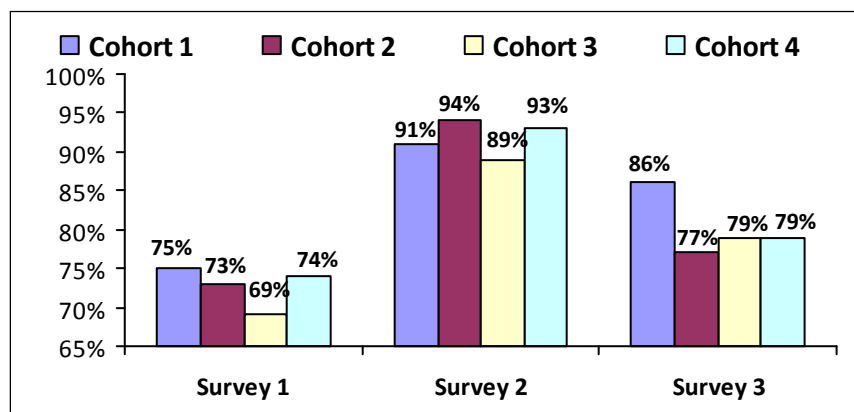


Result: Participants are very engaged in organized clubs/activities, often taking on leadership roles. They are particularly active in community service. They also use their new communication skills to inform others about the U.S. and Americans, thus breaking down stereotypes.

Part of the YES program objectives is to evaluate and assess to what degree participants use their new-found skills, knowledge, confidence and sense of empowerment on returning home and how they put these skills into effect within their communities and schools/colleges. Section IV - Changes in Behavior focuses on how participants' behavior changed as a result of participating in the YES program.

Overall, we can see most YES participants were involved in organized clubs and undertook lots of activities before coming to the United States. Encouragingly, as can be seen in Figure 17, levels of involvement increased greatly during their stay in the United States, with nine in 10 participants getting involved in organized clubs and activities. On returning home, we see the spike in involvement falls from the low 90 percentage points to the high 70 percentage points and mid 80 percentage points.

Figure 10: Participation in Organized Clubs/Activities by Cohort over time ¹³
Percentage of Survey 1, 2 & 3 respondents who participated in organized activities



¹³ These figures represent "yes" responses to the following questions:

Survey 1: "Are you involved in any organized activities or clubs?"

Survey 2: "Did you participate in any organized activities or clubs this past year in the United States?"

Survey 3: "Since completing the YES program, have you participated organized activities or clubs?"

We know from the open-ended responses that much of this can be attributed to the lack of opportunities to get involved in their schools and communities rather than a lack of interest. Many respondents commented on their frustration that these opportunities did not exist back home.

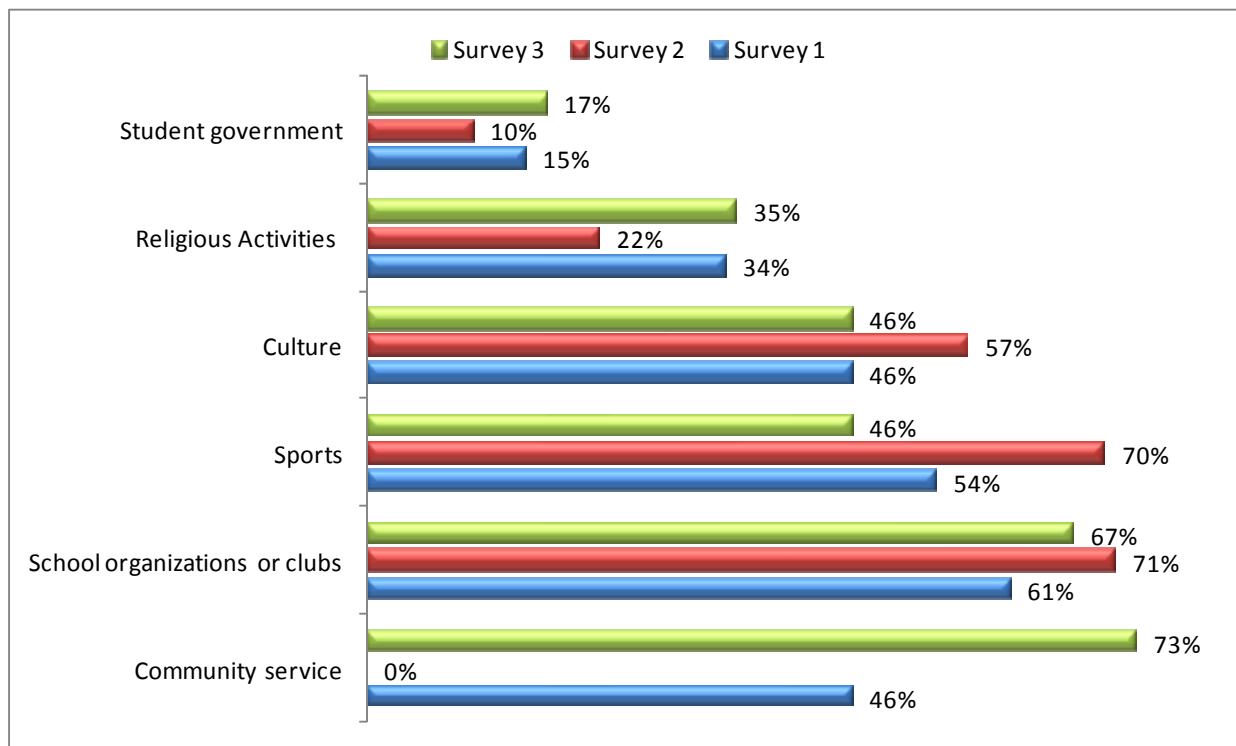
I was not happy to find that my school did not have as many clubs and activities as my American high school did.

