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**Students' Reflection of Cross-Cultural Experiences: A Study Abroad Narrative**

Alexandra Dudley

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**ABSTRACT**

This study sought to explore the cross-cultural experiences of students who had studied abroad during their undergraduate college years. Previous research has shown the importance and impact of study abroad and cultural experiences on student development. A qualitative approach, specifically a narrative method, was utilized to best understand students' stories and how they made meaning of their study abroad experiences. Four participants were interviewed one-on-one, and their stories or narratives are provided here. This study revealed that students studying abroad with adequate support will experience an array of cross-cultural influences that leave lasting impacts on their personal and professional lives.

Keywords: Study Abroad, International Education, Culture, Adaptation, Support, College, Higher Education

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

A trend toward intercultural competency and globalization started after World War II and has continued into the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Morgan, 1975; Tsai, 2011). With this trend, universities across the United States have continued to increase their efforts to promote study abroad experiences to their students “as a primary means of developing global and intercultural competency among American students” (Twombly et al., 2012, p.1). The 2018 Open Doors Report on International Education Exchange found that approximately one in ten U.S. students study abroad during their undergraduate years (U.S. Department of State, 2021). As the importance of global competency and students’ interest in study abroad opportunities continue to increase, it is ever more important for institutions and their study abroad programs to thoroughly understand the cultural benefits and challenges students studying abroad face.

Research has found that students receive several cultural benefits from studying abroad, including cultural understanding, cultural respect, and acceptance of unfamiliar or differing perspectives (Conner & Roberts, 2015; Gaia, 2015). Institutions have the opportunity to create students who are “ambassadors of international and cultural education” who teach others about the culture they have studied and come to understand (Gaia, 2015, p. 21). For study abroad programs to instill students with such values and knowledge, institutions must understand the cross-cultural experiences that occurs when individuals are faced with an unfamiliar culture and must learn how to function and develop a stable relationship with the new environment (Kim, 2005). Along with the benefits, there are several challenges associated with cross-cultural experiences. A common challenge that students who study abroad face is culture shock. In fact, Miller (1993) found that students studying abroad are “one group hardest hit by culture shock”

(p. 3). Examining the cross-cultural experiences of students who have studied abroad is one avenue available to researchers to provide insight into the challenges students face. It also provides institutions and study abroad programs with the information they need to appropriately prepare and support students throughout the entirety of their study abroad journey.

Cross-cultural experiences in students who have studied abroad has been found to be multi-faceted, integrated, and involving both positive and negative culturally related components (Conner & Roberts, 2015). Institutions and study abroad departments have the responsibility and opportunity to help prepare students for the challenges they may face abroad, and they must provide support to help them appropriately meet and overcome such difficulties (Morse et al., 2017). Understanding cross-cultural experiences provides a unique opportunity for institutions to gain greater awareness of the cultural challenges students face. This will allow universities to better equip and provide students with adequate support throughout their study abroad experience.

To study the process of adaption and change, Morgan (1975) used participant observation and written questionnaires over a three-year period to study students participating in a study abroad program in Switzerland. The author stated that “the valued outcome of study abroad, stated very simply, is to help the individual acquire a deep understanding of another culture, and to begin to appreciate and develop empathy for people who are different” (Morgan, 1975, p. 210). In order to provide this opportunity for cultural recognition and respect, institutions must acknowledge and address the cultural challenges students studying abroad experience. This study will examine how students studying abroad have cross-cultural experiences and the challenges associated with the experiences.

### **Purpose of the Study**



The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the cross-cultural experiences of individuals who have studied abroad. At this stage in the research, cross-cultural adaptation will be generally defined as a process in which individuals attempt to create and sustain a stable relationship with the unfamiliar environment/culture that they are in (Kim, 2005).

### **Research Questions**

This study seeks to examine the cross-cultural experiences that students studying abroad experienced. The following questions are used as a guide for the research:

RQ1. How do students studying abroad describe their experiences in a different culture?

RQ2. How has the experience of studying abroad impacted students beyond their time abroad?

RQ3. What types of support do students who studied abroad describe needing and receiving during the experience?

### **Significance of the Study**

Study abroad continues to be an increasing phenomenon among college students (U.S. Department of State, 2021). In fact, more than 300,000 American students study or volunteer abroad for college or academic credit each year (U.S. Department of State, 2021). Studying abroad is a promising experience for students that prepares them to take on global challenges and transforms them into responsible citizens.

Among the many benefits studying abroad provides is that students are exposed to international perspectives and must learn how to navigate unfamiliar cultures (Conner & Roberts, 2015; Gaia, 2015; U.S. Department of State, 2021). However, research has shown that students need guidance to recognize and understand cultural differences and traditions (Conner & Roberts, 2015). Students studying abroad, for either short or long periods of time, are often

vulnerable to challenges, such as culture shock, while transitioning to a new culture and they require adequate levels of support regarding their experiences across cultures (Miller, 1993; Morse et al., 2017).

My personal interest in the experiences of college students' studying abroad comes from my time as an undergraduate student. I began undergraduate college with a desire to travel and an intention to study abroad. However, my true passion for study abroad experiences occurred after I returned from my own study abroad trip. My experience was riddled with unforeseen challenges, but it was also an extremely positive adventure. The locations I studied abroad, Australia and New Zealand, differed from my home culture in several ways. However, I noticed that friends studying abroad in locations that were even more culturally different than our own had experienced even more difficulty adapting to the unfamiliar culture. With the understanding that the cultural experiences I had on my trip highly influenced my journey, I was further interested in how cultural experiences occur for students studying abroad and how it impacts the outcome and experience of the trip. As time has passed from when I studied abroad, the experience has continued to be impactful in my current life. I consider my cultural competence as a life-long learning process, and my interest in international experiences is continually amplified by the memories and lessons I took from my time abroad.

The cross-cultural adaptation process often comes into play when students find themselves in a new, unfamiliar culture and must discover methods to establish a healthy and functional relationship with the new environment (Kim, 2005). Examining study abroad students' cross-cultural experiences, with attention to their levels of challenges and support, will provide information on how students studying abroad face cross-cultural challenges. Exploring the types of preparation and support throughout the experience will help in understanding how

students cope with or take on these challenges. This will also provide insight into how institutions and study abroad administrators can better prepare and provide support and resources for their students.

Ultimately, the goal of this study is to fill the gap in research that exists surrounding study abroad experiences and their future impact on students. Although the cultural experiences of students who study abroad have been well-examined, little research exists that details how these experiences influence students' purpose and integrity development. This gap exists mainly because these aspects of student development can be difficult to determine while students are still in the experience or shortly removed from it. Unlike previous research, this study examines the journey of students who are further removed from their study abroad experience and can now reflect on their experiences and development through a different lens.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The goal of this qualitative study is to examine the cultural experiences of students who have studied abroad. With this intention in mind, although I attempted to create a large and diverse sample population, the scope of this research is limited to the participants available and their experiences. This has resulted in a narrow window of participants. However, with the goal of this study being to deeply understand the cultural experiences of study abroad students, having a small number of in-depth and comprehensive interviews appears to be the best way to obtain this information. Since the participants volunteer to participate, another limitation is that those who want to volunteer their time to speak about their study abroad experiences typically have had positive experiences abroad.

I believe it is also worth noting that this research is coming at a unique time in history. With the global pandemic, COVID-19, and the rise of social justice movements, such as the

Black Lives Matter movement, the time the research is being conducted is unprecedented. Although all the participants studied abroad before these events occurred, the timing of the interviews should be considered.

### **Definitions of Terms**

*Cross-cultural adaptation.* A process in which individuals seek to create and sustain a stable relationship with the unfamiliar environment/culture that they are in (Kim, 2005).

*Culture.* The socially transmitted patterns and behavior, such as knowledge, belief, law, customs, and so on, that are shared by a particular group of people (Birukou et al., 2013).

*Culture shock.* An integrated experience that results when individuals experience stressors that occur as a result from contact with a different or unknown culture (Winkelman, 1994).

*Education abroad.* Any education that takes place outside of the individual's home country (Forum on Education Abroad, 2011).

*Study abroad.* A subtype of education abroad that is designed to result in an individual working toward an academic degree from their home institution (Forum on Education Abroad, 2011).

### **Summary**

As global competency and study abroad programs across the United States continue to grow in their prevalence and importance, the need to understand the cultural benefits and challenges that students studying abroad face is ever more relevant (Tsai, 2011; Twombly et al., 2012). Studying abroad gives institutions the opportunity to provide their students with an experience that enhances their cultural acceptance, cultural respect, and further develops their international interests and education (Conner & Roberts, 2015; Gaia, 2015). Examining the

cultural experiences that students studying abroad experience will provide insight into what challenges they face and how institutions can best prepare and support their students, as well as how these experiences impacted students' life choices, purposes, goals, and values.

## CHAPTER II

### Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to examine the cross-cultural experiences that college students studying abroad experience during their time abroad. This literature review elaborates on the study abroad process and experience. It will examine the history of study abroad, the level of access available for students to study abroad, and the types of study abroad experiences. It will also explore the impacts of study abroad, as well as examine cross-cultural adaptation and the W-curve theory. This review will address the challenges that students studying abroad face in context with their cross-cultural experiences and the support these students may require to have a successful study abroad experience. It will conclude with an exploration of Chickering and Reisser's (1993) theory on the seven vectors of student development as a theoretical framework.

### Study Abroad

Study abroad experiences include any form of education that results in an individual gaining academic credit in a place that is outside of their home country (Forum on Education Abroad, 2011). American students have studied abroad in wide variety of ways since colonial times (Twombly et al., 2012). Into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, study abroad experiences have continued to diversify in its destinations, durations, methods, and purposes. Research has shown that students who study abroad gain a number of benefits from the experience, including increased levels of cultural and global competence and a greater preparedness to live and work in a diverse world (Gaia, 2015; Kitsantas & Meyers, 2001). Along with the benefits, students who study abroad face many challenges during their time abroad and may require various levels of support to counter the difficulties (Goldoni, 2015; Morse et al., 2017).

### *History*

The United States has a long history of sending students to foreign lands (Twombly et al., 2012). Students have studied internationally since colonial times. Beginning in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the term junior year abroad or JYA was used to describe students who went abroad, often on ships, to gain language skills, cross-cultural knowledge, and individual development (Twombly et al., 2012, p. 15). The JYA, as well as faculty-led tours, became the main paths of international study (Giedt et al., 2015). The types of students that were studying abroad at that time were mainly wealthy and European (Twombly et al., 2012). At that time, study abroad was “indeed for the few” (Abrams & Hatch, 1960, p. 1).

JYA and faculty-led tours continued to increase until World War II stopped the upward progress of study abroad experiences (Twombly et al., 2012). Thereafter and during the Cold War, study abroad programs in the United States slowly began to be reinvented with the help of federal programs (Giedt et al., 2015). The years following World War II, the federal government passed several initiatives to promote study abroad programs. These include the State Department Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs which provided opportunities for study abroad programs in Latin America, the Smith-Mundt Act of 1948 that connected educational exchange with information dissemination, and the Foreign Assistance Act, “which established the U.S Agency for International Development and the Peace Corps” (Twombly et al., 2012, p. 17).

Post-World War II brought on the appearance of private agencies such as the Council of International Education Exchange (CIEE) and the National Association of Foreign Affairs (NAFSA; Twombly et al., 2012, p. 18). These agencies and the federal government acts worked to fund, rebuild, and promote participation in study abroad programs. Universities used government and foundation money to improve or establish their study abroad programs (Giedt et al., 2015). In the late 1960s and early 1970s, study abroad departments began to expand the

international curriculum within the majors, and the 1980s brought on an increase in international opportunities for a wider range of majors and minors (Giedt et al., 2015). Since the 1980s, study abroad has developed and transformed into an opportunity for students to gain academic credit or work toward a degree while simultaneously being immersed in another country and culture (Twombly et al., 2012).

### *Accessibility*

Although the number of American students who study abroad has more than quadrupled between the years 1989 and 2010 (Twombly et al., 2012, p. 26), the work to diversify continues as the study abroad students remain typically White and wealthy. Additionally, data from Open Doors indicated that in 2019, approximately 59% of individuals studying abroad were female and only 41% were male (Institute of International Education, 2019). There is an array of reasons that have been researched for why minority students and students from underprivileged families are less likely to study abroad (Brux & Fry, 2010; Lorz et al., 2016). Brux and Fry (2010) accessed the interests, issues, and constraints that multicultural students experience throughout the study abroad process with the use of survey and focus groups. They found that multicultural students face a variety of constraints keeping them from studying abroad (many of which the majority students do not face) including finances, family concerns, fear of racism or discrimination, and institutional factors.

Lorz et al. (2016) used a representative data panel set of 5,808 valid cases developed from the German School Leavers Survey to research why German students from underprivileged families were less likely to study abroad. The findings of this study indicated that the financial strains of studying abroad were highly considered by students from underprivileged families. Beyond the initial fees related with tuition and travel, Lorz et al. (2016) found that students from



underprivileged families had additional financial considerations, such as the time lost from studying abroad that could be used to work side jobs and make strong earnings. Brux and Fry (2010) also found that finances were by far the most common reason multicultural students did not participate in study abroad experiences. Financial aid in the form of scholarships is common for study abroad students in the United States, but these scholarships are often dependent on a needs-base or merit-base, and often go unknown to students (Lien, 2007).

Brux and Ngoboka (2002) found that many of the multicultural students in their research on underrepresented students within international education did not participate in study abroad experiences due to negative family attitudes regarding the value of international experiences. For example, 53% of Asian American students and 60% of African American students in Brux and Ngoboka's study noted family disapproval as a reason for nonparticipation. This extends into family and work commitments that limits students' ability to travel for long periods of time.

Both multicultural students and their families experience fear of racism and discrimination while studying abroad (Brux & Fry, 2010). Research has found that many African American students are apprehensive to experience a new culture (Brux & Fry, 2010; Cole, 1991; Fels, 1993). After experiencing, knowing, and understanding American racism, many African American students question the danger and value of venturing into unfamiliar variations of racism (Cole, 1991).

Brux and Fry (2010) found many institutional factors that also influence multicultural students' decision not to participate in study abroad experiences. These include academic scheduling difficulties, curriculum requirements, lack of information, and lack of encouragement or support from faculty and departments. Brux and Fry (2010) noted that these factors can be

improved upon by intentional actions from institutions, faculty members, and study abroad departments.

These discrepancies have been combated slightly by an increase in racial and ethnic minority students studying abroad (USA Study Abroad, 2019). Between the 2005/2006 academic year and the 2016/2017 academic year, the percentage of racial and ethnic minority students who study abroad increased 29.2% (USA Study Abroad, 2019). In addition, to provide opportunities for students of all economic backgrounds, scholarship and financial aid resources are now available federally and through American universities and colleges (USA Study Abroad, 2019). For example, each year the program USA Study Abroad provides 3,000 students with an international scholarship to study abroad (USA Study Abroad, 2019). Additionally, studying abroad is now completed within a variety of destinations, durations, and fields of study (Twombly et al., 2012).

### ***Study Abroad Experiences***

The types of study abroad experiences vary greatly depending on the institution (Engle & Engle, 2003). Engle and Engle (2003) examined the difficulties associated with analyzing study abroad experiences without proper categorization or precise and well-defined language. In the essay, the authors took many aspects into consideration before creating a classification system. They examined the characteristics and dimensions of study abroad experiences by looking at past data on study abroad experiences, by weighing the advantages and disadvantages of a classification system, and by considering the cross-cultural components. The authors considered seven defining components of overseas programs that helped them to create a classification system:

(1) length of student sojourn (2) entry target-language competence (3) language used in course work (4) context of academic work (5) types of student housing (6) provisions for guided/structured cultural interaction and experiential learning, and (7) guided reflection on cultural experiences (Engle & Engle, 2003, p. 8).

Taking these components into consideration, the authors composed five levels, level one: *study tour*, level two: *short-term study*, level three: *cross-cultural contact program*, level four: *cross-cultural encounter program*, and level five: *cross-cultural immersion program*. Each level is structured with different intended learning outcomes as well as different time frames. Out of all the classification systems that have been established to examine study abroad experiences, this one by Engle and Engle (2003) was chosen because of its comprehensiveness and attention to cross-cultural competence.

**Study Tour.** Level one or *study tour* typically involves a short duration of several days to a few weeks (Engle & Engle, 2003). These may occur over a break in the academic year, like spring break or winter break, or may be for a short period of time over the summer (Sachau et al., 2010). Sachau et al. (2010) studied three types of short-term study abroad programs, including study tours, to examine the characteristics and benefits of such programs and provide suggestions for managing them. The authors found that participants in study tours are likely to stay in hotels or dorm rooms as a group. English is typically the language used for those programs that are coming from the United States' colleges (Sachau et al., 2010). The course work and the academic work is typically led or primarily coordinated by faculty from home institutions.

Cultural encounters may or may not be a main goal of study tour experiences, and often it is an either/or situation (Engle & Engle, 2003). For example, a French professor may be leading a group of students in a French-speaking country with the intent to have students immersed in the

culture as well as the language. However, another French professor may lead a group in a French-speaking country where they lead all activities and tours, and the students speak English throughout the trip. Despite its short duration, research shows that study tours experiences “can increase interest in the course topics, country, people, and it can help students gain the confidence they need to travel and vacation abroad” (Sachau et al., 2010, p. 653).

**Short-term Study.** Level two or *short-term study* may be a three-to-eight-week summer program where the language used in course work may be English or a specific, target-language (Engle & Engle, 2003). Academic work may involve foreign students and housing may include a home stay visit or host family. Tarrant et al. (2014) used a pre/posttest, two-by-two factor design to examine the value of a variety of study abroad experience types. After examining the results, the authors found that short-term study trips tend to provide a springboard for students to engage in additional, more in-depth travel experiences in the future (Tarrant et al., 2014). The result indicated that the students in this study received a basic understanding and interest in international travel, and that short-term study experiences are often a realistic option for students in terms of economic and academic resources.

Tarrant et al. (2014) stated that short-term study programs are crucial and valuable in their accessibility for American undergraduate students to study abroad. Engle and Engle (2003) stated that “the typical four-to-six-week summer course allows students a first exposure to language and civilization in its cultural setting” (p. 11). Opportunities to become involved in the local community are still available to students during short-term study experiences, and for this reason they are becoming increasingly popular (Stebleton et al., 2014). An example of a short-term study would be a student studying abroad in Brazil, staying with a host family, and completing course work that is organized for the student. The student goes to class each day,

where they get to interact with Brazilian students but complete their course work in English. The student gets the most cultural exposure from their home stay visit, and they have the opportunity to engage in some local culture during the short visit.

**Cross-cultural Contact Programs.** Level three, *cross-cultural contact programs*, differs from level two by its duration. At level three, students are typically involved in a semester-long program that is organized on-site or in coordination with other foreign students (Engle & Engle, 2003). For example, a student participating in a level three program in China would likely be living with a host family, where their course work is a mix of English classes with intermediate target-language instruction. They interact with and likely do schoolwork with host students, and the extended duration provides the student with the opportunity to make meaningful and memorable exchanges with host individuals both in class and in the local community.

Research has found that extended duration allows students to benefit from more cultural experiences (Paige & Vande Berg, 2012). Paige and Vande Berg (2012) studied the intercultural learning and development of students studying abroad, focusing on a difference in duration. The authors examined past research and compared the results, finding that those studying for longer terms were more likely to study abroad again during their college career, compared to peers who studied for shorter periods of time. The longer duration of cross-cultural contact programs allows students to increase their confidence to travel and live abroad (Sachau et al., 2010).

Vande Berg (2009) conducted a four-year study that was designed to measure the intercultural learning of American undergraduate students. More than 1,300 students enrolled at 61 programs abroad were examined. The purpose of the research was to examine if students studying abroad learn best when they are “left to their own devices” or with the intervention from proactive educators (Vande Berg, 2009, p. 1). Among many other factors, the author found

that “students who studied abroad for about a semester showed the greatest gains in their intercultural development” (p.10).

**Cross-cultural Encounter Programs.** The next level, *cross-cultural encounter programs*, are distinguished by their requirement for entry-level host language competence (Engle & Engle, 2003). The reliance on the English language is significantly reduced during this program. Students participating in these types of experiences may study abroad for a semester or an academic year, where they are a fully enrolled student in a foreign university. An example of this would be a student studying abroad in Germany, for an entire year, living with a host family. The student’s host-language competence will be advanced, and the student will likely work closely with other host students. However, cultural and language immersion is limited by the use of English by other members in the student’s group.

Intercultural competence gains have been found to increase significantly in students who study abroad for year-long programs (Paige & Vande Berg, 2012). Paige and Vande Berg (2012) found that having direct and authentic contact with the host culture, as allowed by these programs, helps lead to cross-cultural competence. The longer duration involved in this level allows for advanced language proficiency through deeper immersion in the culture. By being enrolled in the university and living with a host family, students are provided the opportunity to be a part of the culture, rather than being a visitor. In this level, students “often make significant progress in the recognition of and adaptation to local cultural rhythms” (Engle & Engle, 2003, p. 12).

**Cross-cultural Immersion Programs.** *Cross-cultural immersion programs* are the fifth and final level established by Engle and Engle (2003). Students studying abroad at this level are housed directly in the community, often staying for a semester to an academic year in campus

accommodations or with a host family. An example of this program would be a student studying for a year in Mexico. The student has direct enrollment in the local university, and the target-language replaces English in all circumstances. The student also works directly in the host culture through service learning, professional internships, or independent projects and is comfortable enough in the host culture to appropriately interact with the locals.

