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Motivation behind Male Undergraduate Students' Decision to Participate in a Study Abroad Program

Rachel Ann Lindhart

Eastern Illinois University

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Motivation behind Male Undergraduate Students' Decision to Participate in a Study Abroad Program

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BY
Rachel Ann Lindhart

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
Master of Science in College Student Affairs

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
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YEAR

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Motivation behind Male Undergraduate Students' Decision to Participate in a Study Abroad Program

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Committee Members:
Dr. Dianne Timm, Chair
Dr. Kurt Olausen
Dr. Daniele Nardi
ABSTRACT

This study sought to explore the motivating factors behind a male students’ decision to study abroad during their undergraduate career at a mid-sized Midwestern university. A phenomenological qualitative approach was used to understand the factors that influenced their decision to participate in a study abroad program. Five male undergraduate students in their third year or higher that had participated in a semester-long or summer independent study abroad program were interviewed one-on-one. The results demonstrated that the participants committed to study abroad during their sophomore year of college. The students’ decisions were influenced by a variety of factors, including academics, people, their personal background, the office of study abroad, and their own personal desire and determination.

Key words: Global Perspective, Intercultural Competence, International Education, Study Abroad, Study Abroad Participation, Study Abroad Program
DEDICATION

If it weren't for a few influential individuals who found their way to me at various points in my life, I would not have found my way to this field and my passion.

To my mom – my hero, role model, and best friend. Your unconditional love and cheer inspires me daily.

To my dad, for always investing 100% into all of my endeavors and encouraging me along the way.

To my sisters, Michelle and Jenna, for inspiring me to be the best big sister – and person – I can be. Know that you can do and be ANYTHING you set your mind to and that I will always be here rooting for you.

To Valerie and Veronica, my study abroad program coordinators, y mis familias mexicanas y españolas, for supporting me throughout my own study abroad experiences. Without having studied abroad, I never would have found my way to higher education.

To Holly Cowman, my Irish internship supervisor, lifelong friend, and greatest professional inspiration.

These words are dedicated to each of you. This is the least I can give for the immeasurable gifts each of you has given me.
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It is thanks to the guidance and encouragement of a few special people that this thesis was made possible.

The sincerest thank you to the chair of my thesis committee and thesis advisor, Dr. Dianne Timm. Thank you for challenging me, encouraging me, and cheering me along every step of these last 16 months. Thank you to my entire committee Dr. Kurt Olausen and Dr. Daniele Nardi, for your support and guidance. Your feedback and ongoing communication broadening my perspective and invigorated my passion for this topic. A special thank you to Kurt, who doubles as my supervisor, for teaching me all about study abroad from a professional standpoint and fostering my growth in this field.

To my family: thank you for supporting me in college and abroad, for encouraging me to pursue student affairs, and most especially for humoring my endless, heartfelt ramblings about my research and for always, always mirroring my excitement.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

As the role of global interaction is gaining influence and significance in the structure and dynamic of the United States' economy, government, and society as a whole, a greater emphasis is being placed on the importance of intercultural competence in U.S. higher education (Chen & Starosta, 2000; He & Chen, 2010; Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2015; Young, Natraj-Tyagi, & Platt, 2015). The rise in acknowledgment of intercultural competence is causing both educational institutions and members of the professional workforce to be more intentional about adopting this concept and pursuing leaders that embody this characteristic. Chen and Starosta (2000) defined intercultural competence to be an understanding of both the distinctive and parallel characteristics that exist between cultures that elicit a more profound sense of self- and cultural awareness within an individual.

Colleges and universities are constantly seeking techniques and practices to better prepare their students for the workforce (Brux & Fry, 2010; He & Chen, 2010; Horn & Fry, 2013; Mohajeri Norris & Gillespie, 2009). The growing demand for global citizens in today's society is influencing universities to provide opportunities for students to explore diversity and develop intercultural competence (Wisansing, 2008; Young et al., 2015; Zehrer and Lichtmannegger, 2008). In terms of intercultural competence, a global citizen is an individual that is able to consider their relationship with themselves, others, and the world around them in a comprehensive, impartial way as a result of their experience traveling outside of their home country and interacting with individuals who are different from themselves (Adam & Carfagna, 2006; Karlberg, 2008). A major
opportunity that institutions utilize to take international education one step further is to offer students an experience that immerses them into a foreign culture entirely: study abroad programs (Mazzaro, Soutar, & Seng, 2003). Seeing as one of the main goals of study abroad is to increase international competence by bringing people of diverse cultures together on a global scale, the perception and mission of study abroad are changing in an attempt to increase their popularity and, in turn, increase global competence (Nyaupane, Morris Paris, & Teye, 2011).

As defined by the Forum on Education Abroad (FEA), study abroad is categorized as a subtype of education abroad that allows students to participate in an educational experience outside of their home country and in this advances them towards their academic degree at their home institution (2011). Study abroad, according to the FEA, does not include the completion of a full academic degree at a foreign institution (2011). Study abroad allows students to spend a period of time ranging from one or two weeks to a semester or an entire academic year studying at a foreign institution; an opportunity for which they will receive course credit from the domestic institution in which they are enrolled (He & Chen, 2010). Due in part to the promoted benefits and drastic changes that have been and are still currently being made to improve the overall study abroad experience, study abroad participation amongst undergraduate college students in the United States has continued to gradually increase since the beginning of the millennium (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2015; NCES, 2014; Salisbury, Paulsen, & Pascarella, 2011). As reported by the Institute of International Education (2016), approximately 313,415 students studied abroad from the United States during the 2014-2015 academic year. While this represents a 65.7% increase in participation in the
preceding decade, there was only a three percent annual increase from 2013-2014, and study abroad participants comprise less than two percent of the 16.7 million students enrolled in a degree-granting post-secondary college or university during that same year (IIE, 2016; NAFSA, 2014; NCES, 2014).

Despite national attempts to increase and diversify study abroad participation such as the Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act and the Generation Study Abroad initiative promoted by the Institute of International Education, there remains a perplexing disparity between consistent trends in which groups of students generally go abroad and which do not (Institute of International Education, 2015; NAFSA: Association, 2009). It is widely understood that Caucasians, females, and students studying humanities or social science are more likely to study abroad than their respective counterparts (Pope, Sánchez, Lehnert, & Schmid, 2014; Salisbury, Paulsen, & Pascarella, 2011; Thomas, 2013). The gap of greatest interest to this study is that of gender. Within the 313,415 study abroad participants, the Institute of International Education (2016) released that 66.6% of this student population were female. This percentage has remained consistent for the past 15 years (IIE, 2016).

The reality of an existing gender gap in study abroad participation has been established through a number of studies (IIE 2014; Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2014; NCES, 2014). However, an in-depth exploration of reasoning behind male decisions to study abroad or forgo the opportunity has yet to be fully examined. This study contributes to the growing list of factors and reasoning behind the male decision-making process when considering studying abroad.
Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the motivation behind male students’ decision to participate in a study abroad program during their undergraduate career. This purpose was best addressed through the facilitation of a phenomenological design within the qualitative realm of research. By understanding the factors influencing the decision-making process and adapting study abroad programs to suit the specific needs of male undergraduate students, study abroad participation between genders can hopefully begin to equalize and intercultural competence will be more attainable across the gender spectrum.

Research Questions

The researcher sought to understand the motives behind male university students’ decision to participate in a study abroad program. This was considered by answering the following research questions:

1. At what point do college men begin thinking about participating in a study abroad program?
2. Who and/or what influences a male student’s decision to study abroad?
3. What obstacles were faced by the male students during their decision-making process?
4. How did the men overcome the presented obstacles?
5. What are the participants’ greatest perceived benefits of the study abroad experience?
Significance of the Study

I, as the researcher, spent two semesters studying abroad in two different locations during my undergraduate time. As a requirement of my Bachelor of Arts degree in Spanish, I was required to spend at least one semester abroad studying the foreign language of which I was working to perfect. I chose to spend the spring semester of my sophomore year in Mérida, Yucatán, located on the northwest region of the Yucatán Peninsula in Mexico. I had never before ventured out on my own; I was a scared, timid, uncertain young woman who had to remind herself daily that she was doing this for her education, and in the end it would all be worth it. I returned home that May with higher senses of bravery, confidence, and appreciation for differences, a greater understanding of the world around me, and an itch to travel and explore that I could not quite seem to get scratched.

It was not long before I was mapping out my academic plan for my senior year and I realized I had only a few Spanish courses to finish up in order to meet graduation requirements. It was in this moment as I was sitting across from my academic advisor that I realized the only option I would allow myself was to earn those credits abroad. What better way to achieve Spanish fluency than by immersing myself in a Spanish-speaking country amongst those whose native language is, indeed, Spanish? For the final semester of my senior year, it was off to Granada, Spain I went. I went abroad again my senior year not because I was required to, but because I chose to. During this semester, I acted on the passions I developed while in Mexico; I allowed my newfound sense of bravery to fuel my independent travels around the world; My eyes were opened to beautiful, unique cultures and people who taught me about life and even more about
myself. My heart has been forever touched by my Mexican and Spanish families who accepted and loved me, my own biological family who believed in me, my institution’s study abroad faculty who guided me, and my companions, who were by my side every step of the way and, to this day, relate to me in ways that many do not. My hope is that each and every student has the ability to partake in such a powerful, meaningful experience as study abroad.

As has been established, there is a gender disparity in study abroad participation (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2015; Salisbury, Umbach, Paulsen, & Pascarella, 2009; Stroud, 2010). This study will assist in understanding and reducing the gender representation gap in study abroad programs. By acknowledging the gender gap in undergraduate male students who participate in study abroad programs and understanding the motives behind both their decisions, faculty and staff members in the departments of International Education and Study Abroad will be better able to adjust their marketing techniques and provide program options to better appeal to and fit the needs of the groups of students who do not go abroad (He & Chen, 2010; Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2015; Pope, Sánchez, Lehnert, & Schmid, 2014). Directors can use the feedback provided by males who chose not to study abroad and either create or adapt specific programs to meet the criteria for what they are looking for in a study abroad experience.

Faculty have a high level of authority over the students with which they are engaged, especially from an academic standpoint (Lewis, 2013). Their input strongly influences student curricular decisions. Many faculty are able to understand their discipline on an international scale, but struggle to envision the supplemental role that study abroad can play in curricula (Heisel & Stableski, 2009). This lack of understanding
prevents study abroad from being thoroughly and appropriately recognized in the classroom. Bringing awareness and engagement among faculty will normalize study abroad on college campuses (Heisel & Stableski, 2009). Ideally, the information presented by this study will spark ideas for and result in stronger study abroad promotion, increased participation and, therefore, a lessening of the drastic gender gap in study abroad (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2015).