I was not allowed to do things back home that I had been able to do when in the United States. I had more freedom than I do at home.

My community does not have the same initiatives as the community I lived in while in the United States so there are not as many opportunities to get involved.

As can be seen in Figure 18, in keeping with the overall trend, participants' greatest levels of involvement occurred during their U.S. stay. Nonetheless, the percentage of participants participating in community service after returning home is substantially higher than before the YES program.

Figure 11: Participation in Activities/Clubs over Time¹⁴
Percentage of Cohort 4 respondents who participated in organized activities



¹⁴ In Survey 2, “community service” was not listed as one of the possible answers to this question. However, as shown in Table 21 under “Community Service Involvement” below, 95 percent of Survey 2 respondents participated in community service during their year in the United States. Furthermore, as will be shown in Table 21, in response to the direct question in Survey 3, “Have you performed community service or volunteer work this past year?” 84 percent of respondents answered affirmatively, even higher than the 71 percent shown in this chart.

In Table 19 below we can see that participants across all cohorts are very involved in organized activities as a result of undertaking the program. In particular, greater percentages of Cohort 4 respondents participated in YES activities (73 percent), school organizations/clubs (67 percent), cultural activities (35 percent) and student government (17 percent) than in any of the previous cohorts, thus showing that the program continues with time to influence participants' behavior.

Only sports and political activities dropped, understandable given the locations and countries participants came from where sports facilities are lacking or are not favored to the same degree as in the United States and where politics is a highly sensitive area and involvement might not be considered "normal" for teenagers to participate in and in many cases would be frowned upon by families and local communities.

Table 19: Participant Involvement in Clubs/Activities by Cohort¹⁵
Percentage of Survey 3 respondents who participated in organized activities

Activity	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	Average
YES Alumni activities	56%	65%	69%	73%	66%
School organizations or clubs	46%	54%	62%	67%	57%
Sports	48%	51%	52%	46%	49%
Cultural activities	27%	35%	40%	46%	37%
Religious activities	29%	18%	30%	35%	28%
Student government	9%	2%	12%	17%	10%
Political activities	8%	13%	8%	7%	9%

As in previous cohorts, we can see from Figure 19 that almost half of Cohort 4 participants were already quite active in leadership roles before leaving for the United States (45 percent). During their time in the YES program, the percentage of those assuming leadership roles ("leader or assistant") spiked to 65 percent. When we look back at other cohorts, we also see a trend that shows:

- At least one-third of participants across all four cohorts are more likely to get involved in "training others" after their time in the United States.
- At least 80 percent of Survey 3 respondents across all cohorts now participate in planning organized activities, an increase from the 60's percentiles in Survey 1.
- At least 70 percent of all Survey 3 respondents now "help to plan activities/projects," compared to low 60 percentiles in Survey 1.

¹⁵ Figures for "community service" are not included here. Although the greatest percentage of respondents in all cohorts mentioned participating in community service, the figures for this question are lower than those in response to the specific question, "Have you performed community service or volunteer work this past year?" This will be discussed below under "Community Service Involvement."

Figure 12: Cohort 4 Roles Played in Clubs/Activities
Percentage of Cohort 4 respondents to Surveys 1 and 3¹⁶
who participated in organized activities

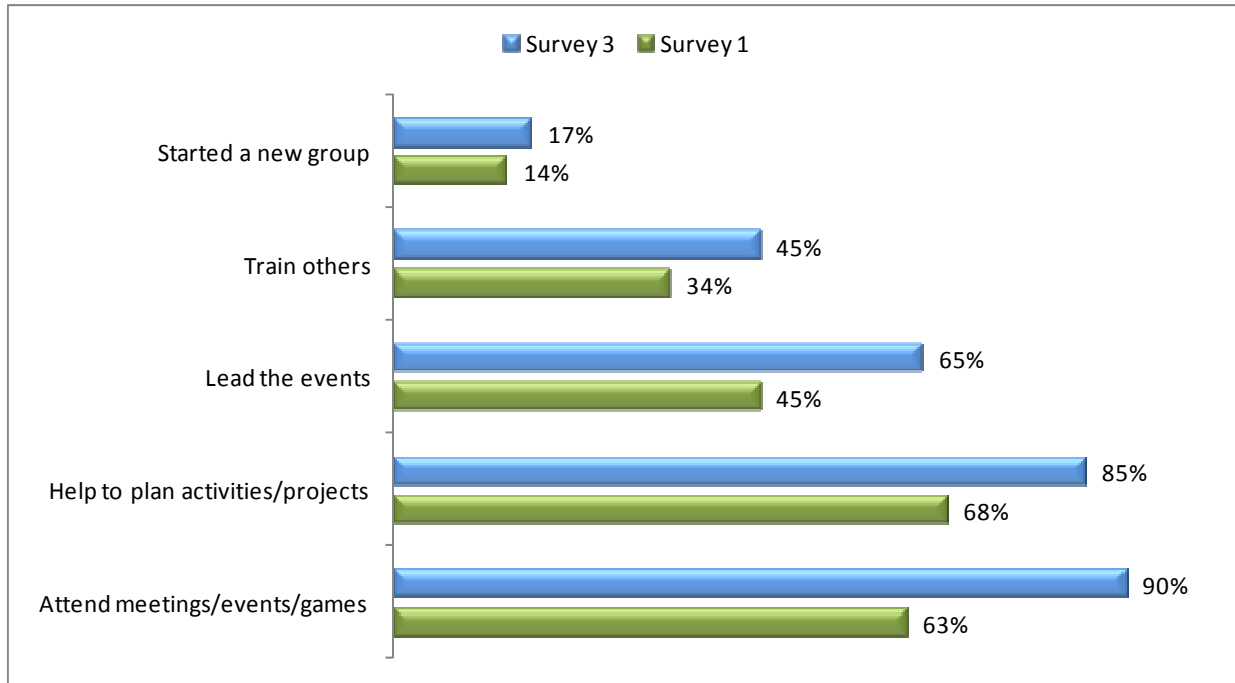


Table 20: Comparison of Participant Roles Played in Activities by Cohort
Percentage of Survey 3 respondents reporting various playing roles in activities
Cohorts 1, 2, 3 & 4