Advanced levels of host language competence are needed, and long-term immersion, while living with a host family, has been shown to provide the most direct experience in another culture (Paige & Vande Berg, 2012). Research has shown that students who study abroad “learn best when they’re immersed in their new experiences” (Vande Berg, 2009, p. 16). Language immersion is a key component of this level, and students get direct cultural encounters daily and a cross-cultural facilitator or mentor are often utilized to help students with the cross-cultural process (Engle & Engle, 2003).

Cultural experiences must be considered at all five levels. However, more attention to cultural preparation should be given to students studying abroad in programs with longer durations, targeted-host language competence, and those that are located in countries that differ significantly from the students’ home culture (Carlson, 1991; Engle & Engle, 2003).

### ***Impacts of Study Abroad***

The benefits of studying abroad have been well-established and investigated (Conner & Roberts, 2015; Gaia, 2015; Hamad & Lee, 2013; Morgan, 1975). One benefit that researchers have discovered is that study abroad experiences enhance learning (Gaia, 2015; Hamad & Lee, 2013; Morgan, 1975). Students that study abroad learn a great deal through the experience, and the kind of learning that occurs is different from the kind that is gained on a home campus (Morgan, 1975). Students who enroll in study abroad programs exhibit higher autonomy,

establish global awareness, and change in their values, goals, and personal attitudes (Hamad & Lee, 2013; Kitsantas & Meyers, 2001; Morgan, 1975).

Gaia (2015) researched the impact of short-term, faculty-led study abroad courses on students' development using the Global Perspectives Inventory in a pre-posttest format. The author described the short-term study abroad experience as being "transformative and educational" and increasing students' personal and academic development (p. 21). Conner and Roberts (2015) used a case study approach to research the cultural adaptation process of individuals participating in a study abroad experience in Swaziland, Africa. From their case study findings, the authors stated that their participants who studied abroad grew both personally and professionally, and when returning, they exhibited an increased interest in experiences abroad.

Another well-established benefit that has been a goal of study abroad since its beginning is to increase students' cultural awareness or "the furthering of international understanding" (Abrams & Hatch, 1960, p. 5). In addition, an increase in cultural awareness, international understanding, and an appreciation for cultural differences has long been established by many studies as being a benefit of study abroad (e.g. Conner & Roberts, 2015; Gaia, 2015; Kitsantas & Meyers, 2001; Morgan, 1975; Williams, 2005). Equally important, study abroad functions to increase the value students place on diversity and to prepare students to work in a multicultural world (Kitsantas & Meyers, 2001). The value of study abroad is to promote an understanding of an unfamiliar culture in a manner that encourages a respect for differing perspectives (Morgan, 1975).

Along with receiving the benefits, students who decide to study abroad are bound to face a few challenges during the journey abroad (Goldoni, 2015; Milian et al., 2015). Some of these



challenges include feelings of nervousness or anxiety, academic differences, financial issues, loneliness, a lack of self-confidence, and feelings of frustration and discomfort (Carlson, 1991; Conner & Roberts, 2015; Rahikainen & Hakkarainen, 2013). Additionally, students often face language barriers when studying internationally (Milian et al., 2015). Milian et al. (2015) researched students' study abroad experiences and the barriers and benefits the students received. The authors stated that participants in their study often struggled with unfamiliar language and slang, misunderstandings during the translation process, and confusion around certain types of language such as metaphors and idioms. As a result, feelings of inadequacy and frustration are common for students facing language barriers (Rahikainen & Hakkarainen, 2013). Rahikainen and Hakkarainen (2013) used a mixed methods approach to study the perceptions of the effects of study abroad programs on students and teachers. The data from this study found that a lack of self-confidence when speaking a foreign language amplified the language barrier many students experienced.

Homesickness is a challenge that individuals often face when they are immersed in a new, unfamiliar culture (Götz et al., 2019). Götz et al. (2019) used a smartphone application to study the emergence and degree of homesickness in 148 international university exchange students. The results of this study indicated that homesickness can be linked to negative health complaints, academic issues, withdrawal or isolation, and it can lead to poor adaptation to the new culture or environment (Götz et al., 2019). However, homesickness and other feelings of discomfort have also been found to be associated with personal growth (Conner & Roberts, 2015). Conner and Roberts (2015) discovered that when some students were forced out of their comfort zone and experienced discomfort, they learned to adapt quickly. To demonstrate, one participant in Conner and Robert's (2015) case study found that getting out of their comfort zone

was “the greatest way to live life to the fullest” (p. 163). Homesickness is a common challenge many students studying abroad face; (Götz et al., 2019) however, some discomfort has been found to encourage adaptation and personal growth (Conner & Roberts, 2015).

Financial concerns have been found to be the most common barrier that students studying abroad may face (Krummrich & Burton, 2013). Krummrich and Burton (2013) discussed the obstacles that honors students face when it comes to studying abroad. Analyzing the results of surveys completed by 41 administrators and 573 students, the authors found that almost 90% of the students felt financial concerns were a barrier toward studying abroad. A lack of financial resources is also one of the challenges students face while they are abroad (Milian et al., 2015). In the book *Preparing Tomorrow’s Global Leaders: Honors International Education*, Klein and Mulvaney (2013) addressed how many factors influence the varying costs of study abroad programs. One of these factors that the authors discussed was the location of study abroad experiences. Being one of the first decisions made, students often overlook the differing costs of study abroad locations. Since destinations such as Australia and the United Kingdom do not present language barriers, they tend to be popular choices despite the high costs associated.

Klein and Mulvaney (2013) recommended that advisors should encourage students to choose programs that are suited with their academic/professional goals in more affordable, but possibly less popular, locations. Other factors influencing the cost of study abroad experiences include the length of the program and the financial aid or scholarship opportunities available. There are several challenges that students face, and Milian et al. (2015) reported that these unique challenges that students studying abroad face must be addressed to gain a purposeful international experience.

**W-Curve.** Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) examined individuals' cross-cultural experiences and developed the W-curve as an extension of the previously adapted U-curve to appropriately describe and characterize "the temporal patterning of individual reactions to foreign settings, and subsequently to their own home cultures" (p. 33). In the U curve model, individuals in an unfamiliar culture or country experience a "honey-moon stage" when first arriving in the country. In this euphoric stage, individuals report feelings of optimism and elation associated with positive expectations regarding their host culture. Students during this stage may be excited about being in a new location and meeting new people. If they are living with a host family or taking courses at a local institution, they may be very engaging and talk positively about their experiences. Overall, these first few days or weeks of their experience will be described from a positive perspective.

Following the shape of a U, after this first euphoric stage individuals experience difficulties as they confront challenges adapting to the new culture (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). Individuals report feeling frustrated, confused, and depressed when attempting to achieve goals in unclear situations. As the student settles into this experience, the initial excitement and newness wears off, and they may exhibit emotions as they adjust to daily life in this new environment. They may find themselves having arguments with roommates or host families, and they may choose to isolate themselves from others during this time (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). Overall, they may feel overwhelmed by the cultural experiences and adaptation they are going through.

If students can overcome these difficulties, they will experience the upward curve of the U, where they can effectively and positively interact with their hosts and host environment (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). This also includes being more aware and taking opportunities to

engage in activities and events that are part of the host culture. This shift helps them get the most out of their experience, helps them prepare for their departure in a positive way, and can lead to a successful transition to home.

With the extension of the W-curve, Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) included research on the individual's return home. This led to other research to understand that as "those re-entering their own culture after an extended period in a foreign culture pass through a second U-curve in readjusting, thus forming a W-curve" (Webb, 1983, p. 499). Practices that once were accepted as normal or typical in their home country, may now be difficult or trying upon return home (Wielkiewicz & Turkowski, 2010). To study the reentry process, Wielkiewicz and Turkowski (2010) surveyed 669 college students who were returning from studying abroad. The authors stated that "having shaped their values abroad, students returning home find that they are out of step with their own culture" (Wielkiewicz and Turkowski, 2010, p. 650). Reentry problems can include academic problems, social isolation, depression and anxiety, and interpersonal challenges. It has been found that the reentry process can be more severe for students who assume they will be able to easily adapt back home (Young, 2014).

The W-curve was created to study students' adjustment process in foreign cultures, and it has been used by many researchers to examine students' study abroad experiences (Gray & Savicki, 2015; Wielkiewicz & Turkowski, 2010; Young, 2014). Using this theory as a framework for the research will provide structure on the characteristics and manners in which students move through cultural experiences.

### ***Support for Students Who Study Abroad***

When students studying abroad face any of the previously mentioned challenges, they may require sources of support (Morse et al., 2017). Colleges as well as private study abroad

companies are equipped to provide a variety of different resources (*Study Abroad with IES Abroad*, 2021). The Institute for the International Education of Students (IES) is a not-for-profit study abroad provider that works with college and university students around the world. The IES provides each student studying abroad a personal program advisor that helps the students prepare for the trip, and they provide academic support services throughout the experience.

**Pre-departure Support.** Research has shown that providing students with a thorough and informational training or orientation before they travel internationally can be extremely beneficial for students' cross-cultural experiences (Conner & Roberts, 2015; Miller, 1993; Salyers et al., 2015). It is recommended that such an orientation or training should provide general travel information, identify possible barriers (such as language), discuss cultural differences, and how to recognize and overcome culture shock (Miller, 1993; Salyers et al., 2015). Other forms of preparation may include media exposure to the host culture, experiences (direct or indirect) with people of the host culture, and previous cross-cultural experiences (Kim, 2005).

In their article on the challenges and opportunities of college/university counseling centers, Morse et al. (2017) outlined the difficulties and opportunities that campus professionals have to support students' mental health throughout their study away experiences. The authors recommended that universities should train students and faculty/study abroad facilitators about student and peer mental health support and about the resources that will be available to them in their host culture. Kim (2005) identified that individuals who are more prepared or informed usually have more positive expectations and experiences in international travel. In fact, in some cases, the pre-departure orientation process wound up being the most crucial factor leading to a successful study abroad experience (Salyers et al., 2015). Morse et al. (2017) suggested that

supporting students should be, “a process of orienting all students to the challenges of study away and encouraging them to be thoughtful about their potential needs for supports and resources which may be vital to their well-being while they study off campus” (p. 123).

**Abroad Support.** Students studying abroad will require support throughout their time immersed in an unfamiliar culture (Conner & Roberts, 2015). This support will look different for each student. The forms of support accessible to students while they are abroad may be lacking or unknown to the student (Conner & Roberts, 2015). Much of the responsibility will be on the study abroad facilitators coordinating the experience or the faculty members leading the group. To support students, Conner and Roberts (2015) found that facilitators need to discuss cultural differences while promoting or encouraging cultural acceptance. This can be done using cross-cultural models and reflection techniques, such as daily journaling, group or individual discussions, as well as a variety of others.

Facilitators need to acknowledge and address how the students may be coping in the new environment and how it may lead to mental health distress (Morse et al., 2017). Morse et al. (2017) in their article on study abroad, suggested establishing a collaborative relationship between a university counseling center and the facilitators or faculty that will be supporting students during their time abroad. For instance, counseling centers can hold training sessions with faculty/facilitators to provide information to recognize and handle students’ mental health distresses and discuss the supportive roles they can play for students while they are abroad.

Students can also find support from individuals within the unfamiliar culture (Miller, 1993). For example, Miller (1993) examined the personal travel experiences of college students studying abroad to explore the coping strategies they used to handle cultural difficulties. From this, Miller (1993) reported that students staying in a host family situation found significant

support from these people during their experience. Experiencing the culture through a local's perspective (such as attending social gatherings like church or family outings) has been found to be eye-opening and beneficial for students' acceptance of their host culture.

Bretag and van der Veen (2017) examined study abroad students' motivations for studying abroad and their perceived benefits from the experience. To do so, the researchers utilized pre-departure and post-return focus group interviews, and they found that students studying abroad formed meaningful bonds with the "buddies" from their host culture (p. 6). These "buddies" were students from the host culture that supported and accompanied the students throughout their international experience, and they had a significant effect on the students' cultural awareness and understanding.

Each student will require support at different levels and times throughout their study abroad experience, and much of these differences lie within the student's own personality (Kim, 2005). In her research on intercultural identity development, Kim (2005) recognized three terms within personality that impacts a student's cultural experiences: openness, strength, and positivity. Students that do not have the right attitude or characteristics such as openness, strength, and positivity, may not find support in people from the host culture and may require extra support from facilitators/faculty (Kim, 2005; Miller, 1993).

**Return Home Support.** The final level of support that students studying abroad may require involves the re-entry process of returning to a home culture (Young, 2014). It is widely acknowledged and accepted that students returning to their home culture after an international experience may struggle adjusting just as they did upon arrival at their host culture (Gaw, 2000). This experience can be called reverse culture shock, and it is often overlooked because students

and facilitators do not consider that returning home may also require a form of adjustment (Young, 2014).

In their article on supporting students through the re-entry phase of study abroad, Young (2014) explained how this final phase of the study abroad process can be challenging, and students may need guidance. The author suggested preparing students for re-entry before they depart and before they return home, having informal conversations about students' experiences abroad, and even holding a re-entry program for students (Young, 2014). Lastly, the author suggested that students need guidance and time to reflect on and make sense of their experiences.

Students studying abroad face a variety of challenges, such as language barriers, homesickness, and financial concerns, and they require support from institutions, faculty/facilitators, and host friends and families (Conner & Roberts, 2015; Götz et al., 2019; Krummrich & Burton, 2013; Milian et al., 2015; Miller, 1993). Morgan (1975) highlighted the importance of establishing a balance between challenge and support for students studying abroad by stating, "placing students in another culture has the potential for being an experience which challenges an individual and helps development, but only if the experience is structured and controlled" (Morgan, 1975, p. 214). Studying abroad can be a wonderful opportunity for students to get out of their comfort zone and overcome the challenges they will inevitably face while abroad. The support offered to these students needs to be considered and implemented for them to have successful and fulfilling study abroad experiences.

### **Cross-Cultural Adaptation**

When individuals leave their home culture and enter a new or unfamiliar one (such as studying abroad), the process of cross-cultural adaptation comes into play (Kim, 2005). Cross-cultural adaptation was first defined by Kim (1988a) as an internal process that individuals



experience when they must participate in daily activities and functions within an unfamiliar cultural environment. In other words, it is a “phenomenon of individuals who, through direct and indirect contacts with an unfamiliar environment, strive to establish and maintain a relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationship with the environment” (Kim, 2008, p. 363). Kim began her research on cross-cultural adaptation in 1988 after moving to the United States from Seoul, Korea in 1970 (Turner, 2021). Kim developed the cross-cultural adaptation theory to provide a theoretical framework to investigate the experiences of individuals in an unfamiliar country or culture.

Kim’s (2005) cross-cultural adaptation theory hinges on the principle “that adaptation manifests the natural human instinct to struggle for an internal equilibrium in the face of adversarial environmental conditions” (p. 378). Kim emphasizes the interplay between internal (the individual) and external (the environment) factors as key to the definition. Students who study abroad are struggling specifically with the internal and external as they enter the new environment and then again as they come back to their home culture. Cross-cultural adaptation is the transformative process individuals undergo when they find themselves outside of their cultural boundaries (Kim, 2005). Individuals in this situation must modify and adjust their home cultural patterns to create a more balanced relationship between their home and host cultures (Kim, 1988b).

There are a few, similar but more narrow key terms under the umbrella of cross-cultural adaptation (Kim, 2005). These include *assimilation*, that is an individual who accepts host cultural elements; *acculturation*, the process of accepting some but not all aspects of the host culture; *coping and adjustment*, responses to cultural challenges; and *integration*, social participation in the host culture (Kim, 2005). Individuals participating in short-term study abroad

experiences are more likely to experience the acculturation stage rather than full adaptation (Hamad & Lee, 2013). Another key component of cross-cultural adaptation is *intercultural communication* (Kim, 1988a). For example, individuals in an unfamiliar culture must learn and accept new forms of communication patterns that are appropriate to their new culture. Hamad and Lee (2013) stated that “communication is at the core of the adaptation process” (p. 664), and Kim (2005) argued that communication is the instrument through which cross-cultural adaptation is possible.

Cross-cultural adaptation can be applied to study abroad contexts. Students who study abroad must engage in interactions with those of the host environment, and they must go through this process of adaptation once entering the unfamiliar culture (Hamad & Lee, 2013). Students studying abroad for short or long periods of time will all experience this process to some extent. Kim (2001) stated that “long-term settlers generally have a greater need to conform than do temporary sojourners, but no stranger is completely immune to having to understand, and manage the various communication patterns operating in the host culture” (p. 52).

Hamad and Lee (2013) stated in their research on cross-cultural adaptation and study abroad length that long-term programs (such as cross-cultural contact, encounter, and immersion programs) allow students more time to become immersed in the culture, settle into the environment, and may experience a smoother adjustment as a result. However, regardless of the specific situational demands or the length of the journey, all individuals in a changed cultural environment “must cope with a high level of uncertainty and unfamiliarity as they are in an ambivalent status” (Kim, 1988a, p. 6). All students who decide to study abroad in a new culture, will experience some form of cross-cultural adaptation in order to survive.

Kim's (1998a) cross-cultural adaptation theory is an appropriate lens to examine the adaptation process of students who study abroad. Other scholars such as Hamad and Lee (2013) have used the cross-cultural adaptation theory in their research to explore students' adaptation while studying abroad. For many students, studying abroad may be their first experience into another, possibly much different, culture than their home culture. Thus, examining study abroad experiences through a cross-cultural perspective may provide insight into the adaptation process and challenges that students go through when they are introduced to an unfamiliar culture.

### *Cross-Cultural Stages*

Research has identified that cultural awareness and growth are a strong benefit for students studying abroad. However, the question remains on how students experience the cross-cultural adaptation process, and the long-term impact it may have on them after they return. In one study, Conner and Roberts (2015) researched the cultural adaptation process of students participating in a study abroad program in Swaziland, Africa. The authors found that students who studied abroad go through various stages in cross-cultural experiences including, cultural surprises, cultural barriers, cultural negativity, feelings throughout the program, and cultural growth" (p. 155).

Conner and Roberts (2015) found that the students in their study experienced cultural surprises or had experiences that were unexpected. One student was surprised to learn how much knowledge students from Swaziland had on American culture, and another student was surprised when she learned about the unequal treatment of women in Swaziland. In a similar study on the cultural experiences of undergraduate students in Costa Rica by Conner and Roberts (2017), the authors identified cultural uncertainty and cultural surprises as being a concurrent experience reported by the students. For example, several students commented on their uncertainty driving

and being driven in this new environment. A cultural surprise identified by many students was the extent of the poverty present in Costa Rica. The cultural surprises were often linked to comparisons being made between the cultures within the United States and cultures within Costa Rica (Conner & Roberts, 2017).

Many students who study abroad choose locations where they have studied the language but have not had to make it their primary language; while others may choose locations without much thought for the language or the barrier it may present (Conner & Roberts, 2015). The most common cultural barrier that the students in this study experienced was a language barrier. One student in the Swaziland study mentioned experiencing for the first time the “awkwardness that comes with lack of a common language” (Conner & Roberts, 2015, p. 162). Other students mentioned that they felt the Swazi language was difficult to learn and master, making interacting with the locals difficult.

Cultural negativity, most commonly found in the form of frustration, was often mentioned by the students in Conner and Robert’s (2015) research. As individuals experience a new environment and culture they may react to local customs and traditions from a perplexed position and may end up with less positive perspectives on what is happening. Two female students noted their frustration with the polygamist lifestyle that is present in Swaziland. Conner and Robert’s (2017) study also identified that students experienced cultural negativity and frustration at different points throughout the study abroad experience. This may be because each individual interacts within the community in different ways and for different reasons. Many students noted that the laid-back environment in Costa Rica was frustrating at times. One student mentioned how the culture was less structured than they were used to, and they had to adjust to the “loose meeting times and impromptu bus rides” (Conner & Roberts, 2017, p. 145).

Beyond the initial feelings the students experienced, there were a number of emotions experienced by the students throughout the trip as well. These included excitement, discomfort, and negative attitude toward the United States (Conner & Roberts, 2015). In the study in Africa, they identified that interactions with the local people of Swaziland was linked to feelings of both excitement and discomfort. One student noted their excitement to meet and build relationships with the locals and others on the study abroad trip. Another student felt discomfort when the local men would stare at women or offer cows to buy the women. Many students noted comparisons between the Swaziland culture and American culture. After the trip, one student noted that they appreciated how Swaziland people held onto their cultural traditions and wished Americans would value traditions in the same manner.

In their 2017 study, Conner and Roberts found that the students also experienced feelings of excitement and discomfort, as well as concerns of safety, and a thankfulness for the United States. Unlike the negative feelings toward the United States found in their 2015 study, the students in their 2017 study experienced feelings of gratitude after returning from Costa Rica. One student said the program impacted them “on a personal level by making me a much more grateful citizen of America” (Conner & Roberts, 2017, p. 147).

Both of Conner and Robert’s (2015; 2017) studies included participants that experienced cultural growth through several ways. These included overcoming language barriers, gaining cultural respect and acceptance, having positive cultural experiences, identifying and recognizing the culture, cultural learning, personal growth, and an increased interest in future experiences abroad. Gaia’s (2015) research on the impact of short-term, faculty-led study abroad courses on students’ development also found that those experiencing study abroad trips, even those in short-

term programs, experience increases in cultural awareness, understandings, appreciation for cultural differences.