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

**Limitations.** It is possible that the qualitative research information collected through one-on-one interviews could have created an uncomfortable barrier between the interviewee and the researcher. This may have prevented the student from feeling comfortable sharing honestly about their experience with study abroad and the reasoning behind their decision-making process in regards to participating or not. Open communication could have also potentially been hindered by the fact that the male participants were interviewed by a female researcher. In order to combat the inherent limitations, a conscious effort was made on behalf of the researcher to build rapport with the participants to attempt to eliminate any uncomfortable feelings that may have arisen on their part from the researcher being an unfamiliar female. This upheld neutrality, helped the participants feel more comfortable opening up to the interviewer, and heightened the value of the disposed information (Krefting, 1990).

**Delimitations.** The participants of this study were drawn from the list of 26 males from the institution who spent one semester abroad between the spring semester of 2015 and the spring semester of 2016. This study was on a smaller, less-generalizable scale but it still made significant contributions to the understanding of the motivation
behind male study abroad participation. The researcher adopted Guba's (1981) outlook
on transferability rather than applicability, understanding that research can be transferable
when the results “fit into contexts outside the study situation that are determined by the
degree of similarity or goodness of fit between the two contexts” (p. 216). The results of
this study provide insightful information to universities with study abroad programs and
specifically the study abroad program director, along with those individuals exploring the
reasoning behind male motivation to study abroad. The information brought forward by
the present study is also useful to faculty – some of the most influential people
throughout a student’s educational choice-making process – who are often skeptical and
unaware of study abroad opportunities available to their students (Kelly, 2010; Lewis,
2013).

Bracketing. Since the researcher has personal experience with study abroad, it
would have been easy for researcher bias to form or for opinions to be interwoven with
the interpretations of the raw data. Objectivity was one of the main goals of this
interview process as a way to uphold neutrality. This was maintained through an
intentional process of bracketing on the researcher’s behalf. Bracketing is a strategy
unique to phenomenological studies that occurs when the researcher consciously
disregards their own personal convictions about the phenomenon of which they are
significantly knowledgeable about (Carpenter, 2007). The researcher’s bracketing
process was focused around reflexivity. Reflexivity is an activity of thought done to
determine different elements of the phenomenon that could be potentially influential
during the research process (Chan, Yuen-ling Fung, & Chien, 2013). This tactic is
helpful for researchers to assess how what is most important to them may negatively
influence their research and recognize and minimize areas of possible bias (Ahern, 1999; Primeau, 2003).

The researcher kept a journal throughout the study to ponder the values she possess, identify any suppositions being made about different groups of people, remain in touch with the genuine reasoning behind conducting the research, and document any likely conflicts – emotionally or dynamically – that may have arisen between the researcher and the participants (Hanson, 1994; Paterson and Groening, 1996). The journaling began during the development of the thesis proposal and continued through the analytical and discussion portions of the report. In an attempt to prevent further researcher bias during analysis phase, a strong coding method was developed and enforced throughout the interpretation of the data.

**Definition of Terms**

**Intercultural competence** – an understanding of both the distinctive and parallel characteristics that exist between cultures that elicit a more profound sense of self- and cultural awareness within an individual (Chen & Starosta, 2000).

**Study abroad** – the opportunity for students to spend anywhere from one or two weeks to a semester or an entire academic year studying at a foreign institution abroad for which they will receive course credit from the institution in which they are enrolled (He & Chen, 2010). For the interest of this study, the term study abroad will be used in reference to a semester-long academic credit-earning experience completed at an international institution (Salisbury, 2011).

**Study abroad program** – an organized study abroad excursion that can vary in length and kind; programs typically are segmented into one or two weeks (short-term),
summer-long, semester-long, or an entire academic year. They include, but are not limited to, exchange programs, faculty-led programs, direct-enroll at a university, the use of a third-party provider, or student teaching abroad (Hoffa, 2007).

Summary

Chapter one introduced the concept of study abroad and the important roles it plays in student development and advancement as up-and-coming professionals in a global society. The purpose of the future study was introduced. Chapter one also included the significance of and possible limitations to the proposed study and defined terms that will appear frequently in the following report.
CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

Previous research demonstrates that there is a strong divide between males and females participating in study abroad programs (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2015; Salisbury et al., 2009; Stroud, 2010). An array of differing reasons has been proposed in an attempt to explain and provide further understanding for this obvious gender gap. In line with this attempt at gaining insight, many studies have been done to examine the factors influencing a student’s decision to study abroad. The subsequent literature review will discuss in depth the background and benefits to study abroad, the goals of study abroad, and the personal characteristics that influence study abroad intent. Additionally, the college choice model, student identity development theory, transition theory, and ignorance as a simplistic cause of ethnocentrism in respect to study abroad participation will be reviewed.

History of Study Abroad

The concept of study abroad has evolved enormously over the past century but the general idea and goal of it has remained the same (Twombly, Salisbury, Tumanut, & Klute, 2012). The notion of study abroad in the United States originated in the late 19th century as professors from several colleges in the eastern region of the country took females on academic excursions throughout Europe as a way to prepare them for the real world (Bowman, 1987). After World War I, colleges in this same region began to coordinate further opportunities to send students – predominantly females – abroad (Twombly et al., 2012). Junior Year Abroad (JYA), a long-term trip focused around curricular, developmental, and cross-cultural student development was introduced as well
as short-term faculty-led or major-specific programs that were designed to help participants learn about the world around them (Hoffa, 2007).

**Funding Study Abroad.** As time passed and study abroad programs evolved, these efforts were recognized, supported, and promoted by the Institute of International Education (Lee, 2012). Study abroad can be a costly option for any student. Over the course of history, various financial supports have been implemented to aid those interested in pursuing these opportunities. The development caught the attention of the government and motivated them to get involved with this new element of higher education by promoting acts and initiatives (Twombly et al., 2012).

The Fulbright Program is a leading U.S. program that promotes exchanges for cross-cultural education, allowing individuals to teach or study abroad at the graduate level (IIE, 2016). Fulbright was established in 1946 as per proposition of Senator J. William Fulbright. His intention was to use the leftover materials from the second World War to connect and build international relationships between the U.S. government and citizens and those from other countries to establish mutual priorities and encourage international well-being (Lebovic, 2013). Fulbright has evolved into today’s largest U.S. exchange program (IIE, 2016).

Two years later, in 1948 the Smith-Mundt Act was signed into law (Maghzì, 2004). This act supported educational international exchanges and encouraged an awareness and shared knowledge between the United States and the rest of the globe (Maghzì, 2004). Following World War II, the United States acknowledged the necessity of incorporating the teaching of life skills to youths to match the growing demands of the country’s national security and defense (Hunt, 2016). In 1958, the National Defense
Education Act was enacted in support of the country's movement to strengthen the U.S. school system and encourage postsecondary education (Hunt, 2016). The funding arranged through this piece of legislature was designed to support language studies, STEM majors, and future teachers (Hunt, 2016).

The Foreign Assistance Act quickly followed in 1961 at the peak of the Cold War as an effort to improve the U.S. foreign assistance programs (Rennack & Chesser, 2011). The objective of the Foreign Assistance Act was to aid countries around the world in the development of their economies and security to advance the foreign policy, security and overall wellbeing of the United States (Council on Foreign Relations, 2016). Later that year, the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) was founded, as administered by the Mutual and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961 (Hoffa 2007; U.S. Department of State, n.d.). Now authorized under the Fulbright-Hays Act, the ECA seeks to use educational, cultural, athletic, and professional exchange programs to foster amicable relationships and understanding between the United States and foreign countries (U.S. Department of State, n.d.).

Similar to the Fulbright Program, the National Security Education Program (NSEP) was instituted by the Federal government in 1991 in an effort to continue to create a strong connection between national security and higher education (NSEP, 2016). The NSEP award provides funding to U.S. college undergraduate and graduate students who are studying areas and languages abroad in regions critical to U.S. interests, as well as to further develop programs in these areas (NSEP, 2016). An initiative of this program is the Boren Scholarship, which offers additional grants to students studying
nontraditional foreign languages in underrepresented areas critical to U.S. national security (NSEP, 2016).

The Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program, established in 2001 and administered through IIE, aims to diversify study and intern abroad participants and locations by providing financial assistance to students who receive Federal Pell Grants and have limited financial means to put towards an international experience (Allen & Arellano, 2014; IIE, 2016). This program seeks to assist applicants who are traditionally underrepresented in study abroad, such as those who may identify with a minority racial or ethnic background, are a STEM major, have a disability, are in high financial need, attend a community college, and those who desire to travel to nontraditional study abroad locations (IIE, 2016). Depending on the institution, many different departments, organizations, and colleges have funds allocated for the international education of their respective students (Dunkle, 2010; NASFA, 2016). Additionally, third-party program providers such as CIEE, AIFS, or ISA will routinely offer scholarships to students enrolled in their study abroad programs (NAFSA, 2016).

Most recently, in 2009 the Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act was introduced. This bill works to aid in the implementation of study abroad into the general curriculum of higher education in order to develop competent pre-professionals for today’s global society (Hoffa, 2007; NAFSA 2009). The grants offered to colleges and universities by the Simon Study Abroad Program support the act’s three national goals: The U.S. will have one million college students study abroad by the year 2020; participants will accurately reflect the demographics of undergraduate students in regards
to gender, ethnicity, financial status, and area of study; study abroad participation in nontraditional sites outside of Western Europe will increase (NAFSA, 2009).

Financial aid of all types has been made applicable towards the study abroad experience (Allen & Arellano, 2014). The Higher Education Act of 1992 mandated that as long as students are enrolled in a sufficient number of credit hours to be considered to have full-time status, they are eligible to receive their full amount of financial aid during their semester abroad. They can then apply that award towards their study abroad costs, as long as the program is approved by their home institution (Allen & Arellano, 2014). Students may also use loans within the U.S. Department of Education’s Direct Loan Program or Federal Pell Grants or Federal Supplemental Educational Grants to fund their study abroad experience (Allen & Arellano, 2014).