Role	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	Average
Attend meetings, events, games	82%	87%	91%	90%	88%
Help to plan activities	73%	70%	80%	85%	77%
Lead events/activities	42%	48%	52%	65%	52%
Train others	34%	34%	47%	45%	40%
Start a new group	17%	16%	17%	17%	17%

¹⁶ The Survey 2 data are not directly comparable, as the options were phrased differently. The results were as follows:

- “Member/Participant”: 94 percent
- “Leader/Assistant”: 65 percent
- “Trainer/Counselor”: 17 percent
- “Group Founder”: 7 percent

Community Service Involvement

Across all four cohorts, nearly all participants were involved in community service activities during their time in the United States. As mentioned in previous sections, their experience of community service in the United States instilled a strong desire to undertake similar involvement in their own communities upon returning home.

Indeed, it is clear from the results of each Survey 3 (one year after returning home) that the vast majority of respondents did follow through on their commitment to continue to undertake community service, with an average of eight in 10 reporting involvement in community service and/or volunteer work in their local communities. Table 21 below shows survey respondents' levels of participation while in the United States (Survey 2) and upon their return home (Survey 3) for all four cohorts.

Table 21: Community Service Involvement by Cohort
Percentage of Survey 2 and 3 respondents involved in community service
Cohorts 1, 2, 3 & 4¹⁷

	Survey 2	Survey 3
Cohort 1	83%	76%
Cohort 2	93%	78%
Cohort 3	95%	84%
Cohort 4	94%	84%

For many YES participants, their ability to get involved in their school and in their local community held a strong sense of pride for them and their families, and promoted the success of the YES program as people around them recognized their newfound skills and abilities.

When you get to be a YES student, you can't stop yourself from sharing your experience every time you meet somebody and they notice that you were an exchange student. I shared a lot of what I learned in lots of formal places like schools and youth centers and a lot of informal places—around my friends, family gatherings, and in the community. I also had informal discussions with teachers at school and all the places I have volunteered. People saw how much I had grown and matured during my year in the United States and were impressed with my increased knowledge.

When I came back from the United States, people realized how much I had changed in the year I was away. I had grown and was more mature and I was more confident and willing to share my thoughts and ideas. My family was very proud of my new status in the community and the respect I gained.

¹⁷ This table presents data for the question, "Did you perform community service or volunteer work this past year?" There is no directly comparable data from Survey 1, which did not ask this question. However, in response to the Survey 1 question, "What activities/clubs do you participate in?" the following percentages of respondents who reported participating in organized activities selected "community service" as an answer: Cohort 1: 30 percent; Cohort 2: 43 percent; Cohort 4: 39 percent.

The types of community service and volunteer work carried out included working with charity organizations helping the poor and homeless; working in orphanages for children; working to improve the environment and cleaning up their communities; volunteering with exchange organizations; helping victims of hurricanes and flood disasters; fundraising; and tutoring children, fellow students and adults. For many participants, there was also a distinct focus and appeal to working with organizations and communities who help children.

I have collected clothes and taken them to orphanages many times and also took care of babies in orphanages.

I volunteered at the local hospital and helped babies whose parents left them there.

We started a new group with friends from school and did some community service where we painted an old school, visited old citizens' center and did fundraising to collect money for poor kids.

I, along with my other friends, collected food items, clothing, toys and other stuff from our school and then we went to the orphanage and spent the day there and we gifted them all these things as their EID present.

I volunteered at a nursing home and helped the staff with the elderly people living there.

As mentioned briefly in Section II of this report, participants stated that their year in the United States strengthened their belief in the importance of equal rights for people with disabilities. Many participants acted on this strengthened belief by helping disabled people in their home communities:

I volunteered to help the disabled kids coming from different countries for the Smiling Child Festival in Istanbul, Turkey.

I volunteered at an organization "Risala" to raise money for orphans, disabled people and the poor. They make cassettes for blind people and books for those who can't hear.

I volunteered at my college and became a writer for the blind student at my college for all her examinations last year.

I helped at ... a school for the physically challenged. The children there had a lot of difficulties so it was good to help them.

I read a book and then recorded it to give it to the blind kids.

I did a fundraiser with my high school to help many handicapped children live in good conditions.

Participants also stated that their improved skills in speaking, reading and writing the English language and in computer skills after their stay in the United States gave them an opportunity to

teach others and help other students and people in their communities improve their skills. This also called on their leadership skills and reminded them how to work as part of a team.

I volunteered to teach children in my community English and talk to them about the positive things I witnessed in the United States.

I am teaching English and computer [skills] to the female doctors at the public health hospital.

I have been tutoring my younger brothers and sisters in English as I would like them to have stronger skills as this will help them in life when they are older.

I helped teach students about leadership and how to become a leader at a school conference.

I worked fixing computers for a lot of people I knew in the school and in the neighborhood.