### ***Culture Shock***

One challenge impacting an individual's cross-cultural process is called "culture shock" (Miller, 1993, p. 2). Miller (1993) suggested that students studying abroad for either short or long periods of time are one of the groups to be hit the hardest by culture shock. Culture shock is brought on by anxiety that students feel from being surrounded by an unfamiliar culture as well as from the loss of their home and familiar culture. In his article on cultural shock and adaptation, Winkelman (1994) described how culture shock can be portrayed as negative cultural experiences and reactions, disappointment and frustration with surroundings, and feelings of helplessness, confusion, and tension. Individuals may experience several symptoms associated with culture shock which can range from mild such as emotional lows, fatigue, and stress to being more extreme such as individuals feeling disoriented and victimized, experiencing mental health distress, and refusing to accept some or all of the host culture's components (Kim, 2005; Miller, 1993; Morse et al., 2017).

For example, an American student studying abroad in Mexico may experience culture shock when they get lost the first time venturing into the local culture. Unable to fluently communicate with the locals, the student experiences feelings of frustration, confusion, and fear while finding their way back to their hotel. After returning, the student still feels disappointed with themselves, the culture, and the locals, and they are discouraged from embracing other unfamiliar, cultural experiences.

There are several factors that influence how and when students studying abroad may experience culture shock (Winkelman, 1994). Students who study abroad in a host culture that is

in significant contrast with their home culture, are more likely to face challenges such as culture shock in comparison to students studying abroad in cultures that are similar to their own (Carlson, 1991). Individual attributes and the quality and quantity of cultural preparation students receive before the trip also influence how/when students experience culture shock.

Culture shock is a challenge that individuals may experience during their cross-cultural adaptation process (Miller, 1993). However, exposure to a new, unfamiliar culture also allows for many benefits (Conner & Roberts, 2015). In their research on the cross-cultural adaptation process, Nguyen (2019) examined the cultural experiences of a Vietnamese student studying in the United States. The author stated that individuals that experience the cross-cultural adaptation process “are able to shape a new perspective that allows more openness and acceptance of differences, a capacity to participate in the depth of the intellectual, aesthetic, and emotional experience of others” (p. 16). Adapting to a new culture can be challenging, but it offers the potential to gain new perspectives and grow in experience and knowledge.

### **Theoretical Framework**

When students make the decision to participate in a study abroad experience, they are likely to be exposed to a culture that is unfamiliar to them (Cho, 2014). Research has shown that this exposure may lead to developmental changes in students (Chapman, 2011; Fine & McNamara, 2011; McCleary & Sol, 2020; O’Callaghan, 2006; Zielinski, 2007). These changes can be examined through the lens of Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) theory on the seven vectors of student development. This study will utilize this theory as a framework to examine the development of students participating in study abroad experiences.

#### ***Chickering and Reisser’s Seven Vectors***

Chickering's theory was originally outlined in his 1969 book, *Education and Identity*. It was again revised in 1993 with Reisser. This theory explores the identity development of college students by describing students' experiences in terms of seven vectors. The seven vectors represented the "successive and essential developmental tasks that have to be achieved successfully in order to facilitate identity development" (as cited by Chapman, 2011, p. 17). The revised version of the seven vectors included more diverse student research, but Chickering and Reisser (1993) also acknowledged that the uniqueness that each student brings will influence their journey through the vectors. They stated that although each student "will drive differently, with varying vehicles and self-chosen detours, eventually all will move down these major routes" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 35). The seven vectors are: *developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature personal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity*, and they are more fully described below (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

This work on identity development through the use of the developmental vectors has been used as a way of exploring and describing the study abroad experiences of college students abroad by many researchers (Chapman, 2011; Fine & McNamara, 2011; McCleary & Sol, 2020; O'Callaghan, 2006). Although achieving the higher vectors of Chickering and Reisser's (1993) theory may not be achieved by students in the study abroad experience, this theory remains relevant to the topic of study abroad. It will be an appropriate lens for this research because this study looks at the long-term impacts of their study abroad experiences. The following paragraphs explore each vector in detail, as well as discusses previous research that supports the application of Chickering and Reisser's seven vectors to the study abroad experience.



Chickering and Reisser's (1993) first vector, *developing competence*, has three levels of competences: intellectual, physical and manual, and interpersonal. In the intellectual level, students develop additional frames of references that can be used to make meaning of their experiences (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). In one study exploring the experiencing of students studying abroad in Switzerland, Morgan (1975) found that the type of learning that occurs on a home campus differs from the learning that can be gained abroad, with a greater emphasis on autonomy and global intelligence. For a student studying abroad, they may have some intellectual capital they enter the experience with, but in a new environment they may feel less competent and will work on feeling more confident in this location as they make their way around.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) defined the physical and manual competence as being able to utilize the body "as a healthy vehicle for high performance, self-expression, and creativity" (p. 54). Another study by Comp (2000) found that all ten of his research participants had experienced mild, physical changes during their time studying abroad, as well as changes to their personal grooming habits, diet consumption, and energy levels. Participating in athletic and artistic activities is one way for students to advance their physical and manual skills. A student active in their home institution may seek out these opportunities in the new environment to demonstrate and further develop their skills.

Interpersonal competence encompasses a student's ability to effectively communicate with others, as well as work in a team environment while maintaining personal views that may compete with others (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Williams (2005) used pre/posttests to research the interpersonal and intercultural communication skills of both study abroad and on-campus students. The results of this study indicated that the students who studied abroad

exhibited a greater increase in intercultural communication and interpersonal skills compared to the students who did not study abroad. This may be the most challenging for the student because their patterns of communication may be impacted by language, culture, familiarity, and so forth. Moving into this new environment will force the student to develop competence, and research has shown that students studying abroad are developing competency during their time abroad.

Vector 2, *managing emotions*, describes how college students learn to handle feelings of anxiety, shame and guilt, anger, and depression, during difficult or challenging situations (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). To develop along this vector, the students first must become more aware of their feelings as well as the meaning that they may carry. Being engulfed in an unfamiliar culture can result in an array of emotions ranging from excitement to feelings of frustration and disconnection with the host culture (Miller, 1993; Winkelman, 1994). The students must then learn how to control these emotions in an appropriate way by expressing them through attitudes and behaviors. Research has shown that both positive and negative emotions are experienced continually throughout a student's experience abroad and managing these emotions is key to a successful and enjoyable experience (Carsello & Creaser, 1976; Chapman, 2011). The student must gain understanding of the cause of their emotions as well as the consequences of acting emotionally impulsive.

Additional research by Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) on the W-Curve found that individuals in an unfamiliar culture may experience a range of emotions. After experiencing difficulties while adapting to the culture, individuals may experience frustration, confusion, or even depression. If and when an individual is able to overcome these challenges, they may experience a sense of accomplishment and comfort in their host culture. Even returning home, an individual may experience additional emotions readjusting. For example, a student studying

abroad in Ghana may feel pure excitement when walking through the airport after first arriving. However, after witnessing extreme poverty for the first time, the student may feel overwhelmed or uncomfortable. Once the student adjusts, they get to know many of the local people and find themselves embracing many of their traditions and characteristics. When the student arrives back to their home culture, they find themselves overwhelmed with the gluttonous practices of the United States and they struggle to readjust. Throughout the entire process, the student experiences an array of emotions they must manage.

The third vector, *moving through autonomy toward interdependence*, describes the transition from autonomy, being dependent on others, toward interdependence, being dependent on oneself (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). This vector involves three distinct components: emotional independence, instrumental dependence, and interdependence. Chickering and Reisser (1993) defined emotional independence as the “freedom from continual and pressing needs for reassurance, affection, or approval from others” (p. 116). Instrumental dependence involves the ability to solve problems and carry out actions in a self-directed way, as well as the ability and confidence to be “mobile in order to pursue opportunity or adventure” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 117). Lastly, interdependence involves students having awareness of their place within the larger community.

Developing autonomy has been found to be a common theme for students studying abroad (Fine & McNamara, 2011; McCleary & Sol, 2020; Zielinski, 2007). One study by Kitsantas and Meyers (2001) examined the cross-cultural awareness of twenty-four students who had studied abroad. One key component within cross-cultural awareness that the researchers examined was personal autonomy. The results of the study indicated that nearly every student in the study experienced an increase in their personal autonomy. Another study by Fine and

McNamara (2011) examined how students studying abroad go from autonomy to global interdependence. The results indicated that the study abroad experience can push students to examine and reevaluate their role within their larger community and to consider the welfare of others in a more global capacity. For example, a student who had grown up in an urban area in the United States may believe they have a good understanding of public transportation, and that this knowledge will transfer to their international experiences. The student quickly realizes that the host country's public transportation highly differs than what they are used to and expected. The only way for the student to get to class is by taking public transportation, so the student must figure out the system themselves. This results in the student having a higher autonomy and relying/trusting themselves to overcome difficult situations.

The fourth vector, *developing mature interpersonal relationships*, involves a student's ability to maintain deep and meaningful relationships (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). To develop through this vector, students must recognize differences and commonalities between themselves and their peers. The relationships developed may be brief or lengthy in duration and may lead to positive (warmth and connection) or negative (hurt, rejection, and sorrow) outcomes.

By its definition, the study abroad experience provides an opportunity for students to meet and interact with diverse people. A plethora of past research indicates that the exposure to diverse individuals that students studying abroad experience often leads to a greater appreciation and respect for differences (e.g., Chapman, 2011; Conner & Roberts, 2015; Gaia, 2015; Kitsantas & Meyers, 2001; Morgan, 1975; Williams, 2005). Students studying abroad get the opportunity to recognize differences and commonalities that exist between themselves and individuals in another culture. For example, a student living in a host family gets the opportunity to build meaningful relationships with locals in the community. They join their host family when

they go to family or community events, such as dinners or church, and the student gains first-hand knowledge of another culture while developing relationships with diverse individuals.

*Establishing identity*, the fifth vector, is dependent on the students successfully developing through the first four vectors (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Chickering and Reisser (1993) explain that identity development is involved within all the previous vectors, stating, “establishing identity certainly involves growing awareness of competencies, emotions and values, confidence in standing alone and bonding with others, and moving beyond intolerance toward openness and self-esteem” (p. 173). Chickering and Reisser described developing identity as primarily involving students resolving different crises that allow them to gain the following:

- (1) Comfort with body and appearance, (2) comfort with gender and sexual orientation,
- (3) sense of self in a social, historical, and cultural context, (4) clarification of self-concept through roles and lifestyles, (5) sense of self in response to feedback from valued others, (6) self-acceptance and self-esteem, and (7) personal stability and integration (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 181).

Although there is limited research pertaining to study abroad students’ identity surrounding their comfort with their body/appearance and their gender/sexual orientation, research outcomes have shown strong support for the identity development of students studying abroad (Bates, 1997; Chapman, 2011; Milstein, 2005; Zhai, 2000). Bates (1997) found that compared to a control group of students, those that studied abroad experienced significantly greater gains in total self-efficacy. Similarly, Milstein (2005) examined 212 students participating in a study abroad exchange to Japan and found that 95.5% of the students reported increases in their sense of self. Lastly, Zhai (2000) used a mixed-methods study with 21 participants to study the influence of study abroad programs on student development. The

researcher found that a significant amount of the participants showed an increase in their confidence, likely related to facing and overcoming challenges. As their cultural context changes, student studying abroad may reconsider their sense of self, their roles and lifestyles, and their self-acceptance and self-esteem. For example, a student may begin to consider their nationality as an American from a much different perspective as they witness the way others in their host country view Americans and American history. The student may also experience shifts in their self-acceptance and self-esteem as they first struggle and then overcome challenges in their host culture.

For many students, the sixth vector, *developing purpose*, is very prominent during their college years (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Students that enter college are expected to have an understanding of what they would like to pursue in terms of both career and life goals by the time they leave college (O'Callaghan, 2006). As a student learns about their interests, talents, and characteristics, they must be more intentional in taking opportunities to assess these interests in order to develop through this vector (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The study abroad experience can often be one of the most powerful ways for students to assess these things as they are experiencing a new culture while also working toward their degree. Chickering and Reisser (1993) explained that to develop purpose, students must consider the following major elements: “(1) vocational plans and aspirations, (2) personal interests, and (3) interpersonal and family commitments” (p. 212). Developing one's purpose often takes several years and goes beyond the college experience.

There has been previous research connecting changes in personal and career interests after experiencing a study abroad trip (Chapman, 2011). One study by Gibson (1991) revealed that 60% of the study abroad students interviewed changed their major or their career choices

after returning home. Another study by Helms and Thibadoux (1992) surveyed and interviewed 59 students who had completed a summer study abroad program, and the researchers found that the students returned home with a greater interest in pursuing international careers. For example, a business student may decide to study abroad in New Zealand where they take a college course on environmental sustainability. Experiencing and learning about this topic in a new environment opens a new interest and passion for the student. When returning home, the student decides to change their major to environmental sustainability with an emphasis in international politics. This change enhances the students' knowledge and interest in the topic, and they eventually return to New Zealand to work to protect the nation's natural parks and environments.

The final vector, *developing integrity*, is one that is often not written about in relation to students and study abroad mainly because it is hard to determine while they are still in the experience or shortly removed from it. This study is looking at students who completed their experience more than a year ago, which gives them time to reflect on their experiences and determine how it has impacted their lives and the choices they make. This vector involves three main components. The first being humanizing values, which involves students balancing their own values with the values of others and society (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). This is where students who have studied abroad may find themselves comparing the two cultures they have experienced and may cause them to think about the environment they are currently in. Second is personalizing values, which is students learning to value others' beliefs while still maintaining a commitment to their own personal beliefs (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). This can be a harder one for students to identify while in the experience, often finding themselves judging rather than valuing another's beliefs. However, with some time and reflection they may begin to see other's perspectives and values as just as important as their own.

The final one is developing congruence, which involves students balancing their personal values with what is considered socially responsible behaviors (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Individuals who have studied abroad in the past may be able to better reflect on what they consider to be socially responsible behaviors and how those influence their current roles. They may also be able to articulate how their study abroad experience has helped them develop this congruence.

Chickering and Reisser's (1993) theory on the seven vectors of student development not only has a prolific place in higher education and student development, it also has been utilized by many past researchers examining the study abroad experience (Chapman, 2011; Fine & McNamara, 2011; McCleary & Sol, 2020; O'Callaghan, 2006; Zielinski, 2007). As students face new and surprising experiences abroad, they are also developing key characteristics, beliefs, and abilities that may transfer into other parts of their careers, passions, and lives.

### **Summary**

Students exploring foreign and unfamiliar countries and cultures has long had a place in American history and higher education (Abrams & Hatch, 1960). Many studies found that students studying abroad experience many benefits from their international journey (Conner & Roberts, 2015; Gaia, 2015; Hamad & Lee, 2013; Morgan, 1975). One major benefit, as well as challenge, that students face while studying abroad involves cross-cultural experiences (Miller, 1993). When individuals first experience a culture that is unfamiliar or different from their home culture, they may struggle and experience challenges such as culture shock. These challenges that students face require levels of support for a successful international experience (Morse et al., 2017). This support is suggested to be provided to students during the pre-departure stage, during their time abroad, and upon re-entry into their home culture.



In order to examine students' cross-cultural experiences throughout their study abroad trip, this study will utilize Chickering and Reisser's (1993) seven vectors of student development as a framework to guide this research. To address the gap in literature that exists amongst study abroad and cross-cultural experiences, this research will seek to understand how these international experiences impact students' passions, purposes, values, and integrity beyond their time abroad.

## CHAPTER III

### Methods

This study was conducted to explore the cross-cultural experiences of individuals who have studied abroad while in college. This chapter includes a detailed description of the methods that were used. These include the study's design, sampling and participants, research site, instrumentation, description of the data collection and analysis, and treatment of data.

#### Design of Study

A qualitative methodology was utilized for this study. Given that the study seeks to capture the cross-cultural experiences of students who have studied abroad through the individuals' voices, a qualitative approach was appropriate (Creswell, 2014). Additionally, since the research explored and told the individual stories of participants, a narrative research approach was used (Fraenkel et al., 2015; Kim, 2016). The research was conducted using semi-structured interviews. The interviews were completed on a one-on-one basis through the online platform, Zoom. Participants responded to demographic questions as well as open-ended questions regarding their study abroad and cross-cultural experiences.

#### Participants

The participants consisted of 4 individuals who, while completing their undergraduate degree, studied abroad in a country outside of the United States, and who voluntarily completed an interview with the researcher. In order to be eligible, participants must have studied abroad studied abroad for a fall, spring, or summer semester during their undergraduate careers. To recruit participants, a snowball method was used to identify these individuals. That is, an email (Appendix A) was sent out to a variety of different people—classmates, faculty, staff, and coworkers— that included participant eligibility, the basic research plans, the researcher's

contact information, and a link to a demographic questionnaire (Appendix B). This message was also shared through social media platforms that have forums/pages/groups of individuals who have studied abroad in the past.

The demographic questionnaire provided the researcher with additional information about participants' study abroad and cross-cultural experiences. Participants had the opportunity, through the final question on the demographic questionnaire, to further participate in a semi-structured interview. Individuals who agreed to participate in the one-on-one interviews, then received another email (Appendix C) that included instructions to schedule an interview time and the informed consent form (Appendix D). Individuals could stop their participation at any time during the study, and all participant information has been kept confidential and secure.

Following is a brief overview of the four participants, all identifiable information has been changed. Sarah is a 23-year-old female living in New York City where she is pursuing her master's degree in higher education. Sarah is from the suburbs of Los Angeles, California, but she attended undergraduate across the country at a private, Jesuit institution located in New York City. Bailey is a 28-year-old female who received her undergraduate degree in international studies from a private, research university in Colorado. Bailey graduated with her bachelors in 2015 and went on to receive her master's degree in student affairs. She is now teaching English at a learning school in California. Claire is a 24-year-old female who received her undergraduate degree from a mid-sized, public university in Kentucky. She graduated in 2020 with a bachelor's degree in Asian religions and culture, with a concentration in Korean and Japanese language, with minors in political science and professional writing with a global studies designation. She is now working in South Korea as an English teacher to elementary aged students. Sam is a 24-year-old graduate from a public, mid-sized university in Illinois. She received her bachelor's

degree in Spanish in 2019 and is now working in a study abroad office as a graduate assistant while working toward her master's degree in political science with a concentration in public policy.

### **Interview Setting**

The research site for this study was a virtual communication platform known as Zoom. This platform was used to connect the participant and researcher via videotelephony and online chat options. Participants were asked to complete the interviews in a location that was private, free of distractions, and in a location where the participant felt comfortable to fully participate in the interview.

### **Instrument**

The demographic questionnaire (Appendix B) asked basic questions to develop a participant profile, regarding participants' age, undergraduate college, major, graduation year, study abroad location and duration, etc. The demographic questionnaire was sent out to all interested participants, and the information was used to identify basic similarities or differences between potential interview participants. This was done to help capture the most appropriate set of participants for the scope of this study. The final question provided responders with the opportunity to further participate in the study by interviewing with a researcher to further discuss their study abroad experience.

### ***Semi-Structured Interviews***

An interview protocol (see Appendix E) was developed to help guide the semi-structured, one-one-one interviews. This was done to guide the conversation and ensure that there was consistency from one interview to the other (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). The questions were designed to learn about the cultural experiences that individuals experienced while they

studied abroad. The protocol included 13 interview questions with several sub questions that sought to capture students' reflection of their experiences studying abroad.

The interview protocol included questions about the individuals' study abroad experiences in much greater detail. Interviews began with general questions about their study abroad experience and became more detailed and focused on their cross-cultural experiences as the interview unfolded. Because this is a narrative study it was important to provide opportunities for the students to fully share their experiences and stories (Kim, 2016).

### **Data Collection**

Data was collected by utilizing semi-structured, individual interviews during the fall semester of 2021. The interviews were conducted virtually through the use of Zoom, where the participant and the researcher video-conferenced for approximately 45 – 60 minutes. All participants received an informed consent form via email prior to the interview (Appendix E). At the time of the interview, participants were asked for their permission to record the interview, and the researcher reminded them that their information would stay confidential throughout the entire process.

Those chosen to participate in the interview were assigned a random pseudonym, decided by the researcher. To maintain anonymity, participants were only identified by their assigned pseudonym for the entirety of the study. This process to maintain anonymity was reflected with other private information, such as participants' home institution also being identified by something other than its original name.

### **Data Analysis**

The recorded interview sessions were transcribed and imported into confidential computer files. Participants were provided an opportunity to complete a member check by

reviewing the transcript from their interview, to improve the credibility of the recorded information from the interview (Harper & Cole, 2012). While reading and examining each transcript individually, the research questions and theoretical frameworks were used to guide the analysis. The content was explored for themes, and descriptive coding was used to assign each with a word or short phrase as a code to summarize the information (Saldana, 2013). Saldana (2013) stated that “in qualitative data analysis, a code is a researcher-generated construct that symbolizes and thus attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection, categorization, theory building, and other analytic processes” (p. 4) The transcripts were analyzed in two cycles, First Cycle and Second Cycle. In between the cycles, a process of recoding or combining codes into a new code that encompasses previous ones was conducted. After each transcript was individually coded, the coded information was compared amongst all 4 of the transcripts to examine for similar themes or differences.

### **Treatment of Data**

A pseudonym was chosen to protect each participant’s identity, and only the lead researcher has access to the participants’ real names. No other identifying information was collected, and any information shared by the participant that could be linked to the individual (institution, building names, etc.) have been changed in this thesis. The data collected was stored in a Microsoft Office OneDrive folder with password protection. Only the lead researcher has access to the data. The records pertaining to this study will be kept for at least three years, per IRB policy. After that time, all data and records will be shredded and deleted.