**Post World War II Development of Study Abroad**

Study abroad halted during World War II, however many men were traveling abroad at this time and being exposed to new and different cultures and environments through their military service (Bates, 2010). Upon the end of World War II the concept of study abroad picked back up and slowly expanded to include student exchange programs, dissertation research abroad, the establishment of separate colleges for international students by foreign universities, the development of third-party providers, and colleges working together to create shared study abroad programs (Hoffa, 2007). From the post-World War II era to the present day, the major objectives of study abroad advancement have been to make it more accessible to students and secure that it is in accordance with the law from an academic standpoint (Hoffa & DePaul, 2010). National educational organizations have been working the past two decades to globalize college
Program modification. The range of study abroad program options has grown significantly over the last century. In the early 1920s the predominant study abroad programs offered were short term, faculty led, and took place in Western Europe (Lee, 2012). This trend was initiated by the University of Delaware, where Professor Raymond Kirkbride proposed to take a small group of students on a six-week excursion through France during their junior year, which later evolved into the program Junior Year Abroad (IGS, 2013). The first third-party program provider, the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE, formerly known as the Council on Student Travel), began its operation in 1947 to offer support and assistance to institutions and organizations seeking to send students abroad for global understanding (CIEE, 2016).

Study abroad program types have been altered and diversified to accommodate a variety of majors that historically were not compatible with study abroad. Current study abroad program options are categorized into different types and subtypes based on their purpose and what experience they offer to students. Students can partake in either an exchange program, where they pay the tuition of their home institution and ideally swap places with an equal number of students from a foreign institution, or they can directly enroll in the international university and are held responsible for that school’s tuition and fees (FEA, 2011). Programs focusing on both area studies or language studies are offered to provide an academic concentration on the foreign region or language within that region (FEA, 2011). Faculty-led programs, usually short in length, are arranged and directed by a faculty member from the students’ home institution (FEA, 2011).
International service-learning opportunities are growing in popularity, as they allow students to complete a type of hands-on field study in which students actively serve the needs of a foreign community (FEA, 2011). Also becoming more supported in study abroad are multi-site programs, in which students study in two or more different locations for a substantial amount of time (FEA, 2011). Students also have the opportunity to participate in a credit-earning internship at an international company or organization (FEA, 2011).

Programs of different lengths that depart at staggered times during the calendar year have been developed to offer a range of opportunities to meet the individualized needs of students. Shorter program opportunities run for eight or less weeks. These can take place over spring or winter break, during January term, or at some point over the summer (FEA, 2011). Semester-long programs are modeled around the typical length of a semester term on a U.S. academic calendar, lasting between 12 and 17 weeks (FEA, 2011). Semester programs not only take place at land-bound institutions, but also on cruise ships that make stops at multiple coastal countries such as Semester at Sea (Institute for Shipboard Education, 2016). At maximum, students can participate in year-long programs that run the course of a traditional academic year of two semesters, between 26 and 45 weeks of schooling (FEA, 2011).

**Diversification of participants.** Participating institutions and study abroad programs continue to diversify study abroad participants in a variety of ways. They are becoming more intentional about advertising study abroad towards community college students (Twombly et al., 2012). While a handful of study abroad opportunities have been available to community college students, leaders at these two-year institutions have
been working to intentionally provide more international coursework options for their students (Blum, 2006). To meet the needs of their student population, who typically face time and financial constraints, community colleges such as Community College of Philadelphia and College of DuPage in Glen Ellyn, Illinois are seeking out shorter-term, cost-friendly study abroad programs to offer their students (Blum, 2006). Study abroad participation amongst U.S. community college students is growing at a substantial pace. During the 2005/06 academic year, over 6,000 community college students studied abroad – making up less than three percent of the total U.S. study abroad population (Blum, 2006; Goodman, 2008).

While both study abroad participation and minority student enrollment have grown in recent decades, there continues to be a racial/ethnic gap in the study abroad student population (Dessoff, 2006; Salisbury, et al., 2010; Thomas, 2013). Although the percentage of Caucasian students participating in a study abroad program dropped from 84.3% to 76.3% between the 2000/01 and 2012/13 academic years, this does not reflect the proportion of Caucasian and minority students in higher education (IIE, 2014). In 2012, 60% of students enrolled in degree-granting institutions were Caucasian (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The percentage of minority students partaking in study abroad programs is not representative of the percentage of minorities in higher education.

**Diversification of program locations.** Prior to the 1930s, the majority of study abroad programs were established in developed European nations. During this decade, the availability of programs located outside of this region expanded. Russia first opened its doors to international students from the United States in 1934 (Lee, 2012). In 1936, IIE offered the first exchange opportunity between American and Chinese students
The leading study abroad program in Latin America was instituted in Argentina in 1939 (Lee, 2012). Study abroad program locations have continued to expand throughout the globe.

The United Kingdom has stably remained the most popular study abroad destination for U.S. students, hosting 12.6% of all U.S. students who went abroad in the 2013-2014 academic year (IIE, 2015). However, the number of participants in nontraditional countries continues to rise. Between 2008 and 2009, the number of students studying abroad in China grew 19 percent; those studying in India grew by 20 percent; and the number of students who chose to study abroad in an African country rose by almost 18 percent (McMurtrie, 2009). The appeal of these less popular countries in study abroad continues to grow due to their developing economies, their low cost of living compared to European countries, and the developmental changes taking place such as in the health or biological fields (McMurtrie, 2009).

Benefits of Study Abroad

Students who participate in a study abroad program benefit greatly from their experience. In addition to increased international competence, study abroad typically evokes the following benefits in its participants: fosters a student’s personal identity and self-awareness (Young et al., 2015); increases a student’s ability to understand moral and ethical issues, and sharpens communication skills (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2015); an increased level of interest in cross-cultural interaction (Bates, 1997); learning how to make well thought out decisions in precarious situations and gain authentic experience about foreign people and cultures (Selingo, 2013); results in higher academic performance and engagement (Dolby, 2004, 2007; Hadis, 2005; Luo & Jamieson-Drake,
2015), and ultimately higher graduation rates (Posey, 2003). Study abroad also allows students to develop foreign language skills (Salisbury, 2011), and aids in their professional marketability and ultimate career decision-making (Mohajeri Norris & Gillespie, 2009). As the nation continues to globalize and study abroad programs diversify and strengthen, the benefits to studying abroad grow and evolve.

**Intercultural competence.** Intercultural competence amongst both students and professionals in all fields is becoming increasingly more valuable in society as corporations and organizations recognize the need for personnel that are capable of working with people from diverse cultural backgrounds that possess dissimilar beliefs and operate on unique principles (Young et al., 2015). International educational experiences such as study abroad play a crucial role in increasing global awareness, accompanying classroom learning through immersion and first-hand experience, and giving students an opportunity to explore future career opportunities on a global scale (Nyaupane et al., 2011). As the push for developing a greater sense of intercultural competence and creating well-rounded global citizens within the learning and working populations of the United States intensifies, the awareness and prioritization of study abroad programs has also magnified.

**Personal identity and self-awareness.** Residing and studying abroad triggers the educational development of students that is often associated with that of a liberal arts education (Latiner Raby, Rhodes, & Biscarra, 2014). In 2013, the California Community College Student Outcomes Abroad Research project (CCC SOAR) determined that the different classroom dynamics and activities that students experienced while abroad, such as an emphasis on discussion about both superficial and deep, controversial topics,
smaller classroom sizes, and first-hand service learning experience, pushed them to be stronger independent learners and create a strong personal ethical mantra (Latiner Raby et al., 2014). These students noticed a strengthened “sense of independence and confidence” as a result of being immersed in a country whose primary language was not English (Latiner Raby et al., 2014, p. 179). Stepping outside of their comfort zone encouraged these students to develop outgoing, driven, and courageous characteristics. It also allowed them to develop a clearer idea of their goals and aspirations for both college and a future career (Latiner Raby et al., 2014).

Study abroad has shown to have a positive influence on how students from the United States identify as American and what that characterization means to them (Dolby, 2007; Hadis, 2005; Study Abroad Outcomes, 2012). Study abroad alumni confided in Kelly (2010) that they had a greater global perspective than their peers who had not studied abroad. Dolby (2007) reported that American students became hypersensitive and even critical of their nationality during their time abroad and upon their return. By being abroad, individuals become increasingly aware of their identity in relation to the culture they are experiencing which allows them to more easily define themselves, their beliefs, and their own personal culture (Study Abroad Outcomes, 2012; Younes & Asay, 2003). These self-realizations that students experience help sharpen their interpersonal communication skills and recognize their level of competency (Younes & Asay, 2003).

**Academic performance and engagement.** Student motivation and engagement is a result of the interaction between intentional, academic activities and extra-curricular involvement (Chickering & Kuh, 2005). Students who are more engaged have an increased potential for academic completion and success. Institutions that are intentional
about offering students academic and co-curricular opportunities for engagement heighten the likelihood of student success (Tinto, 2010). George Kuh (2008) has identified study abroad as an element of higher education that increases academic engagement in students. The CCC SOAR indicated that students who studied abroad attributed their comprehensive learning while abroad to the connections they had made with the groups they were in and the faculty members who led them (Latiner Raby et al., 2014). This same group of students also identified the following study abroad components had increased their level of academic engagement: purposeful tasks such as service-learning opportunities or immersive class projects, interactions with individuals who are different from themselves, and learning about the history and culture of the foreign region in which they were studying (Latiner Raby et al., 2014). These engaging experiences inspired within the students a drive to continue exploring and seeking opportunities for application and further engagement upon returning stateside.

Over the span of 10 years, the Georgia Learning Outcomes of Students Studying Abroad Research Initiative (GLOSSARI) set forth to assess and record the learning outcomes associated with study abroad participation within the 35 institutions of the University System of Georgia (Redden, 2010). In comparing the academic performance of study abroad participants to that of a representative control group that remained stateside, this project found that the mean cumulative GPA of students who studied abroad increased from 3.24 to 3.30, while the mean cumulative GPA of the control group during the same time frame increased from 3.03 to 3.06 (Redden, 2010). This project also discovered that those students who started college with a low SAT score of 800 in verbal and math combined completed with a GPA of 3.21, while those in the control
group reported a mean GPA of 3.14 (Redden, 2010). Similar trends were revealed in the 2014 study presented by CCC SOAR, in which the study abroad participants reported a GPA that was 0.17 higher than their non-participating counterparts (Latiner Raby, et al.).