Throughout the course of the YES program, participants volunteered for, and worked, on multiple community service initiatives during the year, as exemplified by the following quotes:

I volunteer as a math and English teacher for needy and poor children in my community. I helped organize charity events at my college for the poor. I help in rebuilding devastated parts of Pakistan and I am also working on child abuse and a few other ongoing projects.

I did lots of community service and helped improve our local environment. In this past year alone, I did more than 100 hours of volunteer work.

I joined a children's rights group and help them plan activities and attended their events. I helped my school recruit new students for the YES program. My friends and I also plan on arranging a communications club at our school in the fall session. We also made a video documentary about street kids and showed it to higher authorities and raised this issue which was being neglected for decades in our country.

I volunteered in an orphanage and participated in fundraising and running a recycling project at my high school.

I helped clean my neighborhood, contributed in getting the sewage lines fixed in our area, spent time with special [needs] children, taught poor kids in various parts of the city, planted trees, and much more.

In addition, some respondents who participated in community service reported having “created a community service event.”

I started my own group. We work with other organizations on community service. We are now holding a huge project for our town that involves exchanging books and

school supplies, and giving out free supplies for poor, needy people, and in a week we will be conducting ... the Festival of the Child in our town.

I conducted a sports camp this summer and run it with friends.

I started a new chapter of AFS in the city where I live. I became a leader for different activities at my high school and a leader in a lot of family matters.

Communicating New Understanding of the United States

Another measure of success of the program was in determining to what degree the YES participants used their improved communication and leadership skills to share their new understanding of the United States and its people with their compatriots at home, and possibly help to break down negative stereotypes.

Across all cohorts, respondents shared information about their experience in the United States with family, friends and others in their communities during their first year back at home, both informally and formally.¹⁸

I spoke in public several times at school, led several discussions about national/international issues at school or just within my family and have been passing on the knowledge that I gathered from the U.S.

At family gatherings, with family and friends, in high school, in various classes and at various occasions, I have shared information with other people about my experience in United States.

I shared information about my experience in the United States with my friends, at school, with older people I know, different kinds of people who have different points of view about the United States.

In terms of the method of communicating this information, noted in Table 22 below, the following methods of communication were used across all four cohorts:

- All participants had at least one discussion with family and friends.
- Nine in 10 had more than 10 discussions with family and friends.
- Eight in 10 held at least one formal presentation at school.
- Seven in 10 have given at least one formal presentation at a community event.
- Six in 10 have given at least one media interview.
- Five in 10 have given at least one formal presentation in a religious setting.

¹⁸ 98 percent of Cohort 1 Survey 3 participants, 97 percent of Cohort 2 Survey 3 participants, 97 percent of Cohort 3 Survey 3 participants and 97 percent of Cohort 4 Survey 3 participants reported having shared information about their experience.

Table 22: Sharing Information about U.S. by Cohort
Percentage of Survey 3 respondents who shared information with others
Cohort 1, 2, 3 & 4

	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	Average
Over 10 discussions with family/friends	86%	85%	89%	85%	86%
At least one presentation at school	76%	87%	75%	81%	80%
At least one presentation at comm. event	70%	72%	58%	64%	66%
At least one media interview	62%	63%	47%	48%	55%
At least one presentation in religious setting	59%	61%	33%	37%	48%

Participants from all cohorts are confident that their information-sharing efforts have produced very positive results. On average, and as illustrated in Table 23:

- Nine in 10 believe that their family and friends “now understand American people better” because of the information they shared.
- Nine in 10 think their family and friends “now understand the United States better.”
- Nine in 10 think their family and friends “now have a more positive opinion of American people.”
- Eight in 10 believe their family and friends “now have a more positive opinion of the United States.”

Table 23: Positive Impact of Sharing Information by Cohort
Percentage of Survey 3 respondents reporting a positive impact of sharing information
Cohorts 1, 2, 3 & 4

Family and friends now...	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	Avg.
Understand American people better	84%	95%	93%	93%	91%
Understand the U.S. better	88%	90%	91%	93%	91%
Have a more positive opinion of American people	84%	89%	85%	88%	87%
Have a more positive opinion of the US	76%	80%	84%	87%	82%

Maintaining Contacts through Involvement in Alumni Activities

Many participants have continued to be involved in organized YES alumni activities as a way to maintain contacts and links not only with fellow participants but also with organizers.

Approximately two-thirds of all participants have participated in YES alumni activities and an average of 17 percent stated an intention to get involved in the future.

Table 24: Participation in YES Activities by Cohort
Percentage of Survey 3 respondents who have participated and/or intend to do so
Cohorts 1, 2, 3 & 4

Participation in YES Alumni Activities	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	Avg.
<i>Have participated</i>	59%	65%	69%	68%	65%
<i>Intend to participate in the future</i>	18%	20%	16%	15%	17%

As previously mentioned, participants across all cohorts have collaborated on community service activities since returning to their home countries. In addition, many attended workshops, lectures and social events with fellow participants, often coordinated by exchange organizations. Not only do these events help to keep participants connected to the YES network in their home countries, but they also aid participants by building on the lessons learned during their time in the United States.

I trained the YES students for the year 2006-2007 at the pre-departure orientation here in Pakistan.

I've remained heavily involved with the YES program particularly through my school as they are encouraging other students to apply to go to the United States

I get involved on a monthly basis in meetings to do with the development of the program.

I like to keep in touch, not only because I have made good friends through the YES program but also because I want to see it succeed and prosper because it is very good for the United States and my country to keep dialogue open at every level and we know we matter now, thanks to the program.