### **Summary**

This chapter included a detailed description of the methods that were used to examine students’ reflection of their study abroad experience. This chapter specifically articulates the

study's design, participants, research setting, instrumentation, data collection and analysis, and treatment of data.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Narratives**

This chapter will provide narratives on each of the participant's background information as well as their experiences studying abroad. Using a narrative approach provides the opportunity to tell participants' stories in a way that displays their experiences and their reflection of it (Kim, 2016). Each participant's narrative will be broken into sections to provide background information and to help organize their experiences. The sections include the following: background information, study abroad background, experiences at three levels (pre-departure, time abroad, and return home), and cultural experiences.

#### **Sarah**

##### ***Background***

Sarah is a 23-year-old female from the suburbs of Los Angeles, California. She is currently living in New York City where she is a second-year graduate student pursuing a master's degree in higher education. She received her undergraduate degree in political science and American studies from a private, Jesuit institution located in New York City. Sarah's home institution will be identified from here on out with the pseudonym of, Jesuit Institution NYC. After her anticipated graduation in May 2022, she plans to look for higher education jobs in programming, student affairs, or transition programs.

##### ***Study Abroad Background***

Sarah studied abroad in the spring of 2019, for a semester experience in London, United Kingdom. The program was created, sponsored, and led by her home institution. Over 300 students from her home institution and from partnered institutions, such as Loyola University Chicago, Marquette University, and Brown University, all participated in this semester program.



Jesuit Institution NYC had an international campus in London where she and the other students attended courses during their academic semester abroad. The pseudonym, Jesuit Institution London, will be utilized to acknowledge and discuss the London campus where Sarah attended classes. Jesuit Institution NYC worked with a third-party housing company in London to provide varied housing accommodations for all the students. Sarah described the housing accommodations as the following:

We all had accommodations that were organized by them and they were all throughout the city. And so some people, you know, lived really, really far from campus. And then some people lived really close. I was fortunate to be one of the people who lived closer. Sarah lived in a flat near the university with 5 other women with varying schedules and interests. Out of the 5 roommates, Sarah knew 2 of the women ahead of time and had requested to be housed with them.

While abroad, Sarah completed 4 courses, including a course on race, class and gender in the media, a course on European politics, and a course on art and architecture. She commented on how London professors created a great balance between learning academics in the classroom and exploring the city through walking tours, museums, and other local trips. Sarah found her classes interesting, fun, and she had this to say about her classes abroad:

I think all of our classes really just provided us the opportunity to look both at European culture and English culture, through a lens that is applicable to understanding American culture and how a lot of the things that we do in the U.S., where those came from and what they're inspired by.

Sarah and the other students had independence in their activities outside of class, travel on the weekends, and spring break trips.

### *Pre-departure Experience*

The pre-departure process for Sarah involved applying internally through her home institution with a letter of recommendation from a faculty or staff member who spoke to her ability to adapt and learn in different climates.

**Experience Challenges.** During the pre-orientation program, Sarah noted feeling excited, nervous, and a bit stressed out about her anticipated trip abroad and stated that “there was a lot that I felt like was kind of up in the air.” There were certain questions and concerns she and the other students had that were personalized to one person’s banking or cell phone company and could not be answered completely by the pre-orientation team. Overall, Sarah stated that looking back on the experience, she feels the pre-orientation staff gave her and the other students the information and knowledge they needed. She described the experience in the following way:

I realized now that they did give us all the tools that we needed to be successful, but like just being on that side of it, it's very nerve-wracking to make sure you know, that you're doing everything right.

**Support.** The pre-orientation program, as described by Sarah, was provided by the study abroad department included staff from both the Jesuit Institution NYC and Jesuit Institution London. The orientation involved information on what to expect, what kind of things to bring, how to handle technology, such as cell phones, and converting money. A few of the individuals speaking at the orientation had experience moving from the United States to the United Kingdom and were able to speak from their own experiences. Sarah also commented on the family support she received pre-departure, as she had family who had travelled abroad as well as relatives living in and around the London areas, who helped her navigate her expectations and preparations for the trip.

### *Abroad Experience*

While abroad, Sarah experienced an array of feelings, moments, and exciting adventures. The following section will examine the challenges and support that Sarah faced during her semester abroad.

**Experience Challenges.** Sarah described her travel experience from the United States to the United Kingdom as a “whirlwind.” Once she arrived in London, she noted feeling mostly excited to be in a new city, get settled into her flat, and start her adventure abroad. She did, however, feel that her jet lag was difficult to adjust to and simple things such as where to buy groceries and setting expectations with her roommates were small challenges.

As Sarah settled into her semester in London, she established a daily and weekly routine and eventually became very comfortable in this once unfamiliar culture. She stated, “I honestly think I was just surprised at how comfortable I felt there and how easy it was to like live day to day. And how, like, homey and doable the city felt.”

As Sarah began to prepare to return to the United States, she stated feeling “really, really sad.” She commented on how she and many others wished the experience could have been longer, as they really started to embrace the experience toward the end of the trip.

I think the adjustment process took varying length for people. But by the time we really get to the end of March, April, everyone was really coming into their own and having a great time and really, you know, doing all of the things that they wanted to do and felt comfortable doing all these things alone.

Sarah noted a few challenges associated with her and other students’ housing accommodations. The varying types and locations of the living accommodations created tension and Sarah shared,

There was kind of a lot of drama around housing and people, you know, being okay with where they were living and how long their commute was and just kind of the extra time strain, but also financial strain on having to commute into this campus.

Other challenges arose as Sarah adjusted to sharing space and energy with 5 other roommates, who all had different schedules and interests. She stated that “As we started to get tired of one another, that definitely presented some challenges of expectations of what we wanted to do in London.”

Sarah commented on the emotional turmoil that many of the other students, especially the younger ones, experienced from their heavy class load and feeling homesick. She stated that this tension did affect the entire campus, as they struggled to adjust to this unfamiliar culture.

**Support.** When first arriving in London, Sarah had about 3 days to situate herself in a new country, new culture, new flat, and new institution. Jesuit Institution London utilized those days to provide orientation over safety procedures, expectations of classes and academics, and travel advice. After this initial orientation, Sarah and the other students were able to attend social events put on by Jesuit Institution London. These included bowling, arcade nights, walking tours of the city, and a boat cruise. All of these events were developed to help the students adapt, make friends, and feel comfortable in a new country. She sums up the experience this way:

I think the three days before classes started was really just getting settled. Here's what you need to know about your classes. Here's what you need to know about the city. Let's make friends and meet everybody before we really get into gear.

The student activities planning committee at Jesuit Institution London continued to create tabling and information events to help Sarah and the other students adjust to London and their academic schedules. When commenting on her adjustment to London, Sarah said,

I think one of the biggest things that really helped too, was the continuation of that pre-orientation program that they did in New York. They did a series of things called landing talks once we got to the United Kingdom, and they were all targeted at different stressors.

When asked what kinds of support and resources Sarah utilized during her time in London, she noted her luck that two of her good friends from the United States were also studying abroad in London, but they had different housing accommodations. Sarah stated that this gave her the freedom to escape her flat if needed and spend some time with some friendly faces. She also noted reaching out to friends and family from back home, who had travelled previously and could understand and provide support when issues arose.

Talking to my family and my parents who had also traveled and were more understanding of the issues that I had previously had with college roommates and who knew me a little bit better, was helpful. And so, they were able to support me through a lot of those things.

Lastly, Sarah noted that she received support from several staff members who worked in student activities at Jesuit Institution London. She stated that one of these individuals had come to the United States from the United Kingdom to assist in the pre-orientation program, and they stayed in contact throughout her time abroad and since returning home.

### ***Return Home Experience***

As Sarah spoke about working through her emotions leaving London, she reflected on her experiences being back in the United States and her adjustment to being state side, facing the next academic year, and catching up with friends and family.

**Experience Challenges.** After returning to the United States and her home in California, Sarah experienced a range of emotions as she adjusted back into her daily life in the United States. She stated, “it went from being very busy and very hectic and having all these great

things to do to really just having nothing, which felt really weird.” She later stated, “I think my sadness just kind of continued so that I didn't really want to do other things I wanted to just live in the memories of those last couple months.” Once Sarah went back to New York City for her senior year of undergraduate studies, she was able to reunite with some college friends and reminisce on her experiences with others who went to London. She stated that it was great “getting back into the swing of things that felt more normal.”

As Sarah has adjusted back to her life in the United States, she still reminisces fondly of her study abroad experience in London. She recognizes the role it has had on her recognition and appreciation of the history between America and England, stating “I think it definitely deepened my understanding and appreciation of this shared global history that we have.”

**Support.** As far as Sarah was aware, there was no official post-trip/return home reflection provided by her home institution or the study abroad department. However, she did help plan and attended a reunion for all the individuals who participated in their study abroad trip to London that occurred about 6 months after their return home. She reflects positively on this experience and the shared bond she has with those she went abroad with.

I would say honestly to this day, a lot of my really, really good friends were in that program and in that semester, and regardless of whether or not we were friends then, we are friends now. And I think we are kind of bonded by that experience.

### ***Cultural Experiences***

As Sarah navigated her way through a semester abroad, she was able to identify that she experienced substantial cultural opportunities in new locations, both within and outside of London. This section will provide a view of Sarah’s cultural experiences through three categories, local appreciation, surprises, and outside London.

**Local Appreciation.** Throughout her semester in London, Sarah gained experience and appreciation of the local culture while living in central London. Her local housing accommodations allowed Sarah to organically interact with members of the local London community. She stated that her housing was really close to the University College London, which is a large, public, research university, and this allowed her opportunities to interact with local students who were from the United Kingdom.

Another way she became immersed in the local culture was through her classes. Sarah shared that she appreciated how her London professors created a great balance between learning in the classroom and getting her and the other students engaged in the community. She stated that, “most of the classes I had alternated weeks, so we’d have a week in a classroom and then the next week would in a museum or on a walking tour.” As Sarah got more involved with the student planning committee at her London university, she helped plan and attended many informational and social events that involved topics regarding English and London culture. She stated, “we did lots of tabling and informational things around different niche things, like UK holidays, which was really interesting and fun, and again, another way to meet some fun people.” It was through these tabling and engagement events that Sarah learned about the charity shop she began volunteering at. Sarah worked with the charity, Oxfam, that sells quality clothes and appliances to raise money to support the fight against poverty. She volunteered there for the entirety of her time abroad. Through this volunteer work, she was able to work directly with local members of the community and make lasting connections with fellow volunteers and the manager of the shop.

**Surprises.** Through her reflection, Sarah noted several cultural surprises that she and her classmates encountered. This section will further examine 4 of the surprises Sarah encountered and how she handled and reacted to these experiences.

One of the first cultural surprises that Sarah encountered occurred during the orientation she received the first few days after arriving in London. The host institution brought in members from the London police force to go over some safety tips and procedures to aid them in having a safe experience in London. It was during this presentation that many of the students first realized that the police in London do not carry guns. This recognition sparked concern and conversation amongst Sarah and the other students. She stated:

I distinctly remember people not realizing that policemen in London didn't carry guns.

And so there was a whole conversation after that presentation about whether or not we felt safe with policemen who were not armed, and that was just a very interesting, like a cultural switch. There were people who were very, very alarmed.

Another cultural surprise for Sarah revolved around the local food and her ability to find food that worked for her. Sarah has a few dietary restrictions that she admitted worried her when she first began her trip abroad. However, Sarah was pleased to discover how accommodating many of the places she visited were when it came to her restrictions. She said,

I have a lot of dietary restrictions, and so I was always very impressed at all of our places that we visited we were able to accommodate those. Even with the full English breakfast, they made ways to make sure everyone was able to try, which was really awesome.

Overall, Sarah was surprised and impressed with the ease she was able to locate foods that fit within her dietary restrictions



When it came to travel in and outside of London, Sarah was surprised by how simple and affordable it was to travel between different European countries. She stated that she and her travel buddies did not have to go through customs multiple times since they were considered domestic flights. She summed it up in the following manner:

I think the biggest thing that was stunning to me was just how easy it was to travel back and forth from the different countries. Like even being American, as opposed to having an EU passport, it was so inexpensive. It was so doable. You could decide that you were going somewhere on a Monday and book your flight for Thursday, and it would be totally fine, which is so different from the U.S.

The final surprise that Sarah discussed involved the ease she experienced transitioning into this new culture and country. Sarah was surprised to find herself well-adjusted and not nearly as homesick as she had imagined. In fact, when it came time for Sarah to leave, she felt a deep sadness and consoled herself with the promise of returning to London again one day. To describe her experience, she said “I honestly think I was just surprised at how comfortable I felt there and how easy it was to live day to day. And how homey and doable the city felt.” She later additionally stated, “I think that was honestly, the biggest thing, I didn't get as homesick as I thought I would, I didn't have as much culture shock as I thought I would.”

**Outside London.** A major part of Sarah’s experience involved traveling outside of London on the weekends and breaks when she did not have academic responsibilities. Some of these travel experiences were organized by the host university and others were organized and attended by herself and a friend. On multiple occasions during her reflection, Sarah noted how impactful and grateful she was to have received the opportunity to travel to an array of cities, countries, and general destinations outside of London. Although Sarah could not be certain this is

a comprehensive list, the following are locations she was able to visit: Budapest, Brussels, the Czech Republic, Dublin, Edinburgh, the Lake District of Northern England, Paris, Prague, Rome, Salzburg, Vienna, the White Cliffs of Dover, and York.

Sarah described her experiences in a few of these locations in more detail. One of the experiences that she remembered very fondly was her time spent in Salzburg, a city in Austria that exists on the border of Germany. Sarah's trip to Salzburg occurred during her midterm break, and she was accompanied by three other women in her program. The week-long trip took the women to Salzburg, Vienna, and Budapest. Sarah described her time in Salzburg with deep admiration and respect. A few of her favorite moments in Salzburg were seeing snow on the mountains and participating in a Sound of Music sing-along bus tour. To describe her experience there she said, "I absolutely love Salzburg." and "Salzburg was just so different than anywhere I'd ever been."

Another travel experience outside of London that Sarah remembers fondly occurred on a university sponsored trip to the Lake District in Northern England. She said that they hiked around the lake and were able to visit small villages. In regard to this trip she said,

I really loved our Lake District tour that was in Northern England. Just being outside and spending some time with people who were outside of the group of friends, who I was taking classes with and spending a lot of my time with, was really, really fun.

A final travel experience that Sarah reminisced about was the trip she took to the White Cliffs of Dover that she went on by herself. She said that she walked the entirety of the White Cliffs, and at the end was able to stop at a local, mom and pop tea shop. Before walking back, Sarah made herself a picnic lunch, had a cup of tea, and sat down to read her book while

enjoying the view of the White Cliffs. She described it as “such a lovely day,” and recognized the pleasantness that came with traveling and experiencing a new place by herself by saying,

I do love traveling with my friends, but sometimes just having that alone time, especially after living with five other people and university accommodations and being in classes with the same few people, it was really nice to have a break and see something new.

## **Bailey**

### ***Background***

Bailey is a 28-year-old female who spent most of her childhood (from age 3 to 18) living in Japan. Bailey moved to the United States when she was 18 to attend college at a private, research university in Colorado. Bailey’s home institution will be referred to as Colorado University from here on out. After graduating with her bachelor's degree in international studies in 2015, Bailey joined the Peace Corps and moved to Indonesia where to taught English for 2 years. Then Bailey received her master’s degree in student development from a Seattle institution. Bailey is currently teaching English at a learning school in California.

### ***Study Abroad Background***

Bailey studied abroad twice during her undergraduate career. The first trip she took was to Beijing, China, and it was organized and partnered with Colorado University. Bailey studied abroad in China with around 10 other students for one semester from August 2013 to December 2013. For her second study abroad trip, Bailey traveled to Tokyo, Japan. This trip was self-developed and self-led, and it occurred from April 2014 to July 2014. From December 2013 (when she finished her semester in Beijing) until April 2014 (when she began her semester in Tokyo), Bailey stayed in another part of Japan with her parents.

While studying in China, Bailey lived on campus and attended classes at a university in Beijing, which will be referred to as Beijing University for the remainder of this paper. She shared living quarters with other students that was set up in an apartment-style. Each student had an individual room, with a shared living space and bathroom. Also, Bailey has grandparents who lived and are living in Beijing, so she often stayed with them on the weekends. While in Japan, Bailey lived on campus and attended classes at the university in Tokyo, which will be referred to as Tokyo University. Bailey described her living situation at Tokyo University as being a “dormitory setup” that she shared with other students but was “more studio-style than apartment-style because there was no shared living space.”

While in Beijing, Bailey took three courses, including a Chinese culture course and a Chinese language course. She described the course load she took in Beijing as being “pretty lax” in comparison to her maxed out class loads at Colorado University. She also noted that the “grading wasn’t really harsh.” While in Tokyo, Bailey took four courses including a Japanese women’s history class and a Japanese linguistics class. She noted a bit more interest in the courses she took in Tokyo in comparison to her courses in Beijing because she had more options to choose from and was able to pick classes she was really interested in. She says,

I think I was more excited to be in Japan because I had been more involved with the different courses I was choosing. I got to look at the entire catalog rather than being presented with six courses that I had to choose three out of.

### ***Pre-departure Experience***

The pre-departure process for Bailey differed greatly between the two study abroad trips. This section will outline the challenges and the support that Bailey experienced during the pre-departure period.

**Experience Challenges.** One major challenge that Bailey faced as she was preparing to study abroad in Beijing was last minute communications from Colorado University. As the trip was leading up, Bailey was concerned why she was not receiving email updates about the trip. She felt very flustered and as if she had no idea what was going on, stating that “there was a lot of things up in the air.” After reaching out to others on the trip, she was encouraged to check her junk mail and found “so much information I had not been keeping up with.” She said that obtaining all these important documents and information late caused her to feel unsure and behind on what was happening.

Unlike her experience in Beijing, Bailey felt that the Tokyo institution she was attending had excellent communication and she was able to stay on top of those emails and obtain all the information she needed when preparing for her trip. Since this was a self-developed trip, she did not have to rely on communications from Colorado University. Having lived in Japan before, Bailey also felt more comfortable and had less concerns than she did when traveling to Beijing.

**Support.** For her first trip to Beijing, Bailey did receive a formal pre-departure orientation from Colorado University that covered an array of contexts. The orientation mainly focused on the cultural components of the trip as well as safety concerns. Culture shock was discussed during the pre-departure orientation. Since Bailey grew up in Japan and had moved to the United States only a few years prior, she felt she had a good understanding of culture shock and even admitted that she “personally zoned out” during the orientation phase.

Since her trip to Tokyo was self-developed, she did not receive any formal form of pre-departure orientation. Having grown up in Japan, Bailey was not concerned with culture shock or staying safe. She did not feel that she needed a pre-departure orientation even if it had been offered.

### *Abroad Experience*

During her time in Beijing and Tokyo, Bailey experienced many emotions and a few challenges along the way. This section will examine these challenges and the support she received during her semesters abroad.

**Experience Challenges.** When reflecting on her emotions and challenges when first arriving in Beijing, Bailey comments that “Beijing was more uncertain just because the lead up to it was so uncertain, and just in general, my language skills in Chinese weren’t as great as my language skills in Japan.” Additionally, Bailey experienced jet lag when first arriving in China and she had to learn the basics such as “do I drink the water in my sink?” and where to find food.

At the time she was staying in Beijing, Bailey also was doing a long-distance relationship with her boyfriend of the time who was in the military and was going through bootcamp while she was in China. Not being able to communicate frequently or with ease, Bailey said, “that was really hard, emotionally, to manage,” and it was “definitely an emotional rollercoaster.” Another challenge that Bailey faced while in Beijing was with her Chinese linguistic course. She stated that she really “struggled in the class” even though she “was spending hours outside of class studying and prepping.” She spent most of her time and energy on this class rather than her other courses.

Lastly, one large emotional challenge that Bailey had to overcome occurred when it was time for her to leave Beijing. Bailey got to spend a lot of time with her grandparents, and she found it difficult and sad when it came time to leave them at the end of the semester. She got through the goodbyes with promises of coming back and visiting or living with them again. Bailey stated that “I knew I was leaving my grandparents and I didn’t know if I would have ever had an opportunity to spend time with them like that again.”

Having lived in Japan growing up, Bailey experienced less challenges during her time abroad in Tokyo in comparison to her time in Beijing. One challenge that she did note was that the bus system in the Tokyo was very limited and taxis were quite expensive, so instead she walked a lot and took trains and occasionally the subway. She said this about transportation abroad,

I did take the bus, but it was pretty limited. I only went from my dorm to the train station and then hop on the train station to go to school. And taxis are pretty expensive in Japan, so I rarely took them. If I did, it would be with two other people, and we split the cost, and it was only to go from our dorm to the train station, just because we all woke up late and it was easy.

Another challenge or adjustment that Bailey had to face when staying in Tokyo was the late-night scheduled events. She said that she would have events or practices scheduled for “6:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m.” and that she was an “early bird” and struggled with this concept of regularly staying out so late.

Another emotional challenge that Bailey discussed was her sadness with leaving her friends as the trip ended. She stated that “I was a little bit more sad because a bunch of the students there were actually master’s program students, and they were there for an additional year or six months.” She found that leaving the friends she made there, especially the ones staying for longer, was very difficult and sad.

**Support.** When first arriving in Beijing, Bailey had a few days to get acquainted with the campus and city. Beijing University did not provide any formal orientation or scheduled greeting for Bailey or the other students prior to the first day of classes. Instead, she spent these first few

days “meandering, exploring the campus a little bit” and “figuring out where things are and how to find food.”