Factors Influencing Intent

It is widely understood that Caucasians, females, and students studying humanities or social science are more likely to study abroad than their respective counterparts (Pope et al., 2014; Salisbury et al., 2011; Thomas, 2013). Results from a study conducted by Luo & Jamieson-Drake (2015) supported the idea that humanities majors display a greater interest in study abroad than their STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) major counterparts, specifically engineering majors. However, Salisbury et al. (2009) concluded that the underrepresentation of STEM majors in study abroad programs was not a result of a lack of interest but rather educational constraints imposed on them by the rigorous four-year plans associated with each. However, men who had not yet decided a major field or were studying an uncategorized major were even more likely to study abroad than those who decided to major in humanities, languages, and/or arts (Salisbury et al., 2010). Findings from a study conducted by Stroud (2010) supported the idea that major influences intent, revealing that fields with licensure and certification constraints such as architecture, medical sciences, and physical or occupational therapy decreased student likeliness of participating in a study abroad program.

The financial component of study abroad is another influential factor in the decision-making process (He & Chen, 2010; Salisbury et al., 2009). An assessment done by Brux and Fry (2010) on multicultural students’ issues, interests, and constraints with
study abroad found that finances were the main constraint for students who chose not to study abroad. This was agreed upon by Salisbury, Paulsen, & Pascarella (2010), who found that women that receive financial aid in some form were 11.7% less likely to have intentions of studying abroad than those that reported a higher income. However, in regards to men specifically, their study concluded that socioeconomic status of male students was not significantly associated with their intent to study abroad. The same study found that increased extracurricular and community involvement in high school and increased peer interaction negatively affected the probability of male student intent to study abroad (Salisbury et al., 2010).

**Theoretical/Conceptual Framework**

A significant amount of previously written literature is in existence regarding framework that support the concepts of cross-cultural communication and intercultural competence and gives possible explanations for hesitations to interacting with people from backgrounds different than one’s own, such as ethnocentrism (Crook, 2014; Soria & Troisi, 2014; Trede, Bowles, & Bridges, 2013). This study was influenced by four potential theoretical explanations for students choosing either to study abroad or not to study abroad during their undergraduate career: College choice theory (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987); Schlossberg’s (1995) transition theory; Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) psychosocial identity development theory; and the concept of ignorance as a simplistic cause of ethnocentrism (Allport, 1954; Bizumic, 2012; Sumner, 1906).

**College Choice Theory.** The study abroad decision-making process that students experience can be very accurately compared to and explained through the college choice theory (Salisbury et al., 2009). This theory, established by Hossler and Gallagher in
1987, outlines three stages of the college selection process. The first stage – predisposition – is when the student acquires an interest in and intention to attend college, or in this case, study abroad. The individual is beginning to create indefinite educational and career goals, which potentially include an immersive, international education experience (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). A student may enter college with plans to study abroad, while others may make the decision once at the institution. The second stage is the student’s search for what they want, whether that be college or the study abroad program that is most fitting for them. The student assesses the options, the requirements associated with each of them, and determines which aligns most precisely with their “perceived needs, expectations, and preferences,” (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Salisbury et al, 2009, p. 123). As the student determines what kind of study abroad experience they are most interested in, they will need to determine what they want from the experience, where they want to study abroad, and what they will need from their home institution and host institution. The third and final stage in Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) theoretical model is the choosing of and leaving for a certain, determined college or program. Depending on the scenario, students choose to matriculate in either an academic institutional program or a study abroad program (Salisbury et al., 2009).

**Schlossberg’s theory of transitions.** A transition is defined as any situation occurring within the lives of an individual that causes a shift in personal connections, habitual behaviors, suppositions, and personal duties (Goodman et al., 2006). What constitutes transition is entirely reflective of the perception of the individual who is undergoing the change (Goodman et al., 2006). Because of this, they may or may not acknowledge their personal experiences to be transitions.
The decision-making process of a male study abroad participant will be considered through the experiences of two fictitious undergraduate students who will be called Josh and Alex to provide clarity and a well-rounded depiction of an undergraduate student considering studying abroad from a theoretical standpoint. Josh is an undergraduate student in his second year at a mid-sized, Midwestern university who is considering studying abroad after having seen a presentation about study abroad opportunities in one of his classes. Alex is in the same year as Josh at the same institution. Alex is familiar with study abroad after his older sister participated in a semester-long program during her college career. She is trying to convince Alex to study abroad; however, he is not so sure that study abroad is a good fit for him. In seriously considering spending a semester abroad, Josh is on the verge of a transition. He must come to terms with the fact that he will be away from his friends and family, in a foreign culture potentially navigating another language, acquainting himself with a new geographic location, and taking courses in a style and concept that may be new to him. Alex understands the undertaking of a big transition such as study abroad and is hesitant to commit to such a drastic life change. He does not think he can sacrifice time spent with his local friends, nor is he invested in the idea of immersing himself in a foreign culture which will likely shift his behavioral patterns, beliefs, and mindset. Schlossberg’s theory has outlined groups of factors that influence how students like Josh and Alex cope with a transition (Goodman et al., 2006). These sets of influencers are arranged in four S’s: situation, self, support, and strategies (Goodman et al., 2006). Each S in the theory identifies ways in which an individual works through assessing their transition.
The situation within which the transition occurs is comprised of various different factors. Initially, one must take into consideration what triggered or provoked the change and whether it was a planned or unplanned transition (Goodman et al., 2006). The amount of control one feels over the transition impacts the situation as well. For Josh, this decision came of his own accord. His curiosity was piqued after speaking with representatives from the campus study abroad office and this decision is in his control. The timing and duration of the change are also influential elements. Josh has anticipated his transition while Alex’s pending transition is being pushed on him by his sister. Because it is not his own desire, it is more challenging for him to embrace this drastic change; from his perspective, it may not be the right time to go abroad. How one handles their transition is affected by when in their social clock it occurred and whether it had perceived good or bad timing. The same is true for how long the transition is perceived to last and if one knows if it is permanent or temporary. Josh has met with his academic advisor to determine when in his four-year plan would be a fitting time for him to take the classes he needs abroad. He is not over-involved in extracurricular activities, and he could spend a semester away during the lull period of his student organization. Alex, on the other hand, was just hired as a resident advisor through campus housing and is studying on a stricter, less flexible major track. Both Josh and Alex must assess who and what they feel to be accountable for the transition and how it has impacted their behavior. The remaining prominent situational factors are role change, concurrent stress, and previous experience with a similar transition (Goodman et al., 2006).

Self is broken down between personal/demographic characteristics and psychological resources (Goodman et al., 2006). An individual’s perspective of life is
influenced by their personal and demographic traits, such as gender, age (including psychosocial, social, and functional age), socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and health status. Psychological resources encompass an individual’s ways of managing their situation, such as their faith and personal values, psychosocial development, viewpoint and attitude, and flexibility (Goodman et al., 2006). In the case of Josh and Alex, whether they have traveled abroad before may have an influence over their decision, along with their perceived ability to finance and experience abroad.

In the Schlossberg model, support is mainly indicating social support from family and friend groups, intimate relationships, and institutions and communities (Goodman et al., 2006). Support is shown through affection, affirmation, assistance, and honest, constructive criticism. This element of transition processing is assessed through determining the reliable, dependable supports of the individual compared to those that are more unpredictable (Goodman et al., 2006).

Although Josh does not have a sibling who underwent a similar study abroad experience like Alex does, his family is understanding of his pursuit of study abroad. He is not in a committed relationship, and his close friends are considering studying abroad as well, which fuels Josh’s decision. Josh’s mentor and the faculty members within his respective department are very supportive of study abroad and encourage their students to explore the field from an international perspective. Alex’s family, especially his sister, is supportive of his interest in study abroad. Alex is in a long-term relationship and his significant other worries about how distance will impact their relationship. His parents recall the challenging experiences his sister endured while abroad and hesitate to see Alex go through that as well. None of Alex’s friends are interested in international
education and remind him of all of the fun he would miss out on while he would be gone, convincing him he would have the same experience by staying at his home institution.

The fourth S is strategies, and this refers to the mechanisms an individual uses to cope with transition, and includes responses that change the situation in some way; manipulate the meaning of the current state; and strategies used to help regulate stress that follows transition (Goodman et al., 2016). During this time, individuals may use different approaches for coping that are reflective of the goals associated with each coping mechanism. These coping modes are seeking information, taking direct action, hindering action, and behaving in an intrapsychic manner (Goodman et al., 2006).

**Chickering & Reisser’s Theory of Identity Development.** The Theory of Identity Development, as presented by Arthur Chickering, has served as the basis for developmental research and application in student affairs since its formation in 1969 (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Chickering’s (1969) original model was later revised with the assistance of Linda Reisser and outlines seven developmental vectors that work together to assist in the construction of college student identity (Evans et al., 2016). The seven vectors in Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) theory of identity development include developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy towards interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity. Students may be demonstrating development in one or multiple vectors at the same time based on the experiences they are having.

Competence is a balanced interworking of intellectual, physical, and interpersonal competence (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Each of these elements of competence is
connected and reinforced by a confidence and satisfaction within the individual that they are capable of successfully reaching their goals and overcoming obstacles that may arise along the way (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Students become more competent as they become more trusting in themselves and their capabilities; they are surrounded by supportive individuals who provide them with realistic personal feedback; and they are able to harmonize these skills in a way that gives them personal surety (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Josh entered college with a semester’s worth of college credit earned through advanced placement courses at his high school, placing him in an academically more advanced position than Alex. Josh has begun to take courses for his major, while Alex is still completing his general education requirements. Josh’s materials are presented to him in dynamic, challenging ways which have furthered his intellectual competence at a faster rate than Alex’s. Josh is better prepared for education abroad, which is generally more discussion based, thought-provoking, and profound. Josh attends school in a different state from his hometown. This distance has fostered his intellectual competence in figuring out how to do small survival tasks on his own such as grocery shop and do his own laundry. Alex attends school 20 miles from where he grew up. He spends a lot of time back at home and continues to rely on his family to closely take care of him.

The second vector in this identity development theory is managing emotions (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Students can work to manage the variety of emotions they inevitably endure during the college transition by acknowledging their presence. This awareness aids in the development of the next step in managing emotions: learning to channel anger, cope with fear, or rehabilitate emotional scarring before these intense
feelings endanger personal or professional relationships. Those individuals who suppress their emotions must then learn how to release their emotions and self-express in a controlled manner. The concept of study abroad can provoke new, unfamiliar emotions within an individual. Alex gets irritated when his sister continues to pressure him into studying abroad. He sometimes struggles to manage this emotion and occasionally will snap at her to let it go. Alex is having trouble accurately expressing himself, using intense emotion rather than words, which jeopardizes his interpersonal competence. The unknown of education abroad also worries Josh, but he shares these concerns with his peers, family members, and academic mentors in a calm, reflective manner. He has learned to navigate these emotions rather than let them fester and eventually erupt.