As shown in Figure 20 and Table 25, the most popular YES alumni activities among participants were social gatherings organized by exchange organizations, and recruitment for future YES participants—most YES participants participated in such activities at least once during the past year.

Figure 13: Cohort 4 Participation in YES Alumni Activities
Percentage of Survey 3 respondents who participated in YES participants activities

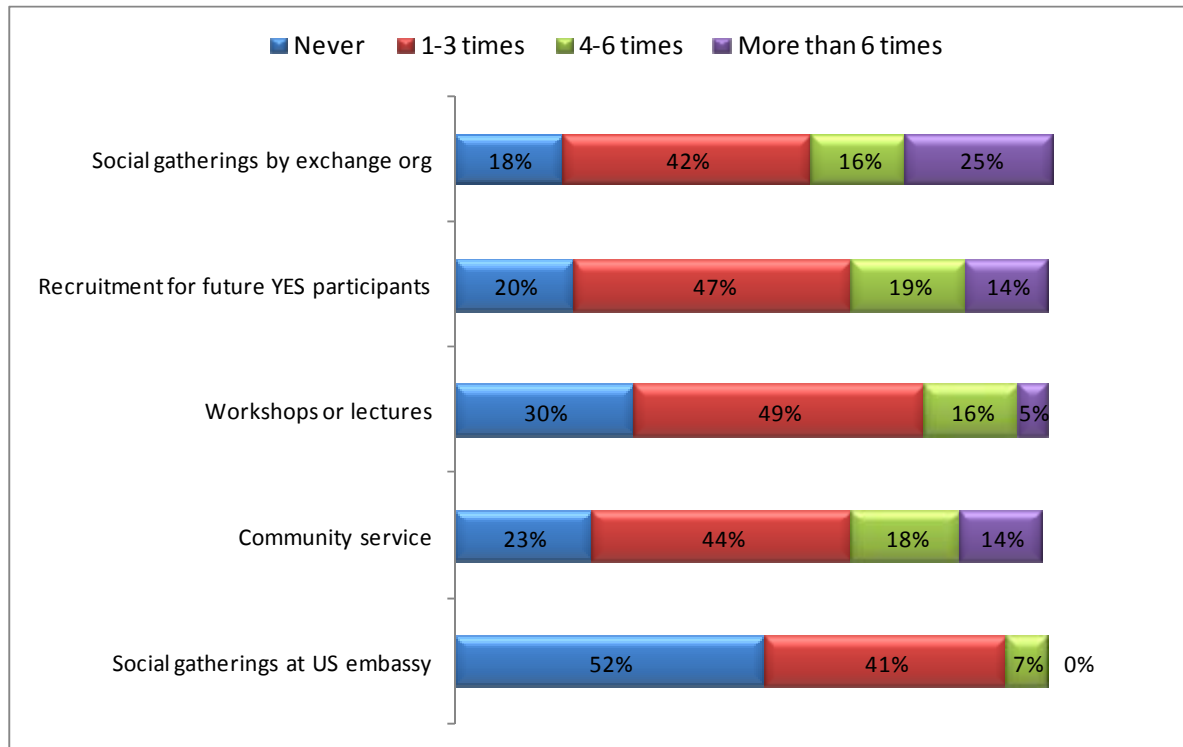


Table 25: Frequent Participation in YES Alumni Activities by Cohort
Percentage of Survey 3 Respondents who participated in YES alumni activities

Activity	Participated at least 4 times				
	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	Avg.
Social gatherings by exchange organization	43%	35%	39%	41%	40%
Community service	19%	31%	34%	32%	29%
Recruitment for YES participants	20%	32%	32%	33%	29%
Workshops or lectures	26%	32%	28%	21%	27%

In their responses to open-ended questions, many participants wrote about their involvement in recruiting YES participants. They seemed quite proud to be able to help select future participants and to “train” or “mentor” them:

I volunteer for AFS in my city, Bogor. I was a coordinator for the first selection of the AFS program in my city. We promoted AFS and YES in schools and to the media.

I help to organize social gatherings for participants of YES and other exchange organizations. I give advice during these social events to other exchange students.

Teaching Americans about their Culture and Societies

On an interesting note, despite the excellent education system in the United States, many participants were taken back by the limited knowledge students and adults alike had of their home countries and indeed the world as a whole. Throughout the study, many YES participants stated that the education system does not go far enough to teach American student about other countries' geography, economies and cultures. That said, they were equally impressed by Americans' openness and eagerness to learn about their home countries and societies.

Even though Americans do not know a lot about our part of the world, they make a conscious effort to do so and are very open to everyone's opinions and hardly take offense.

They don't know much about Arabs, but we can help them understand through the YES program.

Someone asked me 'if you are from Africa, how come you are not black'? I was not insulted because they were curious and not being rude so some people are willing to ask questions so that they learn.

V. Links

Objective: To foster personal ties and institutional links.



Result: Participant maintain regular contact with the host families, friends and others they met in the United States.

In Survey 2, the post-program survey, participants expressed intentions to keep in touch with their host families, friends and others they met while in the United States. The follow-up survey confirms participants across all cohorts have fulfilled this desire and have stayed in touch with friends and contacts as promised:

- Four in 10 have been in contact with their host families at least once;
- Three in 10 stay in touch with American friends or classmates;
- Three in 10 stay in touch with other YES participants;
- Two in 10 stay in touch with other foreign students met in the U.S.;
- One in 10 stay in touch with teachers or mentors met in the U.S.; and
- Almost one in 10 stay in touch with others they met in the U.S., including neighbors, church/mosque members, and the staff of YES or their exchange organization.