When issues arose while in Beijing, Bailey had a few sources of support she relied on. She commented that she had a good relationship with one of her Chinese teachers at Beijing University and had reached out to her on more than one occasion when she had questions or concerns. The most significant source of support that Bailey received was from her grandparents who lived in Beijing. She commented that, “I think my favorite memories would be spending time with my grandparents.” Bailey would often spend her weekends staying at her grandparents’ home, and she found that their support and presence had a large influence on her experiences abroad.

When Bailey first arrived in Tokyo for her semester in Japan, she had a different experience than her arrival in Beijing. Since she was able to plan and develop the trip herself, Bailey stated that “I gave myself a little bit more time to settle in, move in and kind of get to know the area.” During these first few days, Tokyo University provided a formal orientation for the new students. The orientation was used to familiarize the students with the campus, community, and their upcoming courses. The orientation was also a way for Bailey to meet other students and become a bit more comfortable with her environment. She described the experience as “reassuring.”

The other form of support that Bailey mentioned in regard to her Tokyo experience was the community of students and friends she established during her semester abroad. Bailey felt that since her experience in Tokyo was less structured than her experience in Beijing, she had to work a bit harder to build a community, but that this community was stronger because of this. She said,



I think I lived a little bit more, if that makes sense. I had a better community because I was the one that built it rather than us coming together as a circumstance because we're all in the same university.

### ***Return Home Experience***

Bailey reflected on her experience when returning to the United States after being abroad in Beijing and Tokyo. This section will cover the challenges and support that Bailey faced as she adjusted to being back at Colorado University, seeing her friends again, and preparing for the next academic semester.

**Experience Challenges.** When Bailey finally returned to the United States after her trip to Tokyo, she had been abroad since first leaving for Beijing. She talked about how the return to the United States was a difficult adjustment and her experiences with reverse culture shock. She stated that,

At that point, I wished I stayed in Japan longer, or did another semester, or didn't come back to the U.S., not only because I had such a great experience there, but also Japan felt more like home than the U.S. did.

When returning to Colorado University, she felt a bit out of place culturally, specifically with the differences in how students dressed in the United States in comparison to students in China or Japan. She stated that she felt, "I was too dressed up for Colorado" and that she wanted to continue dressing nicer because that is what she was comfortable with now, but also that "it feels awkward standing out, so let's just blend back in and put the sweats on."

Bailey also experienced feelings of missing out when she saw her friends in Japan who had studied abroad for a longer period of time and were still posting about their experiences

online. She said that “I think there was a lot of things that I was missing out on and feeling sad about.”

When reflecting on her interactions with her friends from Colorado University upon her return, she noted feeling “disjointed.” Before leaving, Bailey had joined and helped start a new charter class for a sorority on campus. She felt that since she left, she had missed out on many bonding experiences with her sorority sisters of establishing an organization and building that community. She said, “they had built a community, or they had continued building a community while I was away, so coming back it was like ‘okay, what’s happening.’” From this experience, Bailey said she learned that life continues to happen and reflected on this experience as “life continues. Things still happen, and your memories of what it was before you left are still true, but things have progressed. They’re no longer the same.”

**Support.** Since Bailey spent the time after her trip to Beijing in Japan, she was not certain if Colorado University had provided a formal return-home orientation, but she knew that she had not attended it. Likewise, since her trip to Tokyo was self-developed and not sponsored through Colorado University, she had no formal return-home orientation after arriving back in the United States. Additionally, when Bailey returned to the United States, she had left her parents in Japan where they were currently residing.

She did, however, find support through connecting with the friends and acquaintances she met while abroad. She noted that social media was a major way she was able to keep in touch as well as updated on what her friends were doing. She said that she kept in touch with members from both her Beijing and Tokyo trips through Facebook and Instagram. She stated that “I think social media was a great help, connecting on those platforms.”

### ***Cultural Experiences***

During her experiences abroad, Bailey was able to explore many cultural aspects of both China and Japan. This section will provide an overview of Bailey's cultural experiences through three categories, local appreciation, surprises, and outside Beijing.

**Local Appreciation.** While studying in Beijing, Bailey was able to have experiences with the local culture. Besides having to live, communicate, study, and commute in a new culture, Bailey also worked at a Chinese-English magazine in Beijing as an internship. She said that she worked there for the entirety of her experience and that she wrote articles and did research to help the organization.

Bailey gained the most experience and appreciation of local Chinese culture by spending time with her grandparents. She stated that she got a lot of culture exposure by, "living and staying with my grandparents for periods of time on the weekend." She stated that this provided the most exposure because "they'd be the ones to go the local grocery store or picking up and ordering food." She explained how her grandparents "way of living is very old school," and also reflective of the local culture.

While in Tokyo, Bailey had more initiative and freedom to engage with the local community. She joined a dance club while in Japan that introduced her to many local customs, such as late-night practices, and created a bond with friends in and out of her classroom. She also was able to create and plan her own travel experiences within Tokyo. She commented that she "sought out more experiences in Japan," and that it was more up to the students to coordinate those experiences. She noted that,

Japan was more of like, 'alright, I want to go the Hot Springs. How do I get there?

What's the transit?' And budgeting and things like that, and 'Oh, we want to go to the mountains, go hiking. All right, let's go. How do we do that?'

Another cultural influence that Bailey spoke of in Tokyo was interpersonal experiences including language formality and scheduling differences. Since she had more involvement with the local students, she noted that she was exposed to more interpersonal culture. She said,

I felt like I got more of the interpersonal culture experience. You know, it's very formal or there's degrees of formality that you have to engage in, depending on who you're talking to, navigating their preferences on scheduling and general practices.

**Surprises.** Bailey noted a few major cultural surprises that occurred during her semester in Beijing that revolved around safety, the environment, and health. She first mentioned that she “didn't always feel safe taking transit” while she was in China. Additionally, she was not prepared for the constant need to consider the air quality and pollution in Beijing. She described the situation in the following way,

Just having to be constantly vigilant of pollution in China to the point where my dad had purchased air filtration masks, more intense than the N95s. And so, I checked air quality every day, and if I got the seal right on the mask, I could taste the difference in the air. It wasn't necessarily a horrible experience, but it was something that I didn't have to do in other countries that I lived.

Since Bailey grew up in Japan, she experienced far fewer cultural surprises while in Tokyo than she did in Beijing. Unlike in China, Bailey felt much safer in Japan, noting that “I feel like China, I didn't always feel safe taking transit. It felt like you had to be hyper-aware which was opposite of Japan. I felt relatively safe, I knew what was happening.”

**Outside Beijing.** When Bailey was in Beijing, she was able to travel outside of the city to Southern China as a part of a travel trip planned by Colorado University and Beijing University. The universities offered three different travel trips outside of Beijing, one trip went to Chengdu

and Tibet, another went to Shanghai, and the third option that Bailey participated in went inland to Southern China. Bailey reflects positively on her experience outside of Beijing, getting to experience a more mountainous and different view of China. She described the experience as “a different view of China that I hadn’t seen before, and it was really fun seeing everybody explore China in that sense.”

There were also other travel opportunities outside of Beijing that were built into the program. Bailey stated that, “they also had weekend trips headed out to the big travel locations, probably within an hour or two of Beijing.” She mentioned getting to visit the Great Wall of China and other activities that she described as “tourist activities.”

While Bailey was in Tokyo, she was not able to travel outside of the city. However, she did have many interactions with international students from across the world. She noted that she spent time inside and outside of the classroom with many students from Germany, the Netherlands, and Latin America.

## **Claire**

### ***Background***

Claire is a 24-year-old female who graduated from a mid-sized, public university in Kentucky (referred to as Kentucky University) in 2020. She received a bachelor's degree in Asian religions and culture, with a concentration in Korean and Japanese language, with minors in political science and professional writing with a global studies designation. She originally planned on going into higher education to help college students study abroad but graduating during a pandemic made study abroad jobs rare. Instead, she is currently working in South Korea as an English teacher to elementary aged students.

### ***Study Abroad Background***

Claire had four study abroad opportunities during her undergraduate career that occurred over the summer semesters. Her first experience, Claire traveled to Morocco in 2017 on a faculty led program where she studied women in politics. The next two summers (2018, 2019), Claire traveled to Seoul, South Korea, where she “fell in love” with the country and culture. The first trip to South Korea, Claire studied with 24 other students, and her second time in South Korea, she went with 17 other students. Her final summer semester, Claire spent a month in Costa Rica. Since Claire spent the most time and had the most exposure to the culture in South Korea, the remainder of this narrative will focus on her experiences in South Korea.

For both of her study abroad experiences in South Korea, Claire had the option to live on campus. However, for the sake of money, she opted to find alternative places to live. The first experience, Claire lived in a house she found on Airbnb that she shared with five high school boys. The second summer, Claire stayed in a small apartment called a goshiwon. She described the goshiwon as “a room that is as long as a twin-size bed and just wide enough to put a toilet next to the twin size bed with a shower over the toilet.” This is a common living arrangement for college students in South Korea, and Claire felt she would rather spend her money on traveling experiences than on living arrangements.

While abroad in Seoul, Claire attended classes at the local university (referred to as Seoul University). The first summer, Claire took three classes that were four hours a day Monday through Wednesday. These included a Korean language course, Korean history course, and a Korean ceramic history course. She felt that this class load was a bit “intense” and struggled with her Korean language course. She really appreciated her other two courses, noting that “the Korean history was a very cooky, fun professor” and that the “Korean ceramic history class was

just amazing.” The second summer, Claire only took two courses, retaking the Korean language course, and adding a political thought course through the lens of Korean dramas.

### *Pre-departure Experience*

The pre-departure process for Claire began when she first entered college, unaware of the study abroad opportunities that lay ahead for her. This section will outline the challenges and the support that Claire experienced during the pre-departure period.

**Experience Challenges.** One of the first major challenges that Claire spoke about having to overcome was the idea that she could not afford to study abroad during her undergraduate career. She said,

When I first started undergrad, I was a low-income student, so initially I thought I would never be able to study abroad. I would never be able to travel. Even though it’s the only thing I’ve ever wanted to do since I was little, I figured like ‘oh it’s just not really in the books for me.’

She credits her ability to study abroad so many times to the scholarships available as well as the outreach from Kentucky University’s study abroad department. She mentioned how someone “literally grabbed” her and told her about the scholarship opportunities available for low-income students to study abroad.

**Support.** Before Claire studied abroad to South Korea, she started working at Kentucky University’s study abroad department. This allowed her to become very familiar with the orientation programs provided. She described how the pre-departure orientation was a few hours long and “it basically goes over the basics of safety abroad, remembering cultural differences,” and that “we put a lot of focus on what to do if there is an emergency and then focusing on

culture shock and what to do if you get culture shock.” Overall, she described the study abroad program and Kentucky University as being “incredibly supportive.”

### *Abroad Experience*

While exploring and adjusting to South Korea, Claire experienced many emotions and a few challenges along the way. This section will examine these challenges and the support she received during her summer experiences abroad.

**Experience Challenges.** Claire faced a major challenge when she first arrived in Seoul the first summer. Before she left, she was told by a faculty member that her trip was a faculty-led experience and when she arrived in South Korea, she “realized he was not being truthful, and I was completely alone in South Korea.” This caused a lot of emotional stress and confusion for Claire and the other students on the trip. She did not know where her university was or how to get in touch with any of the other students. However, she noted that once she understood the changes, she and the other students were able to make the most out of the experience. She said, “we just had to adjust how we were approaching the program and realizing, ‘oh we just need to make these plans by ourselves and do things on our own.’”

Another major challenge for Claire revolved around finding food that worked for her. She noted that she has “an auto-immune disorder that makes it so there’s not a lot of food that I can eat without really bad allergic reactions.” This caused many challenges for Claire, especially her first few days in Seoul when she was completely unsure of what was safe to eat and what was not. She said, “my first few days I was really hungry because I was terrified to go and order food” and because of this, she was eating at “Seven Eleven’s and convenience stores for two days.” As time went on, Claire was able to meet up with other students on the trip, and together they found places they could eat at safely.



Overall, Claire loved her experiences in South Korea, and she had many more positive emotional responses than she had challenges. She noted that she “was just having the time of my life.”

**Support.** Unlike her experience the first summer, Claire was much more prepared and informed when she arrived in South Korea the second time. She attended classes at a very prestigious university in Korea, and they provided a student orientation that Claire described as “really intense.” This orientation not only provided Claire and the other students with information on safety, emergencies, and cultural considerations, they also informed them of fun events both at the university and within the community. She described it in the following way,

Then they made sure that they told us, ‘here’s a list of events that we’re hosting. We’ll take you to this theme park or this festival. You just have to sign up ahead of time.’ So, you can do these traditional, fun, summer things, but not alone.

Beyond the orientation provided by Seoul University, Claire was able to find support from faculty members and her advisors back at Kentucky University. When Claire had questions or concerns about the trip or traveling, she often reached out to her study abroad advisor or a professor that taught her Asian politic classes back in Kentucky.

Lastly, Claire relied on her classmates and friends she developed abroad to be a form of support. She noted that many of the students also struggled with the same issues she had, so they helped one another find their way. She said,

We spent our whole week before classes just eating lots of different things, going to museums, trying to figure out how to use the subway. None of us, small town Kentucky kids knew how to use the subway. And just getting our bearings before classes started.

### ***Return Home Experience***

As Claire reflected on her experience when returning to the United States, she described her challenges adjusting to being back at Kentucky University. This section will cover the challenges and support that Claire faced as she figured out who she was in America again and how her experiences had changed her views of certain American customs.

**Experience Challenges.** Claire found that leaving South Korea the first time was really challenging and difficult at times. She noted that, “my first time I was panicking. I didn’t know if I would ever be able to come back to South Korea, and I absolutely loved it.”

Returning home also meant that Claire had to deal with many of the decisions she had made while she was out of the country. She explained how she stepped down from the speech debate team she was a part of and that it “was like my entire identity back home,” so Claire had to reestablish who she was now that she was no longer debating.

She also noted that she struggled to adjust back to many of the American cultures. When returning home, she worked in retail and customer service positions, and she found herself appalled at how rude and disrespectful many of the patrons treated her. In South Korea, Claire explained that everyone was so polite to servers and service workers but,

It vanished when I came back. There was an expectation for me to be really nice to the people that were working for me when I went to restaurants and stores, and when I came back and was put in the position of the employee, I was like ‘why are people being so mean to me? Why?’ I don’t understand why we’re like this.

Claire also noted that she struggled with adapting back to the class culture in the United States. She had become accustomed to students dressing up nicely for class and taking notes only by hand, with no laptops open. When she returned to Kentucky University, she would “go to class and we’re all in our pajamas again, on BuzzFeed instead of taking notes in class.”

Overall, Claire described her experience back home in the following way,

I was just heartbroken and sad because I just had the time of my life. I had just been with students that were serious about the same things I was studying. My major was small back at home and there was only eight of us, so I was like ‘I didn’t want to leave.’

**Support.** Although Claire struggled when she had to leave South Korea the first time, she found that the second time she left, she was more eager to return home because she knew she would be back one day (to visit or live), and she was excited to begin her career helping others study abroad. She described it this way,

When I was leaving for the second time, I was just excited because at this point, I knew the ins and outs of study abroad. I knew how universities love to fund it. I knew that there’s a lot of jobs abroad, so it was more excitement, like ‘oh, my goodness, I’m going to go home. I’m going to graduate, and then I can turn either living in Korea into a job or helping more students study abroad into a job.’

Claire did not have any formal reflection or orientation once returning home. However, her family did provide a form of support when she arrived home. When reflecting on the experience, she noted that her parents were excited for her to be home and had worried often about her traveling alone.

### ***Cultural Experiences***

During her time abroad, Claire experienced many cultural aspects of South Korea that she learned to accept and appreciation. This section will provide an overview of Claire’s cultural experiences through three categories, local appreciation, surprises, and outside Seoul.

**Local Appreciation.** Claire gained a lot of experience and appreciation for the local culture in South Korea through her housing decisions. For her first experience, she was able to

live with several local high school boys. She learned a lot about interpersonal culture from living with them. She noted that, “they were so sweet and respectful,” especially since she was older than them. For her second summer, Claire stayed in a small room called a goshiwon that is very often utilized by local college students in South Korea. She explained it this way, “it was really interesting to stay in such small quarters, but that is a really common experience for Korean students to do because rent prices here aren’t the cheapest,” and that she felt “it definitely added to the experience to live in a way that a lot of local students do.”

Another way that Claire experienced the local culture occurred around dinner and street-culture at night. She explained that in South Korea, food is designed to be shared by a lot of people, so she and her classmates and friends would often get together after a long day of classes to get dinner together, where they would share platters of food. Also, Claire described the night life that occurred on the streets of Seoul at night. She described the experience like this, “there’s a lot of music busking that happens, so the streets at night are just lined with young people, singing, playing guitar, dancing, doing magic acts. So, your walk home is a show.” Similarly, on the weekends, Claire and her friends would often “travel together someplace new, go to a festival during the day, go out at night, as the clubs here are open until 6:00 a.m.”

A final experience with local culture that Claire reflected on was when she was able to visit a temple during Buddha’s birthday. She described the experience as,

It was so amazing to see people who are just culturally visiting because it’s Buddha’s birthday and seeing people who actually practice Buddhism. If I wouldn’t have seen that, I don’t think I would have understood how that religion connects to culture.

**Surprises.** The major cultural surprise that Claire and her classmates commented on was that “the culture is surprisingly polite, but also surprisingly rude at the same time.” She went on

to further explain how “Korean culture is the most polite, respectful, and formal culture” she’s ever seen. At the same time, however, she explained that certain polite American traditions, such as holding a door open for others, was not considered necessary or appropriate in South Korea.

To sum up the experience, Claire said,

It’s so polite, but sometimes not. If I bump into someone on the subway and I say sorry, they look at me weird, but at the same time, if I have my debit card and I’m paying for my meal, I hand it with two hands to the waiter because that’s the respectful thing to do.

Another surprise that Claire experienced was how comfortable and safe she felt, and how South Korea compared to the United States. She said, “it felt normal; it felt at home.” She later went on to describe South Korea in the following way “it’s still a highly advanced, fast-moving, economically outstanding culture, but still has so many differences. It’s so cool to see how something can be exactly the same to a country like the U.S., but also totally different.”

**Outside Seoul.** While Claire was in South Korea, she was able to travel outside of Seoul and South Korea a handful of times, often by herself. She was able to visit friends and family who were in England and Scotland. She also had a layover in Turkey before she arrived in South Korea. Fortunately, her summer courses were set up to give her and her classmates four-day weekends. Therefore, she often spent those weekends traveling, especially along the coast of Korea. Claire reflects positively on these experiences, stating that traveling alone did not scare her away from exploring new areas:

A lot of my travel was all around the coast of Korea, but all of that was done alone. My mother had a lot of heart attacks, but if no one was going to go with me, I’m just going to do it. I’m not going to stay at home because I’m scared of traveling alone.

Claire also gained exposure to cultures outside of South Korea by interacting with her international classmates and friends. She said, “we had people from everywhere. We would have Korean students, Saudi students, American students, Japanese students, and a lot of students from the Philippines.” All of these experiences provided Claire with an array of cultural opportunities, many that she reflects back on positively.

**Sam.**

***Background***

Sam is a 24-year-old master’s student receiving a degree in political science with a concentration in public policy. She received her bachelors in Spanish with minors in Latin American studies and political science and is receiving her master’s degree from a public, mid-sized university in Illinois (referred to as Illinois University). She graduated with her bachelor’s degree in 2019 and is now working in a study abroad office as a graduate assistant while working toward her master’s degree.

***Study Abroad Background***

Sam studied abroad twice during her undergraduate career. The first experience, Sam traveled to Guatemala for a week over spring break in 2018. Since Sam had such a great experience the first time, she decided to study abroad again for three weeks with 9 other students in Costa Rica the following summer of 2019. Both experiences were faculty-led and organized by Illinois University. The remainder of this paper will focus on Sam’s second experience in Costa Rica.

While staying in Costa Rica, Sam and the other students spent the first week based mainly in La Fortuna, Costa Rica and then the last two weeks they were stationed mostly in San Jose, Costa Rica. Sam described the first week in La Fortuna as mainly consisting of “tourist

activities” such as roasting a marshmallow from a volcano, zip-lining, and visiting museums.

This first week in La Fortuna, Sam and the other students took a class that was led by the faculty member from Illinois University that ended with them presenting on something they learned about Costa Rica that first week. The last two weeks spent in San Jose, Sam and the other students attended classes at the local university (referred to as San Jose University). Sam took two classes over these two weeks that were taught by a professor from San Jose University. One class was a Spanish grammar course, and the other was a Spanish culture course. Overall, she described her classes as involving “lots of hands-on learning.”

For their first week in La Fortuna, Sam and the other students stayed in a hotel with the faculty member from Illinois University. When staying in San Jose for the other weeks, each student stayed with a different host family. Sam stayed with a host mom who she described as being “wonderful” and “very sweet.” Sam’s host mother lived about a mile away from San Jose University, so Sam walked about a mile a day to go to school.

### ***Pre-departure Experience***

The pre-departure process for Sam involved applying internally through Illinois University with a statement of interest and a few letters of recommendation. The following sections will cover the challenges and support that Sam experienced while preparing to study abroad.

**Experience Challenges.** When Sam first decided she wanted to study abroad, her parents had many worries about her safety and were not able or willing to help her afford the experience. This, however, did not stop Sam from working hard to keep her goal. She explained the situation in the following way, “I understand they were scared for my safety and there’s just so many concerns, but I feel like I need to do this. I need to broaden my horizons and learn things for

myself.” To afford her study abroad experiences, Sam did all she could by getting extra jobs while in school to save up money and apply for scholarships that were available.