Chickering and Reisser’s third vector is the movement through autonomy towards interdependence. This vector captures a crucial stage in student development; one in which they learn to operate on their own, take ownership for their self-driven pursuits, and be less influenced by the beliefs of others (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). This movement through autonomy is supported by both emotional and instrumental independence. Emotional independence represents being free from a nagging desire for constant closeness, praise, and approval. A student is instrumentally independent when they are self-motivated to problem solve and organize events, and have the capability of freely transitioning from one location to another. Interdependence is a balanced marriage between independence and the need for inclusion. This is acquired when the individual gains a respect for the self-sovereignty of others while seeking mutual concessions and compromises within their ever-growing friend group (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Josh has been considering a study abroad experience since his family trip in high school and
has been pursuing this opportunity on his own since arriving at college. He has found friends with similar interest and lifestyles that he can discuss this with and seeks input appropriately from his family, instructors, and friends. Alex is feeling as if his family is forcing him to think about this experience and has little to no personal interest in studying abroad. As a result, he has intentionally sought out others who have similar interests to his own.

Developing mature interpersonal relationships is the fourth established vector. For a student to establish mature interpersonal relationships, they must learn to be accepting and understanding of differences between themselves and others as well as foster within themselves the ability to be intimate within certain close relationships (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). A respect for differences can be considered on both intercultural and interpersonal levels. Intimacy is achieved when friendship quality and depth is prioritized. The peak of the fourth vector is finding an interdependent balance among equals rather than relationships that are too dependent or too controlling (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Because of Alex’s lack of interest in culture and intercultural communication, he likely would find it difficult to develop mature interpersonal relationships with those who are from different backgrounds than he is. He has successfully fostered an intimate relationship with his significant other; however, this connection is holding him back from opening himself to the rest of the world.

Conversely, Josh welcomes this opportunity, as he is eager to experience the world and life at an international level, comparing foreign lifestyles to what he is accustomed to in the United States. He has a supportive friend unit with whom he is close enough to rely
on but he has been able to make decisions for himself and distance himself from any
overpowering influences on their behalf.

The fifth vector is establishing identity. Individual identity is strengthened as a
result of the interplay between the aforementioned vectors: competence, emotional
maturity, autonomy, and healthy relationships (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Individuals
begin to find their identity as they explore and reach their peak in each of first four
vectors. Each student must find their personal habits and patterns in which they thrive.
Similar to Schlossberg’s (Goodman et al., 2016) element of self in positively coping with
transition, one feels confident in their identity when they find peaceful acceptance of their
body, the way they look, their gender, and their sexual orientation; they are comfortable
with their social and cultural backgrounds; their self-awareness of the roles they fulfill
within their lives; they have self-confidence; and are individually stable and able to
immerse themselves within society (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Goodman et al., 2006).
Josh is slightly more developmentally advanced than Alex in Chickering and Reisser’s
(1993) first four vectors, which gives him a stronger, clearer base for his own identity.
He has adopted healthy personal habits as well as established a comfortable interactive
system within his relationships. He has a sense of what he wants in life and is willing to
take risks to accomplish those goals. Alex is more hesitant, relying too heavily on those
around him and not seeking the truth within himself.

Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) sixth vector is developing purpose. Developing
purpose is about one’s life path; thinking critically about interests and potential
opportunities for the future and establishing goals and plans to pursue one’s calling
(Chickering & Reisser, 1993). This includes ultimately bringing together all life goals
and working daily to see that they are supported and upheld. Josh pursues study abroad as a supplement to his academic and personal experiences during undergrad and is capable of envisioning how these fit into his lifelong goals. Josh understands that his semester abroad may support his future vocational path, but it also has the power to derail it if he happens to discover another passion during his journey. He fully understands and embraces the possibility of this. Alex, however, is still working to establish his identity and is unable to fully determine what he wants from his life, and how or if study abroad will play a role in that.

Developing integrity is the seventh and final vector in this theory of identity development. This vector, similar to forming identity and purpose, allows individuals to develop a personal basis that is influenced by values and beliefs (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). This foundation sets the tone for how one interprets their experiences, behaves, and upholds self-respect (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). This development occurs in three phases which operate chronologically, yet in congruence: acting and making decisions based on intentional, conscientious thinking to consider both self-interest and that of one’s peers; creating individualized values and beliefs while remaining respectful of others’; and aligning personal beliefs with one’s behavior in social settings (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). For students like Josh and Alex who are in the thick of Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) fifth and sixth vectors, they are slowly making their way towards developing integrity. When Josh does embark on a study abroad program, he will begin to merge into this vector, as he explores another culture and makes an internal decision whether he wants to behave as an American or work to acclimate. He will make choices each day through interacting with others in the street, in class, and potentially living with
a host family, that will challenge him to respectfully consider both himself and the
culture and people of which he is present. He will be introduced to diverse religious
backgrounds and cultural values that differ from his own previously established beliefs.
The interaction between his background and what he observes abroad will allow Josh to
develop his own custom, unique set of personal values without insulting or degrading the
many cultures that he dwells amongst.

**Men and ethnocentrism.** Sumner (1906) coined the term ethnocentrism to be
defined as the “view of things in which one’s own group is the center of everything, and
all others are scaled and rated with reference to it,” implying the “group” is to be
understood as an individual’s ethno-cultural group (p. 13). Ethnocentrism often includes
in-group negativity towards the out-group in addition to group self-centeredness
(Sumner, 1906). One proposed cause of ethnocentrism is proneness to simplification
(Bizumic, 2012). When an individual’s ethnocentrism is a result of being prone to
simplification, they tend to attempt to process the complicatedness of the world by
organizing other people, living beings, and objects into categories, such as social
categories (Allport, 1954). These categories typically result in a divide between the in-
group (us) versus the out-group (them). The in-group is prioritized and dependable while
the out-group is unimportant, not dependable, and undesirable (Bizumic, 2012). The
concept of ignorance, or an absence of knowledge about out-groups, largely plays into
ethnocentrism (Allport, 1954). Humans tend to prefer members of their own ethno-
cultural groups because of a familiar level of comfort; they do not want to confront the
unknown. This looming existence on the unknown can be intimidating, and in response
to this uncomfortable sensation, ignorant individuals tend to gravitate towards what is
familiar (their in-group and their behavioral patterns), dedicate themselves to it, and reject any revitalizations or changes within the in-group (Bizumic, 2012).

A number of studies have been done to explore if and how ethnocentrism is expressed through gender (Lin & Rancer, 2003; Neuliep, Chaudoir, & McCroskey, 2001). Neuliep et al. (2001) found that men in the American and Japanese cultures tend to be more ethnocentric than the women of their respective cultures. This finding was based off of the Generalized Ethnocentrism scale, created by Neuliep and McCroskey (1997) to measure this human inclination. Lin and Rancer (2003) replicated the study conducted by Neuliep et al. (2001) and added to previous works that show men have greater ethnocentric tendencies than women. This difference in ethnocentrism between men and women can be connected to general personality variations (Neuliep et al., 2001). Women tend to be receptive and trusting than their male counterparts (Neuliep et al., 2001).

Summary

Study abroad has made tremendous developmental progress over the past 100 years and is still evolving and expanding in different ways. The ever-growing list of benefits attracts a diverse population of students and supports the attainability of study abroad. There is a significant amount of progress left to be made in increasing study abroad participation and an effort is being made to globalize U.S. citizens and increase intercultural competence among students and future professionals. Theoretical concepts such as Hossler and Galligher’s (1987) college choice theory, Chickering & Reisser’s (1993) identity development theory, Schlossberg’s theory of transitions, and the idea of
ignorance as a simplistic cause of ethnocentrism have been applied to study abroad and the understanding behind participant motivation (Bizumic, 2012).
CHAPTER III

Methods

This study employed a qualitative technique for data compilation and analysis. As defined by Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2015), qualitative research is conducted when the researcher wants to understand the intricacies behind a naturally occurring phenomenon. The information is collected through words and conversation and the question at hand is why or how things happen (Fraenkel, et al., 2015). A qualitative approach was used as a means to get genuine, individualized, in-depth responses from the participants about their personal experiences with the decision-making process when contemplating participation in a study abroad program.

Design of Study

The proposed study was done through a phenomenological qualitative approach by interviewing undergraduate males in their third year or greater. Male study abroad participants were interviewed in-depth about their consideration process in regards to study abroad, the factors that influenced their decision, and their perceived benefits of participating in a study abroad program.

A phenomenological qualitative research design best suited the objective of this study because it provides the participants the opportunity to share and describe in detail the unique, personal experiences they have had with study abroad (Fraenkel et al., 2015). The reality of each individual was of value to this study, and the “essential characteristics” of each male’s experience with study abroad was analyzed and clustered in an effort to detect common themes in responses (Fraenkel et al., 2015, p. 326). The researcher initially collected demographic information about the participants followed by
asking them a list of questions designed to provoke responses about why the students made the choices they did in regards to their study abroad consideration process.

Participants

Participants in this research study were five male undergraduate students who were in at least their third year at a moderate-sized four-year university in the Midwestern region of the United States. They fell between the ages of 22 and 23 years old. International students at this institution were not considered. The study compared insight provided by five male students that studied abroad through the institution for either one semester or a summer term. The researcher aimed to have a diverse range of races and ethnicities represented in the sample, but this was not a major determinate in identifying participants; thus, all of the participants in this study were Caucasian. The male participants were recruited via the study abroad office. The director of study abroad tracks interest in study abroad and those who have completed their experience are included in an office database, thus obtaining this list and making personal contact with the students who were randomly selected from this list provided a qualified set of participants. The list was made up of nine participants who met the study criteria. From this list, the 5 participants were randomly selected. Below is a brief description of each of the participants.

Justin is 22 years old in his final semester at the institution studying business management. He spent the fall semester of 2015 in London, England at the University of Westminster, where he completed both academic courses and a professional internship. On his current campus he is involved with his fraternity. Justin is the younger of two boys in a close nuclear family of four. He grew up in a large urban area in the Midwest.
Many of the family activities that he partook in growing up revolved around supporting one another in activities and sporting events. They frequently traveled to various locations both domestic and international during Justin’s childhood and continued to do so after both boys left their parents’ home.