*Table 26: Weekly Contact with People Met on the YES Program by Cohort
Percentage of Survey 3 Respondents
Cohorts 1, 2, 3 & 4*

	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	Average
Host family	42%	46%	33%	32%	38%
American friends	33%	38%	33%	35%	35%
YES participants	37%	30%	25%	29%	30%
Foreign students	25%	19%	16%	16%	19%
Teachers/mentors	7%	11%	6%	3%	7%

Nonetheless, similar to previous cohorts, more than a third of respondents have had someone from their YES experience—host families, American friends, YES participants or other people they met—visit them since the end of the program.

VI. Levels of Satisfaction with Exchange Experience

Over the course of the four cohorts, YES respondents were asked to rate their levels of satisfaction with the exchange program. Overall satisfaction (very/somewhat satisfied) across all cohorts was exceptionally high, with nine in 10 respondents rating the overall experience a success. On an even more positive note, almost all respondents (97 percent) said they would recommend the program to others and, as evident from the qualitative research, they are engaging others by talking about their experiences and how valuable the program was to them.

Yes participants' satisfaction with the program spanned across program elements as follows:

- Nine in 10 were satisfied with the program orientation.
- Nine in 10 were satisfied with their host families.
- Nine in 10 were satisfied with their social experiences in the U.S.
- Eight in 10 were very/somewhat satisfied with the helpfulness of local coordinators.
- Eight in 10 enjoyed and were satisfied with the activities arranged around their program.
- Six in 10 were satisfied with their ability to engage in religious activities while in the U.S.

Table 27: Levels of Satisfaction with Exchange Experience
Percentage of Survey 2 respondents who are "very" and "somewhat" satisfied
Average responses across all cohorts

<i>Satisfaction during your stay in the United States in these areas of your life:</i>		Very & Somewhat Satisfied (Taken from Survey 2 scores)	Average for All 4 Cohorts
Overall Satisfaction with Year spent in the United States	Cohort 1	93%	94%
	Cohort 2	93%	
	Cohort 3	94%	
	Cohort 4	94%	
Helpfulness of Local Coordinators	Cohort 1	85%	83%
	Cohort 2	82%	
	Cohort 3	82%	
	Cohort 4	82%	
Program Orientation	Cohort 1	90%	89%
	Cohort 2	87%	
	Cohort 3	90%	
	Cohort 4	90%	

<i>Satisfaction during your stay in the United States in these areas of your life:</i>		Very & Somewhat Satisfied (Taken from Survey 2 scores)	Average for All 4 Cohorts
<i>Life with Host Family</i>	Cohort 1	90%	88%
	Cohort 2	89%	
	Cohort 3	88%	
	Cohort 4	84%	
<i>YES program activities (e.g. leadership program)</i>	Cohort 1	84%	82%
	Cohort 2	79%	
	Cohort 3	85%	
	Cohort 4	80%	
<i>Social life in the U.S.</i>	Cohort 1	91%	91%
	Cohort 2	90%	
	Cohort 3	90%	
	Cohort 4	91%	
<i>Religious life in the U.S.</i>	Cohort 1	60%	59%
	Cohort 2	56%	
	Cohort 3	61%	
	Cohort 4	60%	
<i>Would you recommend the YES program?</i>	Cohort 1	95%	97%
	Cohort 2	98%	
	Cohort 3	98%	
	Cohort 4	98%	

VII. Challenges Returning Home

Over the course of the four cohorts, we have seen that returning home presented some challenges for students. An average of 16 percent described their return as “very difficult” while a further 35 percent stated it was “somewhat difficult.” Only 17 percent on average stated they had no difficulty at all on returning home after their year in the United States.

Table 28: Difficulty of Returning Home by Cohort
Percentage of Survey 3 Respondents
Cohorts 1, 2, 3 & 4

	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	Average
Very difficult	14%	21%	16%	14%	16%
Somewhat difficult	38%	32%	32%	36%	35%
Only a little difficult	31%	30%	32%	35%	32%
Not difficult at all	17%	17%	18%	15%	17%

When asked what difficulties they faced, YES participants stated a combination of readjusting to the educational system and the overall culture shock. Most participants stated it was trying to fit in again but also rebelling against the lost freedom they had while in the United States.

I had difficulties in adjusting to my previous life. I got used to the lifestyle in the United States.

I had difficulty building a close relationship again with my family, friends and other people considering the changes in me and in them while I was gone.

It was difficult having different opinions and points of view than those I had before I lived in the United States.

The teaching method was very difficult for me. Here in my home country almost everything is taught without practical application, especially in science subjects.

I had a lot of conflicts with my family. My society was unable to accept my level of openness when I spoke.

I guess I changed a little bit in my behavior and some people complained they thought I had completely changed.

I had difficulties adjusting to the way of life, such as my parents interfering in my life and telling me what to do. I lost some of the freedom and rights as a woman/girl that I had in the United States.

Many participants reported feeling as though everything at home had changed and their native country seemed new and unfamiliar. Some had trouble readjusting to the culture, way of life, societal structure and expectations, food and more. Many even had difficulty readjusting to speaking their native tongue.

I had difficulty with reverse culture shock, as if I returned home knowing nothing. It feels like everything is new to me.

I had difficulty adjusting to life in a society that I have grown up in my whole life but recently has seemed to me like a foreign country.

I had difficulty adjusting back to the standards of my own country, for example food, clothing, formalities, etc. In fact, I am still ... in reverse culture shock.

I couldn't eat my food because of the changes to taste.

I had difficulty communicating in my mother tongue for the first month.

I spoke half English when I came back to my country.

My accent has changed, and my friends had a hard time understanding me.