Another challenge that Sam faced was that she had to delay her graduation slightly in order to study abroad for the second time. She said, “I decided to delay my graduation so that I could study abroad in Costa Rica for three weeks.”

**Support.** Overall, Sam described the application process to study abroad through Illinois University as being “relatively simple.” She was able to receive many scholarships from the university to help her afford the experience. Also, Illinois University and the study abroad program provided a pre-departure orientation for Sam and the other students a few weeks before they departed. This orientation provided basic information on what to expect in Costa Rica such as the local culture, hospital locations, and how to handle emergencies. Sam felt that the orientation was thorough and adequately prepared her for her experiences abroad.

### ***Abroad Experience***

While exploring Costa Rica, Sam was challenged and supported in several ways while adjusting to the new environment. This section will examine these challenges and the support she received during her weeks in Costa Rica,

**Experience Challenges.** Sam’s first few days in Costa Rica were filled with a mix of excitement from seeing so many new places and things and exhaustion from the previous long flights and travel days. Another immediate challenge Sam faced revolved around the health accommodations she required. Sam explained how she has epilepsy and celiac disease and had to pay extra attention to taking care of her health and eating appropriate foods. She described the situation in the following way,



I have epilepsy so I had to make sure my medications were taken on time, especially being in a different time zone. It was kind of interesting trying to make sure I still got up at 6:00 a.m. to take my medicine, and then making sure I got enough sleep. I also have celiac disease, so I had to make sure I had a host family that would cook foods I could eat. That was a very interesting challenge.

Partially through their time in San Jose, the faculty member from Illinois University that was leading Sam's experience came down with a health concern that took them back to the United States early. This obviously caused Sam and her other classmates some stress, but they were able to adapt over time. She explained that the faculty member "had to go back to the states and so us 10 students were just stranded by ourselves in Costa Rica."

Other challenges that Sam faced involved the environment she was in. She noted that there were times and certain areas of Costa Rica that did not feel very safe. She explained how on one of their travel adventures, "all 10 of us Americans walked two miles to the bus station in a bad part of town. In hindsight, it was a miracle nothing bad happened." Additionally, adjusting to the extreme heat in Costa Rica also showed to be a challenge for Sam and her classmates. She explained how there was no air conditioning there because "they just don't see the point. That's spending too much money when that money could be spent elsewhere."

Sam faced one final challenge while abroad when she began to prepare to head back to the United States. She described being in deep denial as the trip began to come to an end. She explained the experience in the following way, "as I realized time was coming, part of it was denial. I just kept going, 'no, no, no, it's not happening. We can't do this.' Yeah, I didn't really cope with it well." She struggled accepting that her trip had come to an end so quickly.

**Support.** While in Costa Rica, Sam was able to rely on several support systems to help her adjust and stay safe. First, she explained how accommodating she felt her host mother, San Jose University, and the people of Costa Rica were when it came to working with her disabilities. She described her experience,

Thankfully, in Costa Rica, they were very sweet. They were very kind, and they were able to get my accommodations, so I had all the gluten-free food that I could eat. It was great. The way they assisted with it and solved the problem was very professional, very polite.

She went on to explain how San Jose University worked with the disability services department at Illinois University to help get food accommodations on campus, and that her host mother was always there to help and support her with anything. She said,

Like I said, my host mom was very sweet. If I needed anything, she was like ‘okay, I help you.’ And everybody at the university was very, very nice, and I felt that the support system was very good there.

Another source of support that Sam relied on was her family and friends back home. She said she was thankful for Skype and Snapchat to keep in touch with her parents and siblings back home. She also found support from her fellow classmates, as they navigated Costa Rica together, especially after their faculty member lead was sent home early.

### ***Return Home Experience***

As Sam described her experience when returning to Illinois, she reflected on her challenges adjusting to being back in the United States and the support system she received upon return. This section will cover the challenges and the support system that Sam described.

**Experience Challenges.** Having struggled with accepting that the trip was nearing the end before leaving, Sam also felt sadness when returning to the United States. She explained how she missed Costa Rica almost immediately, and felt that it was almost “like a dream” and she had to ask herself “did that even happen?”

Beyond the disbelief that the experience was over, Sam explained how she did not feel the same after returning and certain aspects in the United States felt different upon her return. She described simple aspects that had changed such as the air conditioning feeling much colder once she returned and forgetting to tip service workers because it was not custom in Costa Rica to do so. To describe her emotions once returning Sam said, “Coming back to the U.S was hard. Even though I was happy to see my family, it was like a part of me was left in Costa Rica.”

**Support.** Once Sam returned home, she did not have a formal return orientation provided by the study abroad program. However, she completed a five-page paper for her class reflection. She explained how it covered “basically everything from my trip, like how I felt, what I learned, and how I can apply it to my future.” This allowed Sam to reflect on her experiences in Costa Rica as well as gain credit for her courses.

Beyond this initial reflection, Sam also chose to take a class upon her return that covered study abroad topics. She said,

Also, when I got back, I chose to take the senior seminar, where they talked about the benefits of studying abroad, how you can use your study abroad experiences to get jobs and a ton of really cool stuff like that.

This senior seminar experience allowed Sam to continue to reflect on her experiences with others who had studied abroad and appreciated the experience.

Sam also relied on faculty members and friends and family who were eager to listen to her reflect on her experiences. She explained how the initial interest and excitement from others allowed her to relive her experience, but this interest eventually slowed down, and Sam noticed a difference. She said, “then things just got back to normal. People stopped asking questions or wanting to hear stories, which was kind of sad.”

### *Cultural Experiences*

While Sam was abroad, she was able to have many cultural experiences in her short time in Costa Rica. This section will provide an overview of Sam’s cultural experiences through the following three categories, local appreciation, surprises, and outside San Jose.

**Local Appreciation.** When reflecting on her experience with the local culture in Costa Rica, she credits much of her exposure to living with her host mother. She explained that “I stayed with a host family, so I was able to practice my Spanish, and I just really got to immerse myself” and that “my host mom did not know any English, so it was interesting but a wonderful opportunity to be able to be immersed in local culture.” Along with her host mother, most of the locals in La Fortuna and San Jose did not speak much English, so she had to rely on her Spanish to communicate with locals.

Another way that Sam was immersed in the local culture was through her down time away from class and faculty-led activities. She described how she and the other students would often go to the local mall after school and the local bars on the weekends. She explained that “we did go to a bar on the weekends because we’re college students. It was an interesting experience, but it was nice seeing how people go to a bar and socialize in another country other than America.” Sam also decided to take salsa dance classes to gain more access with the locals, and through this process she was able to meet two local students from Costa Rica who were “very

sweet people, and they just told us about the culture and everything. We also got to learn salsa and how to dance, so that was really fun.”

**Surprises.** While in Costa Rica, Sam experienced numerous surprises related to cultural differences. Some of these surprises were related to different food and water habits. She explained how they ate rice and beans nearly every day for on-campus lunches. She was also surprised to find out that they put condensed milk on their snow cones in Costa Rica and was even more surprised to discover she loved it. Another aspect that surprised Sam was the way those in Costa Rica conserved their water usage. She described how there was a switch that had to be activated if they wanted to use the hot water heater, and that everyone in the community turned off their water for a few hours in the afternoon to conserve it. She described it in the following way,

They shut the water off from 2:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. every day in this whole area of the city to conserve water. If I wanted to cook dinner or something, we had to get buckets of water beforehand, so that was very interesting to adjust to because we're used to having access to that stuff 24/7 without even thinking about it.

Another aspect of local culture that surprised Sam involved public transportation. She explained how she and the other classmates had to mainly use Uber as a way of getting places because it was the safest option. She explained that the one time they did attempt to take a taxi, “they tried to scam us and take us somewhere else. They do that so they can get more money because they think we're tourists that don't know where we're going.” Also, when Sam took a bus to travel outside of San Jose, she and the other students were surprised with how packed the buses were, not “leaving any space.”

Sam also experienced a cultural surprise when she first arrived at San Jose University. She explained how the university itself was set up completely different than institutions in the United States. She described it this way,

The middle of the university has no roof, and they have a giant tree right in the middle of it. Again, there's no air conditioning so everything is open. There are no walls on the sides so that air can blow through, and because they have the effort to conserve energy, they do everything with natural light, natural wind, and all that stuff.

Sam was also surprised by the relaxed culture within Costa Rica and the university in particular. She described the concept of 'Tico Time' and how "basically, if you plan something at eight, then they will show up at nine. They're very chill. They just take their time, and they don't feel they need to rush anything." Sam explained how this was very interesting to adjust to since the United States is very "fast paced" and concerned with "deadlines and punctuality."

**Outside San Jose.** Although Sam was only in Costa Rica for a few weeks, she was still able to get outside of San Jose and explore another area of the country. One the biggest excursions Sam and her classmates got to experience outside of San Jose was a trip to Manual Antonio, Costa Rica. This trip was several hours southwest of San Jose, and Sam and the other students planned the trip last minute when their faculty member went home early. She explained how the faculty member back in Illinois was not very happy with their decision to go against the itinerary but that she and the other students were determined to visit the area. She explained that they "wanted to try something new," so they all decided to plan and commit to the trip. They all paid their part and stayed in an Airbnb that was close to the beach in Manual Antonio.

Sam reflects on this travel experience as being a very positive and fun experience. She had never been to a beach in the United States, so visiting a beach in another country was very

fun and eye-opening. Although Sam and her classmates did not have a ton of flexibility, independence, or time to visit other areas, she was very pleased she got to get out of San Jose and visit a new area of Costa Rica.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided in-depth narratives for each of the four participants. For each participant, this chapter provided information on their personal background, study abroad background and their challenges and support across the three stages of study abroad (pre-departure, abroad experience, and return home). It also examined the cultural experiences that each participant gained by examining three categories, local appreciation, cultural surprises, and their experiences outside their stationed city/country. The next chapter will examine how the narratives come together in understanding the purpose of this research, which was to explore the cross-cultural experiences of individuals who have studied abroad.

## **Chapter V**

### **Analysis**

The purpose of this study was to examine the cross-cultural experiences of students who have studied abroad. This chapter interprets the findings from the narratives collected by the four participants in respect to the cultural experiences, support, and impact related to their study abroad experiences. The following research questions were utilized to guide this analysis: (a) How do students studying abroad describe their experiences in a different culture? (b) How has the experience of studying abroad impacted students beyond their time abroad? (c) What types of support do individuals who studied abroad describe needing and receiving during the experience?

#### **Cultural Experiences**

When the participants described their experiences in a different culture, three key descriptions arose. These descriptions are adjusting, rewarding, and lessons learned. In this section, these descriptions will be reflected upon to gain a greater understanding of how the participants described their experiences in a different culture.

#### ***Adjusting***

All of the participants described a change in how they regarded and felt about the different culture as their time abroad continued. After the excitement and elation of being in a new culture wore off, each of the participants experienced small challenges as they adjusted to the culture. As their time abroad continued, the participants adjusted to the different customs and daily rituals and began to feel more comfortable in the host country. After first struggling to navigate the new city and customs, Sarah eventually fell into a routine and became more comfortable. She stated,



The nerves and stress wore off fairly quickly when I fell into these patterns. Like all these weekly things that I would do, from going to classes, to where we would eat lunch, to what we would be doing on the weekends.”

She later said that she and the other students “made ourselves feel more comfortable through the daily things we did.”

Claire began her first study abroad experience in South Korea falsely believing she was on a faculty-led study abroad trip. When she realized she was alone in South Korea, she leaned into her weekly routine and quickly felt safe and comfortable in the new culture. She said, “I think after a few weeks there, I was completely open to the idea of moving there and living there because it felt very comfortable, like at home.”

Sam explained how she adjusted to the different customs and climates of Costa Rica after being there for some time. “I think adjusting to the heat there was one of the bigger things I had to get past. Once I did, it was a lot more of like a high or positive experience.” Bailey stated, “once I figured out the nitty-gritty stuff, and I knew when my classes were going to start and be at, I just kind of fell into a routine from there.”

The participant who studied abroad in the same location twice, Claire, also noted feeling more comfortable and confident the second time she went to South Korea. Claire stated that knowing what to expect allowed her to adjust quicker, especially for the small things such as finding food and affordable housing. She said, “the second time I knew better. Rent prices here can be high, and if I wanted to have an apartment, I needed a \$10,000 deposit. These are the things I learned the first time around.”

The other participants that studied abroad more than once but in different locations – Bailey and Sam – also noted feeling more comfortable and confident their second time abroad.

Bailey stated that,

The second [study abroad experience] was a self-led or self-developed study abroad semester with a university in Japan. Previously they were a partner with my university, but the semester before I was to go, they actually stopped the partnership. I still wanted to go though and after studying abroad the first time, I knew I could set things up on my own.

Sam stated that once she returned home from her first experience abroad, she knew she would want to go again. She said that “I had such a great time the first time, I just knew I wanted to go again.” The second experience changed the way they engaged while abroad.

### ***Rewarding***

As participants were asked to describe what it was like to be in a new environment and the cultural experiences they had and what they took away from them, they shared information from a very personal perspective. All of the participants commented on the positive or rewarding aspects associated with their experiences in a different culture. Sam described her experiences in a different culture in the following way,

They have very different views of life, and it was just so interesting to see those views and how I could apply those views in my own life. I didn't necessarily have to agree with them, but it was still great to have the opportunity to see and experience those new views.

Sarah reflected on her cultural experiences by saying, “I think it was amazing to be able to learn about another place and another history and culture on the ground, especially because we were so intentionally shown around by our professors.” She went on to discuss how this

academic system influenced her perspective and appreciation of the culture and city of London. She said as a result of this balance, “I think each and every one of us appreciate the city a little bit more.”

When reflecting on her experiences in a new culture, Claire stated that, “there's something special about seeing what you're learning. Being around a different culture opens you up to new perspectives.” She went on to discuss how being able to physically visit the culture she was studying “transformed the whole experience and my understanding of what I was learning.” Bailey commented on her appreciation for the local culture by saying that “I had enjoyed my time there so much and built so many relationships.” By the end of the experience, Bailey even noted that the United States felt less like home than the culture she was visiting.

### ***Lessons Learned***

Each of the participants expressed a desire for more exposure or experiences with the different culture. Along with this, they identified the shortcomings of their experience and expressed things they would change or do differently if given the opportunity again. Sarah described this desire in the following way,

I think I could've done a lot more to be immersed in the local culture. I think one of the downsides of going to a school sponsored program with a lot of people that you know, is that it's very easy to just stay in that kind of American culture abroad. I think that was one thing, if I could go back and do it again, I would definitely try harder to be part of like the local college culture.

Bailey notes that she regrets not gaining more experience with the local Chinese students that lived in Beijing. She stated,

I think there were some regrets towards the end of my experience, just because the program didn't encourage us to interact with the Chinese students that were there, who were in their four-year, three-year, two-year programs. So, I didn't build any lasting kind of relationships outside of the program.

Sam regrets not gaining even more exposure to the culture in Costa Rica. She said that "I wish I would have done more things so that I could immerse myself more in the local culture rather than just going to the touristy things." She went on to say,

I would most definitely go for a longer time if I had the chance. I also think that I would change the formatting. I think I would have gone by myself because I didn't get to do everything I wanted. And I feel like I would have had more flexibility and independence if I had been able to go by myself.

Claire explained how she would stay longer, stay with a host family, and become more immersed in the local culture if she had the opportunity to study abroad again. She stated, "I think with the overall experience, the only regret I have about studying abroad all four times is that I didn't do a homestay with somebody. It would have been amazing to stay with a family."

### **Study Abroad Impact**

When the participants described the impact that their study abroad experience has had on them since returning to the United States, three key areas of impact were discovered. These areas include undergraduate experience, career, and personal impact. In this section, each of these areas will be analyzed to gain a greater understanding of the impact of study abroad experiences, as described by the participants.

#### ***Undergraduate Impact***

All of the participants commented on the impact that their study abroad experience had on their undergraduate time. Beyond the initial adjustment period each participant experienced once returning to the United States, they also described a longer impact that studying abroad had on them while they were finishing their undergraduate degree.

All of the participants in this study expressed an interest in studying abroad again after their first experience. Three of the participants were able to study abroad at least twice during their undergraduate studies. The other participant, Sarah, has since applied for study abroad programs through the university where she is receiving her master's degree, and she hopes to study abroad in Germany in the spring of 2022. Once returning, all of the participants felt a deep desire to study abroad again. One of the participants, Sam, stated that she decided to study abroad again, and even delayed her graduation because she had such a great experience the first time.

Beyond their own additional study abroad trips, each of the participants expressed an understanding and appreciation for the importance of study abroad experiences for other students. Sarah described her feelings of study abroad in the following way, "I think it's a great development opportunity. Having the opportunity to really test your boundaries and figure out what you're comfortable with in a relatively controlled environment is so important." Claire described her perspective of study abroad as, "I'm really passionate about study abroad. I wish everybody could go, and I really feel like the people who should go the most or have the least experiences and advantages, don't go or even attempt to go." Sam expressed her perspective of study abroad, stating, "I believe that study abroad should be for everyone." Bailey also put emphasis on the importance she believes study abroad experiences can have on students'

undergraduate careers by saying that “I think study abroad experiences are valuable. It’s a different way of living, and I think everyone needs to have a little bit of that.”

### *Career Impact*

Each of the participants described their current career paths and how they relate to or were influenced by their study abroad experiences. Although the participants completed their trips prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, this global incident has influenced many of their abilities to work within study abroad areas. They all noted an interest in working in this field or working abroad one day.

In one way or another, each of the participants commented on their desire to work in a study abroad field or to help other undergraduate students study abroad. For example, Bailey stated that

Originally when I graduated from my master’s program in 2020, I intended to go into international education. I had taken a couple of internships in that area and was hoping to find work in that field, but with COVID, jobs just kind of disappeared. But I hope to soon return to that field, or at least spend some time exploring it.

Sam was also interested in working in a study abroad field after she graduated with her undergraduate degree. In fact, she is currently working in the study abroad department as a graduate assistant as she completes her master’s degree.

Beyond their interest in study abroad and the field of international education, two of the participants also have worked outside of the United States since graduating from their undergraduate institution. Claire initially wanted to work in the field of study abroad, but when she graduated in 2020 with her undergraduate degree, she was unable to do so due to COVID-19.

This, however, did not stop Claire from exploring her passion for international work. She described her experiences in the following way,

I was planning on going into higher education post-graduation to help more students study abroad, but I graduated in the middle of the pandemic. Nobody could study abroad, so I decided to move to South Korea to teach English for a year, and now I'm signing on for another year because I love it.

Bailey spent some time working outside of the country before she began her master's program. For two years, Bailey worked abroad in Indonesia where she taught English through the Peace Corps. Sam showed interest in working outside of the United States, when she accepted an internship to go back to Costa Rica to work after she graduated. Her plans were changed when her internship was cancelled due to COVID-19. Instead, Sam decided to go back for her master's degree where she found the assistantship in the study abroad department at her university.

### ***Personal Impact***

All of the participants expressed an increased desire to travel and explore new areas, countries, and cultures once studying abroad. Sarah stated that, "It honestly just awoke this travel bug in me," and she hopes to travel more once she graduates from her master's program for a "post-grad trip abroad." Sam has a deep interest and intention to return to Costa Rica and other countries to either learn, live, or simply explore. She said, "I'd definitely go back to Costa Rica. I'd go back anywhere, honestly. I just have an itch to travel again."

Bailey and Claire have both spent time traveling and living in other countries since their time abroad. Beyond her time in Indonesia with the Peace Corps, Bailey has also traveled back to both China and Japan, as well as Taiwan and South Korea, since returning from her study abroad

experiences. Claire has been able to explore many new areas of South Korea while living there. She described her experience in the following way,

I get to go to so many cool places in the city, outside the city, other cities. South Korea is such a small country compared to the United States. You can be anywhere in two and a half hours on a high-speed train, so it's just been a crazy adventure for the past nine months that I've been here.

This desire to travel was also noted to be shared by the other students that the participants studied abroad alongside. Sarah expressed it this way,

I can easily say that this is a sentiment that is shared across everyone I know who has studied abroad, in this program or another. Everyone is itching to be able to go back, to just travel again and experience a new place again.

Another personal impact that each of the participants expressed was a change in perspective, either of themselves or gaining a more global perspective. Sarah described the personal impact that her experience had in the following way:

I think that there was a huge boost for my self-confidence and my self-assurance that I can plan a trip to another country by myself, go and do it by myself, come back and be totally fine. I did all of these different things, from day trips to actual flights by myself. It was very empowering for sure.

Sam expressed how she experienced personal growth as a result of her study abroad trips. She stated that,

Overall, I think it really opened my eyes because I grew up in a small town, where if people told people that the sky was green, they'd probably believe it, so it was very interesting going to different places, talking about different cultures. It opened my eyes.



Claire and Bailey both expressed their increased self-confidence, especially regarding their abilities to travel alone. Claire was able to travel by herself numerous times after her first study abroad experience, and it gave her the confidence and desire to live and work abroad. Bailey commented on her ability to plan, develop, and complete her own study abroad experience after completing one organized through her university.

### **Study Abroad Support**

When the participants described the support they received or required throughout their study abroad experiences, three levels of support were discovered. These levels include pre-departure support, time abroad support, and return-home support. In this section, each of these levels will be examined as the participants described the support they had throughout their experiences abroad.

#### ***Pre-departure Support***

All of the participants commented on the support they received during the pre-departure phase, when they were preparing for their experiences abroad. The pre-departure support reflected on by the participants can be examined through two key areas, pre-departure orientation and scholarships and finances.