Dominic is in his junior year at the mid-sized Midwestern institution. He spent the previous spring semester of 2016 at University of Luneburg in Luneburg, Germany. Dominic is twenty-one and majoring in health administration with a minor in business management. At his current university, Dominic is involved in a fraternity, the Honors Program and Honor’s Society. He is a first generation Polish American, with both of his parents coming from Poland. He is one of three children and describes his family structure as “strong” and “close.” Dominic lived an adventurous childhood, during which he traveled abroad to Poland as well as to different places around the country, each to visit family. He traveled with friends as well and would take weekend trips to different parts of the Midwest during high school with his peers.

Marcus is a twenty-one-year-old senior en route to receiving a Bachelor’s degree in political science. He studied at Sogang University in Seoul, South Korea for a semester during the fall of 2015. He serves as the vice president of a political student organization and is an active member of the Political Science Association and Pre-Law Society. With a mother who was a graduate of the same undergraduate university, Marcus is living an institutional legacy. He has a significantly younger sister with whom he is developing a closer relationship as they both mature. During his childhood, Marcus’s father was in the Navy, so he has lived in multiple states and traveled to all but nine of the United States.
Rex spent the fall 2015 semester abroad at Kansai Gaidai University in Hirakata, Japan. He is twenty-three years old and majoring in art. His art major has kept him very connected with his current university’s art department and fine arts center where he spends most of his time and energy. Rex has one younger sister who is significantly younger than he, and although their relationship feels “a little disconnected sometimes,” he said it is still a strong one. He described his parents as his best friends, which is fostered by their “tight-knit” Irish Catholic family dynamic. Rex’s parents divorced when he was a child and were separated for seven years before they remarried. During that time of separation, Rex went on one of his most memorable trips to Florida with his father. Their nuclear family of four traveled routinely as well, both to different parts of the country and internationally.

Murray is a senior political science major with a focus in international studies and minors in French and women’s studies. He participated in a four-week summer study abroad program in Paris, France during the summer of 2016. Murray is a member of the university’s competitive speech team, which takes much of his time and commitment. He is one of the two campus organizers for a state representative campaign and serves on the campus Student Advisory Board for the College of Sciences. He was born and raised in the same city as the mid-sized Midwestern university he attends, which allows him his independence but also makes it easy for him to continue to gather with his family on multiple occasions each week. He, too, characterized his parents as “some of his best friends” and gets along equally as well with his two younger siblings. Growing up, Murray’s family frequently traveled around the United States to visit extended family that was located in Chicago and Tennessee. They would take the occasional family vacation
to Florida, but his study abroad trip was the first time that Murray had traveled outside of the country.

Research Site

The institution selected had an enrollment of 7,202 part- and full-time undergraduate students, as reported by the university’s Department for Planning and Institutional Research. Of these students, 60% identified themselves as female and 40% identified as male. Twenty-nine percent of students enrolled identify themselves as minorities. This includes the ethnicities of American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, African American, Hispanic, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific, students who identify with multiple ethnicities, and excludes international students.

During the 2015-2016 school year, 150 individuals – including undergraduate, graduate, and non-students – participated in a study abroad program, which represents an approximated mere two percent of this institution’s undergraduate student population. Interestingly enough, this is almost identically representative of the under 1.5% of U.S. students studying abroad (NAFSA, 2014). Twenty percent of this population was male and eighty percent identified as female. Seventy-four percent of the participants were Caucasian or non-Hispanic while the remaining twenty-six percent included Hispanic Americans (9%), African Americans (7%), Asian Americans (2%), individuals from multicultural backgrounds (1.3%), and a handful of undeclared ethnicities (6.7%).

Interviews took place in a quiet, secluded study room in the library on campus. This ensured that privacy and confidentiality were upheld.
Instruments

As the graduate assistant in the Office of Study Abroad and a three-time study abroad alum, I personally understand the study abroad experience and consideration process. I realize that there are many existing factors – personal, developmental, social, and demographic – that influence student decisions of whether or not to go abroad. My intent was to develop a list of questions (Appendix A) to be asked in an interview between the student and myself that effectively encompass the different elements that play into a student’s decision-making process and provide the interviewee with an opportunity to share, in full, their experience with and motivation behind study abroad participation. Questions were designed to build rapport so the participants would feel comfortable sharing more and more information about their decision-making process and experience abroad. The conclusions from this study aid in the public understanding of the nation-wide gender gap in study abroad participation and the lack of male representation in abroad programs.

Data Collection

One-on-one interviews were conducted between the researcher and the male undergraduate students. Interviews with prospective study participants who expressed interest in sharing their stories with the researcher were scheduled upon the start of the fall semester of 2016 and interviews were conducted between the second and third week of the fall semester. These interviews lasted between 30 and 120 minutes and were recorded on a digital recording device and stored on a personal, secure flash drive that will be for the use of this study only. The student participants were assigned an alias by the researcher by which they were referred throughout the study to protect their identity.
Data Analysis

The responses to the qualitative interview questions were transcribed and documented in Microsoft Word where the content was analyzed. The entirety of what was collected in the interviews was transcribed and coded. In order to eliminate researcher bias, a second, independent researcher reviewed the transcripts. When coding the interview content itself, the researcher coded a First Cycle using Descriptive Code to summarize thoughts and In Vivo Code to quote ideas directly from the participants (Saldaña, 2013). A second cycle was run to minimize the original number of codes and appropriately group them together. This included categorizing the more common concepts throughout the interview and assigning subcodes within them to give specific, realistic actions within the more abstract group (Saldaña, 2013). Themes or concepts were drawn from the coded data and either a pre-existing theory was supported or a potential new theory began to form.

Pre-coding played a role in the analysis process as the researcher came across significantly striking words or phrases said by the participant (Saldaña, 2013). Analytical memos including reflective data of the researcher’s as well as observational field notes from during the interview served as material that was taken into consideration while coding (Saldaña, 2013).

Treatment of Data

The interviews were recorded and the participants’ responses to the prepared interview questions were transcribed into Microsoft Word in preparation for coding and analysis. Before the interview began, the participants were required to read, agree to, and sign an informed consent form before the interview was conducted. All files were kept
on one flash drive which only the researcher had access to. The flash drive and existing data will be destroyed after three years following the completion of the research, as required by IRB.

Summary

This study employed a qualitative method of research to assess the motivation behind male undergraduate student study abroad participation. Five male students who participated in a study abroad program were interviewed by the researcher. The interviews were transcribed, reviewed by an unrelated third-party researcher, and coded for analysis.
CHAPTER IV

Analysis

The purpose of this research study was to investigate the influencing factors that motivate a male undergraduate student’s decision to participate in a study abroad program. To understand the study abroad process and experience from a male’s perspective, it was necessary to identify the point during which college men begin thinking about and committing to studying abroad as well as the individuals or factors that were present in their lives during that time. Obstacles that the male students face when selecting a study abroad program as well as how they overcame these obstacles also impress upon the student’s ultimate study abroad decision. This chapter shares the individual perspectives and experiences on the study abroad decision-making process of each of the five unique participants that were disclosed in the one-on-one interviews. This section discloses the analysis of data and the themes and ideas that emerged from the exploration of male study abroad motivation and participation.

Initial Thoughts on Study Abroad

Participants were asked to think back to when they first began to consider study abroad and how they initially reacted to this concept. This was followed up by questions about when they made the ultimate commitment to their study abroad program. The themes of encountering study abroad that emerged in this study were through campus visits and prior knowledge.

Awareness. Two of the participants identified the institution’s orientation involvement fair as their first encounter with the concept of study abroad. Dominic,
whose parents are both from Poland, relayed the following memory in regards to his initial awareness of study abroad:

I remember I came here with my old man to the freshman orientation. It was where you walk through the Union and they have all the tables set up, and I saw a study abroad thing and I just grabbed it. I’m like, ‘Oh, that would be cool,’ not thinking I would ever do it, I just grabbed it and my dad was like ‘Yeah, whatever.’

Marcus became more aware of study abroad during a campus visit as well.

I think I [had] heard of it in high school. I knew it was a thing and then when I visited Eastern they were talking about a program and different things, like it might be cheaper or you could get credit for it. Different things like that. So I really liked that and that was one of the things I wanted to do while I was here.

It is also worth noting that Marcus participated in a short-term study abroad trip to Italy in high school. Additionally, during Marcus’s childhood his father had been in the Navy in which he did a fair amount of traveling as part of his time in the service.

Justin, Rex, and Murray each talked about knowing that study abroad was an option prior to coming to college. Justin was “sure [he] had heard of study abroad” before sophomore year, but until then, the information went “in one ear and out the other.” Rex said, “I have always known about study abroad. Even through high school I had heard about the idea of study abroad. I never thought I would do it.” When asked why not, he shared, “I didn’t think there was much merit to it. I thought that was what vacations were for. Even freshman year [of college] I had no intention [to go abroad].” Murray expressed:
I had always planned on studying abroad if I could, even before I came to Eastern… it was during freshman orientation when they have the involvement fair that I actually met somebody or spoke with somebody very briefly about studying abroad.”

When asked about his initial reaction to this concept, he said, “It was exciting… it was just something that I knew I wanted to pursue.” Like Dominic and Marcus, Murray shared that he had met somebody from the study abroad office during his freshman orientation involvement fair that really started his pursuit of an experience overseas. This awareness of opportunities for international education prior to entering college stemmed from the student’s family dynamic, guidance and encouragement from older family members, friend groups, and prior experience with travel, including both domestic and international travel.

Commitment. Justin, Dominic, Marcus and Rex all identified sophomore year as the time when they decided upon and committed to a program abroad. Some chose to commit in the fall and others in the spring, with trips occurring in the fall, spring, or summer of their Junior year.

Justin said, “I got really interested in my sophomore year. That’s when I was like, ‘Okay, I’m definitely going to study abroad throughout my college career.’” He began the application process immediately – almost an entire year in advance – to “really ensure that this was happening.” Justin said:

I started a year before I was going to go because I knew I wanted to study in the fall, so the fall before I went I was going into the [study abroad] office. So I
committed really early. I really set my mind to it like, 'I want to do this. I want to make sure it happens.'