The language was a little difficult because I'm not up to date on new slang words.

Other difficulties related to education and the schools in which they were previously enrolled. For many, their year in school in the United States did not count towards their high school graduation requirements; therefore, they had to repeat an entire year to qualify for graduation. This led to difficulties such as having to make new friends, catching up on the curriculum and social difficulties in school. It strained some friendships as friends had moved on and some participants felt like outcasts in their old worlds. Others stated they were fortunate to have that year qualify and this allowed them to move directly to college and university, thus easing the sense of exile.

I had difficulty adjusting to new and younger classmates.

The method of teaching is so different to what I had got used to. I found it very difficult to settle back into the style of classes we have at home—here it is much for academic and there is less room to converse with teachers.

I didn't repeat the year, so I had to do two years of school in one year.

I found it difficult to fit in again. My old friends no longer accepted me as I had been gone so long and because I was in a new year in school, I had to work hard to make new friends and try fit in. I felt different to everybody in my school so it was hard.

I was lucky that my year in the United States counted in my school. It meant when I came back I was able to prepare for college just like my friends. That made it easier to fit in.

In my country, school is all about memorizing and studying things you won't use in the future. But in the U.S., you take classes and subject that you are interested in and love, which helps you pass easily and get grades that you actually deserve.

Some of my friends were not very quick to accept me back. They had moved on and they thought I had changed too much to fit in again. It took a lot of work and time to rebuild friendships at school.

Across all four cohorts, participants frequently mentioned the difficulty of adjusting to their home environment and the lack of independence they have at home compared to the autonomy they experienced and witnessed while living with host families in the United States.

Many stated that it was not that their host families did not care for them or provide for them but that they were more relaxed in their method of parenting and gave their own children and the YES participants more freedom and treated them as more mature teenagers who would make sensible decisions rather than children and “kids” who needed to have all their decisions made for them and choices determined by their parents.

This view also seemed slightly stronger among female participants who faced returning to societies where women are not granted the same levels of independence as males.

I was not allowed to do a lot of things at home even though I considered myself mature and responsible enough to handle them, and had done them while I lived in the United States.

I had a hard time trying to tell people that I changed, and I'm not a CHILD or KID.

My parents didn't accept me as the new person I became.

I had to forget all about the U.S. and how much freedom I had there.

I had difficulty getting used to being ... told “you can't do this and that.”

I had a lot of difficulties adhering to the rules of my parents. They were not used to having a child rebel against their rulings. This was something new for everyone because I was not used to rebelling and they were not used to my attitude.

For others there were difficulties in trying to explain their new views on Americans and the United States. Prior to coming to the United States, most participants agreed that they held the views of most of their friends and families about all things American, yet now they were coming back and trying to convince people what they believed was not so. For some, it was easier to take than others. Many participants stated they had to work extremely hard to convince people that what they were communicating was true. Family members also found it difficult to break away from the stereotype images they had (not unlike the participants themselves before they left for America) and therefore it took time to convince them it was so. In some cases resistance remained but on a positive note, most participants stated that people came around because they

knew the participants spoke the truth and the more stories they heard the more they realized that this new image of America had merit.

Sometimes it was difficult to get people in my community to understand about America. They were disinclined to believe such a difference was possible between what we had been told through the media and TV and what I experienced.

My family and friends took some time to understand my feelings about the United States and thoughts about my own country.

It was difficult for me having different opinions and points of view to those I had before my experience in the United States so I understood that it was going to be very difficult for people to believe what I told them when I came back a year later.

When people only know one way about something, it is hard to convince them of another. It took me a long time to convince people that Americans are really nice and are like us in a lot of ways.

When I was living in the United States, I felt like an ambassador of my country but it was hard to know how to be the best representative of the United States in Afghanistan.

Despite all the challenges they faced upon returning home, half of Cohort 4 respondents reported having little or no difficulty adjusting. In fact, a few emphasized that their YES experience had equipped them to deal with such transitions:

This YES program experience already has helped us in adjusting to any kind of people or place.

I had no difficulties because I was prepared to be home and change what I can.

It felt strange at first but once I settled back in everything was fine. My family loved having me back home and they respected that I had matured and grown up.

My siblings made it a little easier for me to settle back in as we were able to be together again and they were able to tell me things that had changed and helped me get used to family and school life again.

VIII. Conclusion

The evaluation of the first four cohorts of the YES program clearly demonstrates the success of the program in meeting its objectives in terms of 1) increasing learning and understanding about the United States; 2) strengthening leadership skills; 3) promoting greater involvement in community and organizational activities, and 4) fostering long-lasting memories and ties between the students and those they met during their exchange experience. The longitudinal nature of the study allowed us to witness and record how the YES participants have developed and grown as individuals, as well as how their views on and understanding of the United States have evolved.

The findings highlight that the YES participants emerged from the program with an improved and more nuanced understanding of American society and culture, with greater tolerance for other peoples and cultures, with much-improved leadership and communication skills, and with a sense of empowerment that they can affect change in their communities and beyond. The potential longer-lasting impact of the YES program is illustrated by the finding that one year after their programs ended, the YES participants from Cohorts 1 through 4 remain committed to becoming more involved in and working for change in their home communities, to changing the views of those around them about the United States, and to remaining in touch with their host families and friends.