**Pre-departure Orientation.** Each of the participants received a formal pre-departure orientation before they went abroad for the first time that was conducted by their home institution's study abroad departments. Although the orientations differed in depth and length, they covered many of the same topics: what to bring, what to do in an emergency, how to recognize and handle issues of culture shock. Sam explained it in this way,

I think two or three weeks before the trip, there was a pre-departure orientation class, and so students go there to learn what to expect. They tell you all this information about the

country, culture, where the hospitals are, how to handle emergencies, and just laid down all the information that we would need to know before we went.

Sarah had a formal pre-departure orientation that included members from both her home institution as well as others from the host institution she would soon travel to. She described it as,

We had staff from London come to New York and give a talk to everyone about what to expect, what to bring, and what not, so we really got it firsthand, not only from the study abroad office, but also from the staff members who worked in London, which was a good mix.

Each of the participants commented that they felt they were adequately prepared to study abroad by their study abroad departments through the pre-departure orientation.

**Scholarships and Finances.** All of the participants expressed concern with affording and paying for their study abroad experiences. Two of the participants, Sarah and Bailey, received help from family members to afford the expenses associated with applying for and attending study abroad trips. Claire and Sam, who noted that they came from a low-income family who were unable to help support them financially, relied heavily on scholarships and financial aid to afford their study abroad experiences. Claire explained that because of scholarships through her home institution and the study abroad program, she was able to “have four awesome opportunities that I barely paid for.” She went on to say, that her “university is incredibly supportive with helping to find scholarships.” Sam expressed her experience with affording her study abroad experiences,

I got two jobs, so I could save up, and I also applied for all the scholarships I could. I used my FAFSA and everything in my financial aid package, and thankfully I only had to pay for the plane ticket out of pocket.

Each of the participants considered the financial concerns of their study abroad experiences and gathered information about how to make it happen. They also received support from family members and the home institution through the use of scholarships and other financial aid.

### ***Abroad Support***

While abroad, each of the participants received support that helped them through challenges they faced and helped ensure they had a positive experience abroad. From the participants' reflections, three main forms of support were discovered, host university, home friends and family, and built community.

**Host University.** All of the participants expressed that a key area of support they received came from the host university abroad. For three of the participants, their host universities provided a formal orientation when they first arrived in the country. These orientations provided academic as well as social support for the participants. Sarah explained that “after the more nitty-gritty orientation stuff on safety and class expectations, we had social events that been pre-planned for all of us to get to know each other.” Sarah’s host university continued to host events that aimed to provide information and support on an array of topics, such as culture shock and United Kingdom holidays. She described these events as being “extremely informative” and “another great way to meet some fun people.”

Three of the participants explained how their host universities helped to accommodate the health concerns they had. Sam explained that the host university was excellent at working with

her home institution and providing her with the accommodation she required. She expressed her health concerns “were kind of a barrier, but not that bad because they did so great assisting me. They were very professional and polite.”

All of the participants noted receiving support from a host faculty member or advisor when they experienced challenges, especially those related to academics. Bailey noted that when she was in China, she reached out to a faculty member on several occasions, stating that “I feel like I had a really good relationship with my Chinese teacher, and so I would reach out to her often when things came up.”

**Friends and Family.** Each of the participants commented on the support they received from their friends and family. Bailey and Sarah expressed how they felt supported by friends and family who were also abroad. Bailey explained how her grandparents were a “major source of support” for her as she would stay with them most weekends. Sarah was able to meet up with childhood friends who also happened to be studying abroad in or near where she was staying. She explained,

I had a really good friend who was also from California who was in the same program, and then I was also super lucky that I had one of my best friends from junior high and high school who was studying abroad in London at a different program the same semester.

Each of the participants commented on utilizing phone plans, Snapchat, Skype, and other communication applications to communicate with their friends and family back home. Sam said, “thankfully I had Skype because I didn’t have an international cell phone, so I would use Skype and Snapchat to talk to my family.” Sarah explained her concerns while ensuring she was able to communicate with her family,

I knew that I was going to be abroad for four or five months so I wanted to make sure I had a SIM card that worked in London so I could talk to my family and friends back home.

**Built Community.** While abroad, each of the participants established some form of community with those from their host country that they were able to rely on and receive support from. For the participants, this form of support mainly derived from the friends they made abroad. Bailey explained how one of her favorite set of memories from studying abroad was spent with her new friends at the end of the day. She said,

It was really fun heading back to the dorms with my friends. Sometimes, if we were hungry, we'd grab a bite to eat or we'd just hang out and study, but it was just that community and just being together and living in that moment. It was great.

Claire explained how her time in South Korea was filled with meeting new people and creating new friendships. She stated that,

I was just having so much fun. I was making friends with anyone and everyone, people I could understand, people I couldn't understand. Just never saying no, someone from class that I'd never seen before, I'd be like, 'hey you want to go to dinner with us?' It was just a great time.

Sam relied on the host mother that she was living with as another form of support. Her host mother was extremely accommodating, cooking her the foods that she could eat with her health concerns, helping her navigate and adjust to the culture, and providing an overall source of safety and support.

### ***Return Home Support***

Once returning to the United States, each of the participants navigated the transition back home with the support of two main areas, home institution, friends, and family, and the community they built while abroad.

**Home University, Friends and Family.** None of the participants attended or were offered a formal post-trip orientation or reflection. They did, however, still find indirect ways to reflect on their experiences abroad. Sam was able to write a reflection paper for one of the courses she took abroad, recapping what she learned from her time abroad and how she could use what she learned and experienced in her life. She also chose to focus her senior seminar course on her study abroad experiences, allowing her to further reflect on her experiences and bring meaning to them.

Each participant expressed how they relied on their friends and family to help them transition back. Sarah described her experiences with her friends once returning, “it was really, really nice to see all my friends I hadn’t seen in six months, and just unpack the whole experience with them.” Sam reflected on her experiences talking with her friends and family about all she experienced abroad. She stated that,

I talked to all my friends and family about all the amazing stuff I experienced, and everyone at first would always ask about my experiences. I loved sharing that with them.

I just loved looking back on my time abroad.

**Built Community.** Each participant expressed how they worked to stay in touch with those that they had studied abroad with or with others who had experienced similar trips abroad. The community that the participants built while they were abroad was discovered to also be a form of support for the participants once they returned home. Sarah helped to plan a reunion for all the students who had also studied abroad in London during the same semester. She explained

the reunion in this way, “I think all of us with this shared experience came together with a force. I think we were definitely bonded by that experience, for better or worse.”

Once returning, Bailey utilized social media to stay connected to those she studied abroad with and who were still in China/Japan. She explained,

I think social media was a big help in keeping me connected. On one hand, I felt like I was missing out because those who had stayed in Japan for that semester, I saw them post on Instagram about stuff and all the fun things they were doing. But I also loved having a way to stay connected to them and feel like I was still a part of that experience.

### **Summary**

This chapter consisted of a reflection and analysis of the narratives collected from the four participants. Three research questions were utilized to guide the analysis that examined the cultural experiences, support, and impact of study abroad experiences on the participants. This analysis will provide the readers with the opportunity to consider and compare the participants’ stories and responses. In the next chapter, a discussion of the narratives and analysis will be provided, implications and recommendations for future research will also be shared and discussed.

## **Chapter VI**

### **Discussion**

Chapter six will provide an in-depth discussion of the study, the presented narratives, and the experiences of the participants as they transitioned through the study abroad process. To assist in creating impactful experiences for study abroad students, implications and suggestions will be provided for home institutions and their study abroad departments, students, and academic advisors. The purpose of this study was to explore the cross-cultural experiences of individuals who have studied abroad, the impact of study abroad experiences, and the support study abroad students need to have meaningful experiences abroad. With the participants' stories, we can better understand the experiences that students go through during their study abroad journey.

#### **Cultural Experiences**

This research looked at the study abroad experiences and stories of four participants. All of the participants studied abroad in a culture different than the one they grew up in. At the time of the interviews, the participants described their experiences in a new culture. Descriptions that the participants expressed include adjusting, rewarding, and lessons learned. These descriptions have many parallels with previous research on study abroad experiences.

The research related to students' cultural experiences while studying abroad shows that students accommodate their behaviors, emotions, interactions, and views as they handle challenges and adjust to the new culture. Examining students' cross-cultural experiences through Gullahorn and Gullahorn's (1963) W-curve model provides a clearer understanding of the participants' reactions to a culture different than their home culture. Kim's (1988a) representation of the cross-cultural adaptation theory and Chickering and Reisser's (1993) theory



on the seven vectors of student development also provide insight into how students studying abroad experience cultural differences.

### *Adjusting*

The participants in this study described a change in how they handled and regarded the different culture as they adjusted, describing a similar path as suggested by Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) in their model of the W-curve. When first arriving in the new culture, feelings of elation, excitement, and general positive thoughts and emotions were common. These experiences are congruent with the tip of the W-curve, where research shows individuals enter a "honey-moon" phase of excitement (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). As the participants began to get settled into the new culture and figure out daily life, they faced an array of challenges. It was described how handling these challenges created emotions of frustration, nervousness, and at times homesickness. This coincides with the W-curve's downward drop where individuals experience difficulties as they confront challenges adapting to the new culture.

As they worked to overcome these challenges, the participants commented on adjusting their understanding of cultural traditions and aspects to accept and adapt to the new culture in front of them. As they did so, their experiences in the culture shifted again to allow for more positive and meaningful experiences to occur. This reflects the path suggested by Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) as individuals in a new culture begin to have better interactions and experiences on their way back up the W-curve.

In order for the participants to get to this place of contentment and adjustment in their host culture, they went through many of Chickering and Reisser's (1993) vectors of student development. They commented on developing competence, especially in cultural and interpersonal situations, which is represented as the first vector in Chickering and Reisser's

(1993) research. Vector 2, managing emotions, was largely commented on by the participants in this study. A range of feelings were expressed, including feelings of uncertainty and homesickness. It was also common for the participants to experience an increase in emotional awareness, a stabilization of emotions, and an ability to express their emotions in culturally appropriate ways.

This path taken by the participants is also congruent with Kim's (1988a) research on the cross-cultural adaptation process that suggests individuals change their patterns and modify their beliefs and behaviors from what they knew at home to what they are experiencing in the host culture. This research shows support for Gullahorn and Gullahorn's (1963) model of the W-curve, Chickering and Reisser's (1993) theory on the seven vectors, and Kim's (1988) theory on the cross-cultural adaptation process. It provides evidence to support the role these prolific theories and models have within study abroad research.

### ***Rewarding and Surprising***

In this study it was found that the participants had rewarding and meaningful experiences when interacting with the host culture. Many researchers have found evidence of the positive and beneficial results that study abroad experiences can have on students. Previous research shows that students studying abroad who have transformative or meaningful experiences return with an increased awareness and appreciation of different cultures (Conner & Roberts, 2015; Gaia, 2015; Kitsantas & Meyers, 2001). The experiences of the participants in this study reflect the previous research as they expressed an increased appreciation and interest in international experiences.

Another concept reflected in the previous research is the expectation of cultural surprises while abroad. Conner and Roberts (2015) found that the students studying abroad in their study experienced numerous surprises or moments of cultural uncertainty. As the participants'

narratives show, they experienced varying levels of cultural surprises that differed from the customs experienced and understood in their home culture. Like the research suggested, these cultural surprises were often linked to comparisons that the participants made between the home and host cultures (Conner & Roberts, 2017).

### ***Lessons Learned***

Along with the rewarding experiences, some regrets and lessons learned were expressed by the participants as they adjusted to the new culture. This research also found that students can feel constricted by their formal programs. These participants expressed a desire for greater cultural immersion, either through a longer program, a different housing experience, or more flexibility to experience what they wanted. As research by Engle and Engle (2003) on study abroad programs suggested, the participants felt they would have had a deeper and more rewarding understanding of the culture if they could have had greater immersion in the local community.

Another common theme discovered in this research was an increased likelihood of studying abroad again during the undergraduate years. It was found that the participants did certain aspects of their experience differently the second or third time around. The students ensured they could stay for a longer amount of time, or they chose to complete a self-developed study abroad experience to guarantee they could participate in any of the cultural experiences they wanted.

### **Study Abroad Impact**

This research found that study abroad experiences often impact students even after they return to the United States. Three key areas of impact were discovered: undergraduate, career, and personal impact.

Research on the impact and benefits of study abroad experiences has shown that study abroad provides students with unique opportunities to learn, grow, and develop in their personal and professional lives. Utilizing Chickering and Reisser's (1993) seven vectors of student development theory as a lens provides insight into how study abroad programs can impact students beyond their time abroad.

### ***Undergraduate Impact***

The participants described ways in which their study abroad experiences impacted their undergraduate experiences. It was discovered that the participants felt that the type of learning they experienced when they were hands-on in another culture was a different kind of learning than they experienced on their home campus. This correlates with research conducted by Morgan (1975) that showed the type of learning done while studying abroad is unique from the kind of learning that is possible on a home campus. The participants explained how this immersive kind of learning allowed for a deeper understanding and appreciation for the material they were learning.

Another influence that was discovered was an increased understanding of the importance of study abroad opportunities for undergraduate students. Repeat study abroad experiences, as well as increased personal international travel, was a common theme found in this study. Previous research has also found that individuals who study abroad often return with an increased interest in international travel and experiences (Conner & Roberts, 2015).

It was also found that the participants recognized the imbalance related to the accessibility of study abroad programs for all students wishing to participate. Previous research recognized the unequal accessibility that students from certain demographic groups – specifically those from minority groups and those coming to college from low-income families – face if and

when they go through the study abroad process. Brux and Fry (2010) found that students with minority or low-income backgrounds face numerous barriers that students from majority backgrounds do not face, such as financial and family concerns and a fear of discrimination. The participants in the current study expressed attention to the inaccessibility of study abroad opportunities for certain students, including students with disabilities and students from low-income backgrounds. These inequalities discussed by the participants have been discovered and examined in previous research (Brux & Fry, 2010; Lorz et al., 2016).

### *Career Impact*

This study found that study abroad experiences highly impact the professional and career plans of students who participate. The participants in this study were found to have returned home with a newfound interest in working in a study abroad field as a career path. The participants have followed this trend in the recent years; working in a college study abroad department, getting a degree in college student affairs with a desire to help her future students study abroad, and working and living abroad. This career impact expressed by the participants is represented in previous research that found students studying abroad often change their major or career path once returning to their home country (Chapman, 2011; Gibson, 1991; Helms & Thibadoux, 1992).

The sixth vector of Chickering and Reisser's (1993) seven vectors, developing purpose, can be an effective lens to examine the influence study abroad experiences have shown to have on students' career paths. This current study provides evidence to support the notion that studying abroad provides opportunities for students to expand and reconsider their interests, passions, and career paths. Although previous research suggests that students continue to develop

their purpose beyond their college years, it is clear that studying abroad impacts students' professional and career paths.

### *Personal Impact*

In this study, it was also found that study abroad experiences impact the lives of those participants from a personal perspective. Increased self-confidence, self-assurance, and sense of self were common terms utilized by the participants when describing the impact their study abroad experience had on them. It was found that the participants felt more independent and empowered after completing their study abroad experience. This also correlates with previous research that stated that students who enroll in and complete study abroad programs exhibit higher levels of personal autonomy, self-confidence, and a more stable sense of self (Bates, 1997; Milstein, 2005; Zhai, 2000).

Although there is very limited previous research relating study abroad impact and the seventh vector of Chickering and Reisser's (1993) theory, developing integrity, the participants in this study do show evidence of increased integrity. Chickering and Reisser (1993) described how individuals develop integrity by humanizing values, personalizing values, and developing congruence. Humanizing values, which involves comparing and balancing one's own beliefs with those of others and society, was described by the participants in this study. It was discovered that the participants considered and compared their personal and societal values with those of the culture and society they were in.

This study also provided supportive evidence of personalizing values. The students expressed how they considered their own values through a different lens after learning the values of another culture. The participants felt a sense of both cultures' values within themselves as they gained new values and held onto previous committed values. The final component of Chickering

and Reisser's (1993) seventh vector, developing integrity, involves being able to balance personal values with what is considered socially responsible behaviors. The participants spoke briefly on how they began to view what would be considered socially responsible behaviors in their home culture differently after experiencing another culture's values.

### **Study Abroad Support**

This research examined the levels and types of support that the participants described needing and receiving throughout their study abroad process. From their stories, support was found to be needed through three distinct levels of the study abroad process: pre-departure, time abroad, and return home.

Research on the level and type of study abroad experiences has shown that students require support unique to their study abroad process, location, and experience. Utilizing previous research and models such as Chickering and Reisser's (1993) seven vectors of student development theory and Gullahorn and Gullahorn's (1963) W-curve model provides greater insight into the support the participants express needing to have a meaningful study abroad experience.

#### ***Pre-departure***

All of the participants discussed the support they received throughout their pre-departure phase that helped prepare them for their experiences abroad. The support that the participants described receiving during this phase came mainly from the home institution or home study abroad department.

The participants' descriptions of their pre-orientation process differed significantly in length, depth, and duration. The longer or more immersive the experience the more in-depth the orientation was, and it involved hours of information provided by those at the home as well as

host institution. While those that are short in nature were brief and covered the basic information needed to complete the trip. Although their orientations differed depending on the type and length of experience, the content discussed in the participants' pre-orientation programs tended to have similar themes, such as money/technical adjustments, culture shock preparation, and how to handle emergencies.

The participants described their pre-departure orientation as being helpful, informative, and mostly providing the tools they needed to be prepared for their study abroad experiences. This parallels previous research that has recognized the importance of pre-departure preparation for study abroad experiences because it sets the participants up for success by helping increase their awareness before entering the experience (Conner & Roberts, 2015; Miller, 1993; Salyers et al., 2015). Salyers et al. (2015) suggested that pre-departure preparation is the most crucial factor leading to a supportive experience. Although the participants found their pre-departure orientations as helpful, only one of them felt that the orientation was essential to their success abroad, and none of them felt it was the most crucial support they required; however, having had the orientation they have little to compare how their experience would have been different without the preparation.

Previous research identified that financial concerns are a common barrier and consideration for students preparing to study abroad (Krummich & Burton, 2013). The participants in this study also identified that finances were a concern. They learned about financial support options as part of their orientation and application process that helped them afford this experience. Providing this information to students during the recruitment, application, and orientation process can relieve some pressure around the topic of finances and provide individuals with a realistic outlook on financing their experience.



### *Abroad*

The participants described the support they required and received that helped them have meaningful experiences during their time in a new country. It was found that the support received during their time abroad originated mainly from their host institutions and the community of friends and students that they built while abroad.

One area of support that the study found students relying on is their host university or college. The formal orientations provided by host universities supply students with appropriate academic and social support. The host institutions' support includes information on safety and class expectations as well as social and out-of-class events. This support also includes providing health support, which is an important part of an experience abroad. Previous research has found that these types of supportive and informational programs can be extremely effective at helping students adjust to their new environment and cultural differences (Conner & Roberts, 2015). The participants' narratives in this current study reflect this previous research.

Establishing relationships with fellow classmates and individuals in country is also an important form of support in this study. This support can come from roommates, host families, classmates, faculty, and the community at their host institution. This correlates with previous research on support for study abroad students; Bretag and van der Veen (2017) found that their participants formed meaningful and supportive bonds through paired relationships with a "buddy" from the host culture. This current research found that creating and fostering a bond or relationship with others provides students with academic and emotional support.

Chickering and Reisser's (1993) fourth vector, developing mature interpersonal relationships, is an excellent lens to examine this type of built community support. The participants reported still being in contact with friends and acquaintances they met and

befriended while abroad. As Chickering and Reisser's (1993) theory suggested, the participants in this study reported that they recognized differences and commonalities between themselves and this newly built community. Through these interactions and recognitions, the participants were able to grow close and meaningful relationships with people from different backgrounds and experiences.

Reaching out and leaning on faculty members/advisors from their home institutions can also be helpful, especially toward the beginning of the experience while the students are getting adjusted to the new environment. Conner and Roberts (2015) found in their research on support for study abroad experiences that the support available to students during their time abroad may be lacking or unfamiliar to the students. This correlates with the current research that highlighted the lack of formal and significant support resources for students studying abroad.

### ***Return home***

This study found that support when returning home is a necessary and essential area of support students need. The support that the participants discussed receiving once returning to their home country was rather limited and originated mainly from home friends and family and the built community they created while abroad.

Feelings of readjustment, discomfort, and isolation were common themes found as the students returned home and adjusted to their daily routines. This readjustment phase follows previous research by Gullahorn and Gullahorn's (1963) on the W-curve model. These researchers and others have found that the reentry process can be a difficult adjustment for students returning from study abroad experiences (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Wielkiewicz and Turkowski, 2010). The participants in this research followed this path and reported experiencing struggles and discomfort finding their footing again in their home country.

This research found that home institutions, study abroad departments, and advisors often do not provide a formal reflection or place of support for students once they return to the United States.

Previous research has found that difficulties related to the reentry process are a common experience for students studying abroad, but the support is still lacking (Young, 2014). Although return-home support from institutions is lacking, research by Young (2014) shows that students who have a guided reflection after returning home have an easier time readjusting and making the most of their experiences abroad. The one participant that reflected on her experience abroad with her home institution found the process very meaningful, supportive, and helpful when it came to adjusting back to her life back in her home culture.

### **Implications**

The number of students participating in study abroad experiences is increasing and will likely continue to grow as the importance of intercultural competency also increases across the world (Twombly et al., 2012; U.S. Department of State, 2021). As undergraduate students embark on this international and educational journey abroad, it is imperative that institutions and their critical departments provide appropriate and varied international opportunities with substantial support. The following recommendations are provided for the home institutions, academic advisors and other student affairs professionals, and fellow students.