Marcus, who studied abroad during the fall semester of his junior year, also committed to his study abroad program during his sophomore year. "It didn't work out initially because I was changing [my major] so much," he stated, "but then one day I just put my foot down and said, 'I'm going.'" Marcus said, "I walked into the office and had a week to fill everything out. It worked." He answered that he committed to study at Sogang University "as soon as [he] got the paperwork." Once Dominic began handing in the required paperwork during the fall semester of his sophomore year, he considered himself committed as well. He decided to pursue study abroad towards the end of his freshman year, made the commitment on the brink of his sophomore year, and studied abroad during the spring semester of his sophomore year. "Once you start handing in papers and you realize it's getting real, then that's it. Once I'm handing in forms, I'm not backing out," he said.

Rex, who studied abroad during the fall semester of his junior year, discussed his development of awareness of and interest in study abroad. "Freshman year I had no intention [to study abroad], but sophomore year I just said, 'Forget it, I really want to go.'" When asked about his commitment to the program, he said, "I [technically committed when] officially got confirmed to go to Kansai Gaidai. Mentally I did not confirm until like two weeks out."

In reference to his junior year, Murray disclosed:
I got the acceptance in late-March after the January deadline, and so it was from that point, once I knew that I had everything secure - it was a week or two after that maybe – I sent off my deposit which was like saying, ‘Alright, I’m coming!’

**Influencing Factors**

Participants were asked to recount the process for selecting where they wanted to study abroad as well as share about groups or individuals who influenced their study abroad decision. They were also asked to talk about a point where they thought they could not study abroad. Each of the participants identified a variety of factors that influenced their decision-making process which inspired the following themes: academics, people, background, personal desire and determination, the Office of Study Abroad, and program.

**Academics.** Four participants talked about academics as an influence in their study abroad decision-making process. Justin identified his major as a driving force for selecting his program location: “I’m a business management major and so I just went on the [study abroad] website and searched by major and London – Westminster – was there and that’s how I picked it.” Dominic, too, highlighted his major by saying:

> I wanted to go with my buddy Jack. We wanted to go somewhere that had both of our majors – I am a business minor, so somewhere that had a business program, and he is pre-law/political science, so that was the main thing.

As a political science major, Marcus’s academic interests inspire a curiosity within him on a global scale. “Different government institutions – how things are run, what the differences are, all of that is interesting [for me] to see.” Murray sought programs in France to build on his French minor but was intentional to also find courses
that would work towards his major, “the Women’s Studies department certainly had a big part in that and political sciences, [since] that’s the school that I went [abroad] with.”

Murray also shared:

I always knew that France, or at least a French-speaking country, was the focus on where I wanted to go. From there it was just narrowing down programs that worked for political science, specifically. I knew I could go abroad somewhere in France and do language, but I was done with the language portion of what I’m doing and didn’t want to declare it my major. .. so I wanted to find something with political science.

**People.** The participants revealed that the influential people in the lives of each student played a significant role in their study abroad decision-making process. Dominic identified a particular family member and their past experiences and the person’s regrets as inspiring him to study abroad:

[My cousin] went to college and all the other college graduates that I know – relatives and friends – they all say that if they could do it again, they would study abroad. So I thought, ‘Okay, I will learn from their mistakes.’

Similarly, Murray mentioned the general support of those by whom he was surrounded. “Anytime I talked to anybody about it they were always like, ‘Absolutely go,’” Murray said. In addition to these general statements made about social support, each participant identified at least one influential individual in their lives that can be categorized into three main subthemes: faculty, family, and friends.

**Faculty.** As college students, interactions with faculty are common. In their role, faculty can impact students’ decisions about studying abroad. Dominic, a health
administration major with a minor in business management, told a story about a professor of his who, through the sharing of his own experiences with international travel, encouraged Dominic to further consider this opportunity:

I had this professor, Dr. Wolf, who taught U.S. History within the last 100 Years. I remember he took a whole 50-minute class talking about how he studied somewhere in the Middle East and he had run out of money. He had no money and took 30 cents and bought two candy bars for fifteen cents apiece and slept on a bench and then the next day his parents wired him money... the whole point of his story was to go out and see the world. Money doesn’t matter, the world is huge. Go.

Later, Dominic added that Dr. Wolf “was talking it up big time, about how easy it was to do and all the partnerships [that] we have.” A faculty mentor of Murray’s influenced his decision as well. “My research advisor last semester was a pretty integral role in [my decision-making].” Murray said, “He had spent a couple of years in Berlin while working on his Ph.D., so he was just like, ‘Yeah, you need to go, this is something that you absolutely should do.’” Murray also identified a member of the Women Studies department who was particularly supportive:

When I had talked to [Women’s Studies professor] about it – about credit transfer and what not – she was super supportive and was super interested in what I was doing from the get-go. So there was a lot of institutional support from Women’s Studies faculty, from Political Science, Study Abroad, all who kind of helped push me that way.
Rex identified three different faculty members within the art department that influenced his decision. He attributed this to the entire art department in general and ultimately said campus in general offered an immense amount of influence. Rex shared, "talking to friends, honestly, too," influenced his decision.

**Friends.** The individuals that the participants spend their time with both at college and from back home also played a role in their decision. Rex, an art major with a business management minor, spoke about how his friends supported his decision, "some friends back home were really like, 'You should go study abroad.'" In reference to his college friends, he added:

My friends are super into anime and they were pestering me in the background, 'You should go do this.' I have never been a fan of that, but I would say that they contributed because they were more annoying than anything else. I was finally like, 'Okay, fine, I'll do it.'

Three of the participants spoke about how their decision was also influenced by having their friends go along with them. Marcus talked about how he encouraged one of his friends to decide to study abroad at Sogang with him for the semester. Dominic spoke about wanting to study with a friend, "I wanted to go [abroad] with my buddy Jack." For Dominic and Jack, it was a friend of theirs who encouraged them to go to Germany and guided them through this process based on his previous experience. "My buddy actually studied at Leuphana for a full year. Jack and I got into study abroad and then we learned that he was there. So the partnership probably got our friend there, and then he walked us through." Dominic also mentioned that he had gone on road trips with friends in high school, which inspired him to continue to get out and travel.
The participants were asked how they told their friends about their decision to study abroad and how those conversations went. Justin said, "everyone said that it was cool and everything, but I feel like no one really believes that you’re going to do it until you actually, do, you know?" Murray said the following about how he brought it up:

Just kind of in general conversations, talking about it. A couple of my friends had been abroad already, so it was at least a point of common interest between us. So it was just throwing it out there and talking about it off-handedly a lot.

All of the participants shared that they did not tell friends until they had officially made the commitment to study abroad.

**Family.** Participants’ study abroad decisions were influenced by their families and the dynamics and experiences they shared. Growing up, Justin’s family was very involved and supportive of one another. “We were really involved in sports, so [my parents] would always come to our sporting events. My dad used to run triathlons all the time, so we would go and watch that… We would go on walks and stuff.” Marcus told of his parents’ encouragement:

My mom pushed me. She always wanted me to explore the world. She’s a teacher, so she understands the importance of that. My dad wanted me to and he did influence me as well because he was in the Navy. He’s been to every corner of the world.

Marcus later added of his father, “My dad has always been like, ‘Get out of [the state]. Go explore the world. Just go see… and he’s just always wanted better [for me] than what he got. So that has been a big pressure.’”
Family experience. Hobbies and trips that the male students partook in with their families growing up also inspired within them an interest to travel and study abroad.

Marcus said of his mother and family hobbies, “My mom made sure to [take us] to museums and stuff like that, we’ve always been interested in things.”

The participants were asked about their experience with travel growing up. They were also asked to describe a favorite trip that they took. As was explained in Chapter 3, each of the men had prior experience with travel to some extent, and three of the participants had traveled internationally prior to studying abroad. Dominic, who is a first generation American with parents from Poland, shared, “we did go to Poland once before to visit family and we have traveled around the country for weddings.” Similarly, Marcus said, “I had done a lot of road trips. My grandparents lived where my mom grew up and I also traveled to Montana where my dad grew up to visit my grandparents there.”

Murray talked of family-oriented travel as well:

I have always appreciated travel, or at least I’ve never hated it... I’ve always wanted to go abroad, but travel for me until I did that was just vacation-style, just seeing the family. It wasn’t a true appreciation of where I was going or digging as much in and finding out what I could about the place I was at.

Family vacations that were not centered around visiting extended family members were also discussed. Rex spoke of some of his family vacations, “prior to coming to college [we took] family vacations, like to Florida. I went to Cancun. We did one special [trip] where we went to Hawaii. I ride motorcycles with my dad, so we went up to Sturgis.” Justin shared:
We would go up to Minnesota during the summer, we would go to Florida every once in a while... We went to Cancun a couple of times, but we never really traveled all that much as a family. Nothing too exotic.

**Background.** Male students’ background – their personal experiences along with their familial heritage – influenced their study abroad decision-making process. For Dominic and Rex, their decision was impacted by their roots. Dominic stated, “I’m one-hundred percent Polish, both of my parents were born in Poland.” When asked what assisted him in choosing his program location of Germany, Dominic added, “The fact that me being Polish. My whole mom’s side of the family is in Poland and it is right next door [to Germany], that definitely helped.”

Rex spoke of his ancestral history as an influence:

Three generations since we got off the boat [have stayed] within a 20-mile radius. That was a huge contributor to why I wanted to go abroad too, because my biggest fear is getting stuck down here and dying within this same 20-mile radius. I feel like it is my job to expand new horizons.

Marcus’s independent travel experience in high school strengthened his desire to continue to travel:

The summer after my freshman year of high school I went to Italy for nine days – Rome, Florence, and Venice, which was so wonderful and I would go back right now if I could…since then I had had the bug and wanted to go, wanted to do things.

Marcus’s decision was additionally influenced by personal aspects of his background. He shared a hobby of his by saying, “One of the things I like to do is travel
to eat. Food was a big [factor].” This commitment to study abroad was further motivated after not getting a leadership position on campus:

I had applied to be a Resident Advisor and my friend and I got waitlisted. I didn’t wait to wait that out, I really wanted to study abroad. So I walked into the office the next Monday to get the [application materials].

**Office of Study Abroad.** Participants mentioned the campus’s Office of Study Abroad in reference to their decision-making processes. Justin and Marcus specifically identified the Study Abroad Coordinator during their recollection. “[The Coordinator] helped me out so much along the process. I pretty much just did it by school and then he helped me out with the whole procedure,” said Justin. The Coordinator helped guide Marcus’s location choice. “The Coordinator did [influence my decision],” Marcus said. He wanted to study in Japan and the Coordinator guided him towards South Korea after Japan wasn’t a good fit for Marcus.