In sum, the evaluation showed that from their pre-program orientation through their exchange year in the United States through their engagement in alumni activities, the YES students exhibited considerable and lasting changes in their understanding, attitudes and behaviors with regard to the United States and their own roles in their home communities. The impact of the program is best illustrated by the words of the participants themselves:

I started to reflect on something about all the different YES students I met. What I reflected on gave me back some hope and joy and a sense of togetherness. The YES program unites us all under one umbrella. It defines a common goal for us. I realized that under the YES program, we all have the same aim and objective to work on, and that is “promoting peace.” Although we are people of different colors, we are one and share the same goal! Indeed, different colors, one people!

IX. Demographic Information

The following chart presents the demographic profile of participants who participated in all four cohorts of the YES program. The groups were evenly divided between males and females. The majority of respondents come from a major urban center (either the capital or a big city). Also, the majority of respondents were Muslim, followed by a minority of Christians.

Table 29: Cohorts 1, 2, 3 and 4 Participant Demographics

	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4
Male	53%	55%	51%	48%
Female	47%	45%	49%	52%
Location				
Capital City	34%	30%	28%	27%
Big City	41%	44%	39%	39%
Town/Small City	21%	21%	24%	28%
Village	4%	5%	9%	6%
Religion				
Muslim	82%	80%	80%	73%
Christian	13%	14%	15%	17%
Not close to any	2%	3%	5%	5%
Hindu	-	1%	4%	3%
Buddhist	-	1%	2%	1%
Other	3%	1%	2%	1%

Most respondents come from well-educated, relatively well-to-do families. Just over half of their mothers and almost two-thirds of their fathers have university or post-graduate degrees. Nearly all respondents have televisions, radios and mobile phones in their home. Most also have computers and more than two-thirds have internet access.

Table 30: Cohorts 1, 2, 3 and 4 Media Ownership/Access

Activity	Ownership/Access			
	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4
TV	98%	98%	98%	96%
Radio	96%	96%	94%	93%
Telephone	91%	88%	86%	82%
Cell Phone	92%	96%	97%	97%
Computer	84%	85%	90%	87%
Internet Access	76%	73%	75%	70%

Table 31: Cohorts 1, 2, 3 and 4, Survey 1 – Percentage of Fathers with Secondary Education or Higher

Education	% of Fathers			
	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4
Secondary/Technical	-	28%	28%	27%
University or Higher	-	55%	58%	58%

Table 32: Cohorts 1, 2, 3 and 4, Survey 1 – Percentage of Mothers with Secondary Education or Higher

Activity	% of Mothers			
	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4
Secondary/Technical	-	30%	32%	29%
University or Higher	-	51%	53%	52%

Appendix I –YES Participants by Country, Cohort and Exchange Organization

(Based on Numbers of Participants in Survey 1)

Exchange Organization	Country	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	TOTAL	
AFS	Egypt	14	37	40	41	132	
	Indonesia	20	36	87	80	223	
	Turkey	19	17	37	36	109	
	Malaysia	20	-	30*	36**	86	
	Philippines	-	41	40	39	120	
	Saudi Arabia	-	-	15	-	15	
	India	-	-	35	32	67	
	Thailand	-	-	-	15	15	
	TOTAL AFS						767
	American Councils	Afghanistan		40	39	36	115
TOTAL AMERICAN COUNCILS						115	
AYUSA	Palestine (Gaza + West Bank)	2	23	26	31	82	
	Jordan	1	17	26	29	73	
	Kuwait	7	13	12	14	46	
	Lebanon	9	24	41	34	108	
	Pakistan	29	40	45	43	157	
	Syria	6	13	16	-	35	
	Tunisia	3	6	14	22	45	
	Yemen	12	20	27	31	90	
	Iraq	-	-	17	11	28	
	Israel	-	5	15	12	32	
	Morocco	-	-	22	28	50	
	Oman	-	3	8	4	15	
	Qatar	-	-	5	-	5	
	Ghana	-	-	-	16	16	
	Other/no resp	-	-	-	-	0	
	TOTAL AYUSA						782
IRIS	Nigeria	22	15	19	20	76	
TOTAL IRIS						76	
Nacel Open Door	Algeria	-	-	23	4	27	
	Bangladesh	-	10	20	18	48	
TOTAL NACEL OPEN DOOR						75	
Total Respondents all Countries		164	360	659	632	1815	

Note: Numbers of participants fluctuated throughout the year as some students arrived and others departed for example:

* 30 Malaysian students arrived in January (Cohort 3) but did not complete Survey 1 (Pre-travel). They did however participate in Survey 2 and Survey 3.

** 36 Malaysian students arrived in January (Cohort 3) and were able to participate in all 3 surveys.

Appendix II - Exchange Organizations

AFS-USA

AFS-EGYPT

AFS-GHANA

AFS-INDIA

AFS-INDONESIA

AFS-MALAYSIA

AFS-PHILIPPINES

AFS-SAUDI ARABIA

AFS-THAILAND

AFS-TURKEY

AYUSA

2003-2004 – Pakistan, Jordan, West Bank, Gaza, Kuwait, Lebanon, Yemen, Syria, Tunisia

2004-2005 – Pakistan, Jordan, West Bank, Gaza, Kuwait, Lebanon, Yemen, Syria, Tunisia, UAE, Morocco, Iraq

AMIDEAST

AMIDEAST - IRAQ

AMIDEAST -SYRIA

AMIDEAST -TUNISIA

AMIDEAST - MOROCCO

AMIDEAST - JORDAN

AMIDEAST – WEST BANK/GAZA

AMIDEAST - YEMEN

AMIDEAST - KUWAIT

AMIDEAST - LEBANON

AMIDEAST - OMAN

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION & RESOURCE NETWORK (iEARN)

iEARN BANGLADESH (Taking over recruitment late '05 for the 2006-07 Cohort)

iEARN ISRAEL

iEARN Pakistan