#### ***Home Institution and Study Abroad Departments***

There is a plethora of previous research that suggests home institutions and study abroad organizations need to provide substantial support for their students studying abroad (Conner & Roberts, 2015; Miller, 1993; Morse et al., 2017; Salyers et al., 2015; *Study Abroad with IES Abroad*, 2021). Home institutions and their study abroad departments/private organizations must

take responsibility for providing substantial information, guidance, and support to their students from recruitment to their return from the experience.

**Pre-departure.** Previous research has suggested that the pre-departure orientation phase is the most critical factor leading to meaningful study abroad experiences (Conner & Roberts, 2015; Salyers et al., 2015). Pre-departure support begins with recruitment and outreach. Those experiences must be well marketed to potential students, including the financial support available. Home institutions must be willing to provide funding to their study abroad departments to be utilized for outreach and scholarship. Many students, especially those from low-income and minority backgrounds, do not consider studying abroad to be an option for them because of the perceived financial burden. Study abroad departments must develop meaningful and effective outreach programs that will inform students of their study abroad opportunities. More specifically, workshops, tabling events, and social media can all be utilized to share information, promote opportunities, and gain exposure. Each of these need to very clearly and specifically provide information about the cost of the experience as well as the various support pieces that are available. Study abroad departments must also begin to utilize and rely on other departments and professionals to help with outreach and advising assistance.

This research provides evidence of the financial constraints that students feel when they consider studying abroad. Home institutions must work to provide scholarship and financial aid opportunities for students who wish to study abroad. They must ensure that all applicable departments (student affairs, academic affairs, financial aid, etc.) understand their role within the study abroad process. Through outreach initiatives, study abroad advisors must be transparent about all aspects of the study abroad process, specifically the financial opportunities available to them. Study abroad advisors must stay up to date on scholarship or financial aid options that they

can share with students, and they must help ensure that applicable scholarships and financial opportunities do not go unused.

As previous research and this current study suggests, a pre-departure orientation is an essential factor leading to successful study abroad experiences (Miller, 1993; Salyers et al., 2015). A formal pre-departure orientation must be a mandatory step for students studying abroad. This orientation will be provided by the study abroad department, along with appropriate faculty, and should be thorough and as interactive as possible. The orientation must provide guidance or information on an array of appropriate topics, including but not limited to *travel information* (passport, visa, travel insurance, plane/bus/transit expectations), *packing instructions and recommendations*, *financial components*, *cultural customs, traditions, and expectations*, *coping with culture shock*, *resources abroad*, and *handling emergencies*. If applicable, study abroad departments must coordinate with administrators from the host institution who could provide the students with extra guidance and pre-departure support.

The participants in this study and those in previous research have found support from the students they are studying abroad with and those they meet along the way (Bretag and van der Veen, 2017). Therefore, if the study abroad experience includes many students from the same home institution, study abroad advisors or the faculty member leading the trip need to introduce the students to one another early. If the student or students will be attending courses with international students, study abroad coordinators need to consider reaching out to the host university about connecting the students before the trip. Introducing students to others who will be going on this experience with them will help them formulate and develop friendships and build a supportive community abroad.

Study abroad coordinators must connect students who plan to study abroad with an advisor who will be a form of consistent support throughout the entire journey. None of the participants in this study were provided with a formal advisor or guide from their home institution, but they all noted the potential need for one. This advisor may be an employee in the study abroad field, a student-mentor who has studied abroad in a similar context, or the students' academic advisor that they may already have an established relationship with. During the pre-departure phase, this advisor will be a general form of support to ask questions or concerns to, and they will provide access to outside information when necessary.

**Abroad.** Once the student has landed in their host country, the home institution and the study abroad department must still provide support and guidance when needed. Based on the evidence from this research and Gullahorn and Gullahorn's (1963) model of the W-curve, students abroad experience a low while they adjust to the different customs and cultures of the new environment. This low point typically occurs a few weeks to a month after the students' arrival. Therefore, study abroad departments who develop ways to check-in with and support their students during this time will enhance those students' experiences. The advisors assigned to the students during the pre-departure phase could be utilized to provide personal and genuine contact while they are abroad. Advisors need to reach out to students during this critical period to ensure they have access to any resources they need. This could also catch those students who may be struggling and connect them to resources in a more timely and effective manner.

The study abroad department also needs to be in good contact with the host university in order to help with concerns and accommodation for their students. This will help the student while they are in the country but also in the pre-departure phase. Those working in the study abroad department and the students' guided advisor must stay up to date on all the resources

available to their students. They need clear information about what is accessible, prepare for issues their students may encounter, and provide the students with clear information and expectations. Study abroad coordinators or advisors must be willing to adapt their assistance to match the needs of their individual students.

**Return Home.** Although the participants expressed attention and appreciation for the support provided during the pre-departure and abroad phases, they noted needing the most support when they arrived back home. Previous research has found that although challenges related to the reentry process are common, the support from home institutions is still lacking (Young, 2014). Study abroad departments need to require a mandatory post-trip reflection/orientation for all students who study abroad. This orientation's purpose will be to provide the students with a platform to reflect, remember, and share their experiences. Research has shown that students who receive opportunities to properly reflect on their experiences find more meaning in them as well and have an easier time adapting back in the home environment (Young, 2014). This orientation will also provide an opportunity for the students to reconnect with those that they studied abroad with, and it could encourage them to stay engaged and help recruit, orientate, and support their classmates in pursuing similar opportunities.

The advisors that followed the student throughout their study abroad process will also play a critical role in helping the student adjust back to their daily lives. This advisor should plan a one-on-one opportunity for the student to reflect and decompress all that they went through. Advisors must also send out several small check-ins in the weeks and months after the students return. They can also help the student find opportunities to share their experiences with others in the community.

### *Academic Advisors*

Academic advisors are in a unique position that balances nicely between student and academic affairs. If utilized correctly, academic advisors have the potential to reach nearly every student often on a one-on-one, personal basis. Academic advisors must begin to work closer with their study abroad departments and stay up to date on opportunities, scholarships, and basic information. Research shows that many students do not study abroad simply because they do not believe it is possible, either academically, financially, or personally (Brux & Fry, 2010; Lorz et al., 2016). In order to help with this barrier, academic advisors need to start promoting and advocating for study abroad experiences and providing students with realistic starting points and resources. Advisors must connect their interested students with more information and a contact that works in the study abroad department where they can receive more assistance if needed.

Little to no research exists regarding the role academic advisors play in this experience. This may be due in part to their lack of knowledge or training on the topic. Unless they have studied abroad themselves, they may not know what the process is like or understand the benefits. However, with training by the study abroad office and financial aid, along with exposure to students returning from their experiences, they will gain new insights that they can pass along to the students they work with in their role. This could also include regular professional developments around the topic with new information about different programs and opportunities that may complement different academic curriculums.

Academic advisors also have a great opportunity to provide extra guidance and support for their students who decide to study abroad. They can be the first person to introduce this topic to the student and begin to cultivate interest as the student moves through their college experience. They need to be a consistent resource that the student can rely on if and whenever they need it, from the pre-departure phase until their return home and beyond. Advisors must be



willing to answer questions, guide students to other resources or information, stay engaged with students throughout their experience abroad by providing check-ins periodically, and be a key source of informal support when they return home. Lastly, advisors need to understand the development that students go through as they study abroad. Utilizing Chickering and Reisser's (1993) seven vectors of student development theory, Gullahorn and Gullahorn's (1963) W-curve model, and Kim's (1988a) cross-cultural adaptation theory, as laid out in this paper, provides a useful lens to examine students' development while they study abroad.

### *Students*

Students attending college in the United States today have more opportunities than ever before to learn while studying abroad, and research has clearly shown that studying abroad provides unique and meaningful experiences (Gaia, 2015; Kitsantas & Meyers, 2001; Twombly et al., 2012). As institutions and study abroad departments continue to adjust and improve their study abroad initiatives, it is ultimately the responsibility of the student to do the hard work. Students must get informed about the opportunities and process of studying abroad at their home institution. They need to take the initiative by asking an advisor, faculty member, or someone in the study abroad department about the process and how to get started. Students also need to do their own research early on as it will likely impact where they go, for how long, and how much it will cost. When receiving any form of instruction or orientation, students need to pay close attention and take note of important resources and facts. Students studying abroad must learn to advocate for themselves as they navigate their way through international travels.

While abroad, students need to be informed and aware of their unfamiliar surroundings. Getting educated, asking for help, and relying on support systems will be important factors while students adjust in the new environment. Students need to be aware of research such as Gullahorn

and Gullahorn's (1963) W-curve model that examined individual's reactions in settings different than their own. The W-curve model, as well as this research, provides evidence of a common path that students studying abroad often experience as they find their way in the host culture. Students need to understand this research so they will have a better idea of what to expect and how to handle the changes. Understanding this research will allow students to prepare for the low point that commonly occurs when the student first arrives and for the discomfort that may occur as they go through the reentry process when returning home.

When students arrive home, they need to expect an adjustment period and find an effective way to reflect and decompress from their experiences. Students need to reach out to their advisors or study abroad departments to learn about any post-trip reflection or expectations. Students need to be patient with themselves and rely on their support systems and their built communities during this time, as it can be a difficult and isolating process. Lastly, students need to provide meaningful feedback to their home and host institutions, study abroad departments, and advisors. This feedback will help create and maintain more meaningful, supportive, and successful study abroad experiences for future students.

### **Future Research**

This research sought to explore and better understand the cross-cultural experiences of individuals who have studied abroad by examining the experiences of four students who had studied abroad during their undergraduate years. To build upon this study, future research is still needed to expand our understanding of the lasting impact of study abroad experiences. The following are recommendations for future research.

One limitation of this study was that all the participants were female. Conducting similar research with male participants could allow for greater understanding of what if any differences

exist between males' and females' experiences adjusting to an unfamiliar culture. However, it should be noted that female students do tend to participate in study abroad experiences more often than male students, as discussed previously. Another limitation of this study that should be considered is that three of the four participants had previous experience in international and global contexts before studying abroad. This previous global orientation could have contributed to an easier or more positive transition and may speak to how prior international experiences can impact study abroad experiences. Analyzing the study abroad experiences of participants who were not previously globally oriented could provide interesting results.

Conducting similar research that had more specific criteria – such as only short-term experiences and faculty-led only trips – could prove to be beneficial in broadening our understanding of students' study abroad experiences. This study was done with students from across the United States, looking at a specific institution may gain greater insight for that institution regarding pre-departure, experience abroad, and post-experience. Looking at one specific study abroad program or location could also provide unique results. The study could also be done looking at participants with specific host institutions in other countries to understand their experience abroad.

Other recommendations for future research include conducting a study utilizing students who stayed for longer than one semester, conducting a study with students who all did home stays, conducting a study with participants from underrepresented populations, and conducting a study with students who did multiple study abroad experiences. Researching participants who studied abroad for even longer and who completed home studies could provide unique insight into Gullahorn and Gullahorn's (1963) W-curve model, and the later stages of Kim's (1988a) cross-cultural adaptation theory. Examining the experiences of participants from

underrepresented populations could broaden our understandings of barriers to study abroad and the personalized and invaluable experiences of these students. Students who study abroad from these underrepresented populations and those who study abroad multiple times are likely to develop in different and unique ways. Utilizing Chickering and Reisser's (1993) seven vectors of student development to examine these sets of students could expand our knowledge of students' development and the impact it has on their ability to adapt and adjust in each new environment.

### **Conclusion**

This qualitative research study utilized a narrative approach to explore the cross-cultural experiences of students who have studied abroad with special attention to the support students require and receive and the lasting impact of study abroad experiences.

This research found that viewing study abroad experiences as a key opportunity for student development establishes a basis for increasing study abroad access, removing barriers, adequately supporting this student group, and developing meaningful study abroad experiences. It was found that students experience a range of behaviors and emotions when reacting to unfamiliar or uncertain cultural experiences. The participants in this study had rewarding and challenging cultural experiences that led to meaningful and educational take-aways. It identified that study abroad experiences have the potential to provide lasting impacts on students far beyond the experience itself. Specifically, it was discovered that students were impacted long past their time abroad in several key areas including their undergraduate years, career plans, and personal lives. Unlike previous research, this study showed support for the place Chickering and Reisser's (1993) seventh vector, developing integrity, has within study abroad experiences.

This research found that students expect, desire, and need formal and informal modes of support throughout their entire study abroad process. From their pre-departure phase and beyond

their return home, this study shows that students who receive substantial and individualized support have impactful experiences abroad that have lasting a impact on their lives beyond the experience.

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## Appendix A

### Initial Email/Message

Greetings,

My name is Alexandra Dudley, and I am a graduate student getting my MS in College Student Affairs at Eastern Illinois University.

I am currently completing a research study for a thesis, that is advised by Dr. Dianne Timm, that explores the cross-cultural experiences of students who have studied abroad. I am seeking potential participants to complete a short demographic questionnaire and possibly an interview with the lead researcher, regarding their study abroad experience. Participation in this study is completely voluntary.

Participant eligibilities include those who have: (a) studied abroad at least a year and up to three years ago, and (b) studied abroad for at least a semester. **Even if you or a potential participant do not exactly meet the above criteria, I highly encourage you to still consider participating, as the criteria may be flexible.**

Attached is a link and QR code to the demographic questionnaire, where participants will have the opportunity to complete a few short questions and further participate in the study if they would like.

If you, or a potential participant, have any questions or concerns, please contact the lead researcher, Alexandra Dudley, at [asdudley@eiu.edu](mailto:asdudley@eiu.edu).

Thank you.

Demographic questionnaire: [http://eiu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_3JjCEB3fgIaABRI](http://eiu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3JjCEB3fgIaABRI)



## **Appendix B**

### **Demographic Survey Questions**

The following demographic and information questions will be sent to participants via survey before the time of the interview. This information will not be used to identify students.

1. How old are you?
2. What was your undergraduate institution?
3. What year did you graduate from that institution?
4. What was your major?
5. What year did you study abroad?
6. What was the location or locations of your study abroad experience?
7. How long did you study abroad?
8. Who led the trip? Faculty? Home institution? Other company?
9. What kind of housing accommodations did you receive while abroad?
10. Were there other students from your home institution also studying abroad?
11. Would you be willing to participate in a virtual interview session with a researcher to further discuss your study abroad experiences? If so, please supply your email address or phone number below. The researcher will contact you within 24 hours of submitting this form.

Demographic questionnaire: [http://eiu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_3JjCEB3fgIaABRI](http://eiu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3JjCEB3fgIaABRI)





## Appendix C

### Second Email

Hello,

You are invited to participate in a study exploring the cross-cultural experiences of students who have studied abroad. You are receiving this email because you recently showed interest in participating in a one-on-one interview to further discuss your study abroad experiences. This study is being conducted by Alexandra Dudley, a graduate student in the College Student Affairs program at Eastern Illinois University and is being advised by Dr. Dianne Timm of the Department of Counseling and Higher Education at Eastern Illinois University.

I want to thank you for your interest and your completion of the demographic questionnaire regarding your study abroad experiences.

I want to remind you that participation in this study is voluntary. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to interview with me, the lead researcher, virtually over Zoom for approximately 45 – 60 minutes. I will ask you an array of questions regarding your time abroad.

Attached you will find the **informed consent form** for this study. You do *not* need to sign the form or return it. If you participate, we will go over the form in detail, and you will be asked to verbally consent at the time of the interview.

If you would like to schedule an interview time, please follow the calendly link below and select a provided date/time. If you find that your schedule conflicts with all options or you have any questions or concerns, please contact Alexandra Dudley at [asdudley@eiu.edu](mailto:asdudley@eiu.edu) or 712-420-2988 by text or phone call. Thank you for your consideration to participate in this study.



Informed Consent  
.doc

## Appendix D

### Informed Consent

## CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

### *Students' Reflection of Cross-Cultural Experiences: A Study Abroad Narrative*

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by *Alexandra Dudley and Dr. Dianne Timm* from the department of *Counseling and Higher Education* at Eastern Illinois University.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate. You have been asked to participate in this study because during your undergraduate experience, you studied abroad for at least a semester and the experience occurred at least a year and up to three years ago.

- **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study will be to explore the cross-cultural experiences of individuals who have studied abroad. The study will examine the impacts that the study abroad experience had on individuals before, during, and after their return home.

- **PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a short, demographic questionnaire about yourself and your study abroad experience. From there, you may be selected to further participate in a one-on-one semi-structured interview with the principal researcher, Alexandra Dudley. The conversation will take place virtually, using a Zoom meeting. You will be asked 11 questions, including several sub-questions, during the semi-structured interview that will last approximately 45 – 60 minutes. If you allow, the interview will be recorded (audio and video) and later transcribed.

- **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

No risks or discomforts are anticipated to occur from participating in this study. The only potential discomfort could involve possible emotional feelings that occur as a result of discussing uncomfortable or triggering experiences that occurred while abroad.

- **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

By participating, you may benefit from reflecting on your experiences, both positive and negative, and how they relate to your life experiences since returning home. The study may also benefit universities, colleges, and study abroad programs by providing a deeper understanding of the preparation, experiences, and support that students studying abroad require for a successful study abroad experience.

- **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of identifying participants (and all other private or identifying information) using only pseudonyms. The data received from the study will be stored in a password protecting folder, and only the lead researcher will have access to this data. The records pertaining to this study will be kept for at least three years, per IRB policy. After that time, all data and records will be shredded and deleted.

- **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

Participation in this research study is voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from Eastern Illinois University or any other organization sponsoring the research project. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled.

There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer, and you may request for the recording of the interview to stop at any time if you become uncomfortable.

- **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact: Alexandra Dudley or Dr. Dianne Timm. Alexandra Dudley can be reached at [asdudley@eiu.edu](mailto:asdudley@eiu.edu) or 217-581-2313. Dr. Dianna Timm can be reached at [dtimm@eiu.edu](mailto:dtimm@eiu.edu) or 217-581-2400.

- **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

Institutional Review Board  
Eastern Illinois University  
600 Lincoln Ave.  
Charleston, IL 61920  
Telephone: (217) 581-8576  
E-mail: [eiuirb@eiu.edu](mailto:eiuirb@eiu.edu)

You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

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I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time. I have been given a copy of this form.

---

Printed Name of Participant

---

Signature of Participant

---

Date

## **Appendix E**

### **Interview Protocol**

At the time of the interview, welcome the participant and thank them for their participation. Ask the participant if they received the informed consent and had a chance to look it over. Pull up the informed consent through the Share Screen feature on Zoom and go through this form with the participant. Answer any questions they might have. Ask permission to record the interview.

This set of questions will ask about students' experiences throughout the study abroad process and will be asked directly to the participants during the interview.

1. Tell me a little about yourself.
  - a. Do you work?
  - b. What do you do for work?
  - c. How do you spend your time?
  - d. What sorts of things are you interested in?
  - e. Is this the path you thought you would take? Please explain.
2. Tell me about your study abroad experience
  - a. Did you have a pre-departure orientation?
    - i. What did that include?
    - ii. Did you feel it adequately prepared you for your experience? Why or why not?
  - b. Where did you go? How long were you there?
  - c. Who did you go with?
  - d. Where did you live?
  - e. Did you travel outside the area you were based out of?

- f. Can you tell me about your five favorite memories?
  - g. Can you tell me about your five most challenging memories?
  - h. Had you been outside the U.S. prior to this experience? Where, when, and what type of experience?
3. While you were studying abroad did you turn to anyone for support? Who and why?
  - a. How were these the same or different from those that you may have utilized in the U.S.?
  - b. How did you find these individuals?
4. While you were studying abroad did you need or rely on any resources? Explain.
  - a. Why did you need the resource?
  - b. How did you find the resource?
  - c. How was this the same or different from those that you may have utilized in the U.S.?
5. Tell me about your arrival and the first few days in the new culture.
  - a. What did you experience?
  - b. Who did you meet?
  - c. Where did you live?
  - d. What did you do?
  - e. What kind of emotions did you experience?
  - f. What kind of independence did you have?
  - g. How did you navigate your way around?
  - h. What did you observe or notice about this new environment?
    - i. How immersed were you in the local culture?

- i. Did you have classes during this time – what were those like?
  - j. Did those feelings change or shift throughout the trip? If so, in what ways? At what point did the newness and excitement of the experience wear off?
6. As you adjusted to your new environment did your perspectives change about your experience, the environment, or what you were going through? Can you tell me about that?
  - a. Were there things that you were challenged by?
  - b. Who were you spending time with?
  - c. What sorts of things did you do on a daily basis?
  - d. Were there things that you did that were different from things you may have done in the U.S.? Explain.
  - e. What emotions did you experience?
  - f. Did your perspectives on this new environment shift during your time there?
  - g. How were you doing as a student?
7. Can you tell me about how you prepared for your departure and return to the U.S.?
  - a. What sorts of emotions were you experiencing?
  - b. How did you find closure with the people you were spending time with?
  - c. How were your classes at the end?
  - d. Were there things you wish you had done but didn't get a chance to do?
8. Talk to me about your adjustment back to college in the U.S.?
  - a. Did you have a pre or post departure preparation provided by your home or host institution?
  - b. What emotions did you experience?

- c. What was the same and what was different?
  - d. Did your perspectives on the U.S. culture shift as you returned? What influenced this?
  - e. What were interactions with family and friends like upon return?
9. As you reflect back on your experiences studying abroad how did they impact your undergraduate experience?
10. If you could change anything about your experience what would you change and why?
11. What additional resources and or support would have helped you at any point in your experience?
12. Have you ever gone back?
- a. Would you go back?
13. Has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your thoughts on study abroad experiences?