Murray and Dominic spoke more generally about the study abroad office. “The study abroad office was quite helpful when I was like, ‘Alright, I have these 15 different questions, where do I go from here with this?’ Murray said. Dominic said, “The people in the study abroad office are so helpful and they really push you.”

**Program.** Various details about the study abroad program itself play a role in the student’s decision-making process. Factors of influence can include geographic location, cultural elements such as the native language spoken and food eaten, timing and length of the program, as well as the cost of the program and cost of living in that location. Academics were a priority to all of the men. The male students identified three different
elements of specific study abroad programs that influenced their decisions: the program cost, program length, and program location.

The total program cost was a factor in Marcus's program selection process. "Europe is expensive," he said, "so that kind of pushed me toward Asia and towards eventually Korea, but that was definitely a factor in [the selection]." Marcus determined that the cost of living in Asia would be cheaper than that of Europe, which he weighed into consideration when comparing program options.

Justin, Dominic, Marcus, and Rex participated in semester-long study abroad programs that ranged from three to five months in length. Murray's study abroad program in Paris was one month long over the summer term. The program length of time was also an element that Marcus considered. He said, "I didn't want to do the week excursion, I wanted to actually be in the city and explore it and see it and everything." To get this experience, Marcus decided on a semester-long program. Murray knew that, due to his campus commitments and scholarships, he could not study abroad for a whole semester. This led him to select a shorter program over the summer.

Dominic talked about his decision to go to a European country, sharing, "I wanted to go to Europe because I have family there and if you're anywhere in Europe you can easily branch off, and Germany would be perfect, right in the heart of Europe. So that's what we did." Marcus discussed his reasoning for choosing Korea, saying, "The reason I went to Korea was because I wanted to go to Asia. I'd figured I had done Europe and North America and I didn't really have interest in South America or Africa." He also added, "I love anime and Pokémon and wanted to experience the Japanese culture." Although he ultimately studied in South Korea, his interests and hobbies influenced
Marcus’s decision to study in an Asian country. Rex, too, was influenced by an appreciation and awareness of culture. He mentioned, “I’ve always had an appreciation for Japanese culture. I got to see the Taiko drums live and I thought, “Oh man, that’s super awesome, and I decided, ‘Okay, I’ll go.’”

**Personal desire and determination.** For Justin, Dominic, Marcus, and Murray, their decision-making was driven by a personal desire to study abroad and a curiosity about the world. When asked where the pressure to study abroad stems from, Marcus answered, “Myself, because I wanted to go… [it’s a] personal pressure… I just really wanted to go… I wanted to see more.” In regards to his decision and commitment, Dominic said:

I don’t want to say that it’s a spur of the moment decision, but it’s something that you want to do deep down, like you have always wanted to do it, but you always tell yourself, “Oh, that’s impossible. I would never do that.”

Justin shared his internal determination to study abroad. “I just wanted to go to Europe, I wanted to see what Europe was like. I wanted to do it now before I’m not able to.” He elaborated on this idea by saying:

I definitely wanted to [study abroad], because I figured it would be a great life experience and after college I’m probably going to go right into a job. I’ll probably never have the chance to live somewhere abroad, so… I might as well do it while I’m here and get that experience while it’s an option.

Curiosity played a role in Murray’s study abroad decision:

It was just something that I knew I wanted to pursue; I appreciate… the States, but I’ve always felt that there’s a certain part of me that just wants to say, ‘Yeah,
this is cool, but there's an entire world of other really cool, interesting, fascinating things.

When asked about pressures he faced when considering study abroad, Murray answered the following:

In my interpretation of events it was all mostly in my head. I've known pretty much since I started school here that I wanted to do international work. I'd always had a love for other cultures and languages from taking French in high school. International politics had just always been more interesting to me than domestic and national politics. So for me that was just what I wanted to do.

The participants spoke of a range of factors that influenced their decision, from institutional and individual support to academics and finances. However, the decision was ultimately their own to make, and each of them recognized this and acted on this through their own personal desire and determination to make it happen.

**Obstacles Faced During Decision-Making Process**

The men were asked about the obstacles they faced during their study abroad decision-making process as well as the ways in which they were pressured to go abroad. The following themes were identified as obstacles to the students: the fact that studying abroad is generally not talked about by role models, peers, or prior to commitment; academics; program cost; timing of the program; unknowns; application paperwork; and family support.

**A topic not talked about.** When asked in what ways they were pressured to go abroad, Dominic and Rex both said that there actually is no pressure. Dominic stated, “I
don’t want to say [there was] pressure to stay, but nothing was really pushing me to go.”

Rex shared the following about pressure:

The funny thing is there is no pressure to go abroad, and I think that is uniquely an American thing. It’s just something that is in the background. I can’t remember someone, even in high school, grade school, even in college, no one is super aggressive like, ‘You should go study abroad!’ We don’t push that very hard. I feel like that is a big contributor because the whole idea of America is that we have everything, why would we ever leave?

Rex reinforced his statement by saying, “There’s zero pressure. No one’s like, ‘You need to go abroad.’ They’re actually almost the reverse, like, ‘Are you sure you want to go abroad?’ I would say there’s zero pressure.”

For Justin, it was that he did not have role models or peers who had studied abroad and were talking about it. He said, “There was no one in my life that had done that.” In regards to his peers, he stated, “I don’t know any other guy at this school that studied abroad for a semester somewhere.” The other participants did not identify having peers pressure them or encourage them to study abroad.

Not talking about it before committing. The participants were asked how they told friends and family about their study abroad decision. Dominic answered:

I didn’t tell anyone at first because people say these big things that they’re going to do and then they never get around to it and then they sound super dumb, you know? …So I didn’t want to do that just in case it did fall through. So I didn’t tell anyone at first.
When he was asked to elaborate on his hesitation to tell about his commitment to study abroad, he continued, “I didn’t want to tell them until it was all set in stone… because I didn’t want to sound dumb just in case I didn’t go.” In regards to talking about his plans prior to committing, Murray shared, “I would hesitate a little bit on whether or not I would want to go and then bring it up again.”

**Academics.** All five participants stated that academic arrangements and meeting GPA requirements were a concern of theirs while preparing to study abroad. Murray shared the following in regards to finding a program in France that offered political science courses:

The main thing for me was trying to find the program that fit what I wanted to do… The main obstacle was finding a program that I could go to that worked out.

In my initial searching, there was a limitation of available programs.

Dominic also struggled with this, saying, “I remember [Jack and I] were running back and forth trying to find a place that had both of our majors. That was definitely the hardest thing.” When asked about his challenges and concerns, Justin shared, “The only thing I was kind of concerned about abroad was academics. I was concerned that the school would be too hard and that my classes wouldn’t match up.”

Meeting the program GPA requirement was a challenge faced by Rex and Marcus. “Because I had been to Europe, I wanted to go to Japan, but I didn’t have the GPA at the time to do Kansai Gaidai,” said Marcus. This led to his choosing of the Sogang University program in South Korea. Rex faced a similar obstacle in GPA requirements, saying, “For Japan, you need a 3.0 GPA to get there… they actually let me in as an exception. Mine was at a 2.88.”
**Finances.** Justin, Dominic, Marcus, and Murray each stated that finances and program cost were an obstacle in the study abroad decision-making process. Justin responded to the question concerning obstacles saying, “The biggest [obstacle] is financial. It is pretty expensive, and London is a really expensive city.” Murray had a similar outlook, sharing, “The main challenge for me going was the money issue in that, I mean Sciences Po is a pretty prestigious school, so it came with a prestigious price tag.” Marcus took this into consideration as he was determining his program location. He said, “Europe would have been too expensive; I wouldn’t have been able to do it reasonably. Especially for a semester, because I wanted to be gone for a long time.”

“I think people are scared that [study abroad] costs too much,” commented Dominic, in response to being asked about study abroad obstacles. He elaborated on his personal experience and shared, “I have always had a job my whole life, so it was hard not working for 5 months and not having any income. That was weird.”

**Timing.** Marcus and Murray shared their challenges in and awareness of arranging a study abroad experience into their academic plan. To answer the question concerning obstacles faced, Marcus said:

> Fitting it into my schedule, especially with all of the major changes. I did it my junior year. I was not able to do it this year because I needed to get my political science major done and next semester I graduate.

This arrangement was complicated, however, as Marcus continued:

> I wanted to do it early, like my sophomore year, and I was looking at Japan, maybe Korea. I didn’t get too far with it but it looked like it wouldn’t work
because I had already changed [my major] to geology at that point and I needed the courses the next semester in order to graduate on time.

Murray was aware of his academic timeline as well and took this into consideration as he considered program length. “I knew I didn’t have the option to do a semester abroad,” said Murray. His perseverance led him to committing to a short-term program over the summer.

**Unknowns.** The unknowns of studying abroad emerged as a theme within obstacles in the decision-making process. In response to being asked at what point he committed to his study abroad program, Justin shared:

I’d never traveled by myself, never been on a flight without my parents, so there was never really a moment where I was like, ‘I’m totally committed and ready for this!’ It was just kind of jump into it and see what happens.

For Marcus, Rex, and Murray, a challenge was the language barrier they faced, and their lack of proficiency in that foreign language. Murray said about his summer in Paris, “Being in a place where I haven’t taken enough French over my life... When I was in Paris with the language and skills it was still not easy by any means.” Rex had shared that Kansai Gaidai admitted his GPA of a 2.88 as an exception to their requirement of a 3.0. In response to this, he said, “I get the reason why they don’t admit people below a 3.0 [GPA] because I tripped and fell really hard in the Japanese classes.” For Marcus, who was studying in South Korea:

Language was a big challenge. In our area there were three or four universities and most students know English and can hold a conversation. So in our area it wasn’t bad, but once we got into the countryside, there was no way.
Something that Rex struggled with initially was selecting a program in general. 

"Selecting was nerve-wracking at first," Rex said, "I didn’t know where I wanted to go."

After deciding and leading up to his departure, Rex shared the following story about his preparation and feelings:

I was actually getting cold feet... I was just getting nervous. Little white kid from mid-America, leaving the country for the first time. I'm the first person in my family to go to college. My uncle went to college but my parents never went. My parents have never really left the country, besides Cancun - which doesn't count. We've never left the continent. This was a big deal, so I started thinking about that and putting it into perspective. I'm the first of all of this. I started getting really cold feet, like I can't really explain it. It was really weird. I got really, really nervous. It was at a point where I was staying up at night like, 'Should I just cancel it?'

In consideration of program prestige of *Sciences Po* and the likelihood of getting accepted, Murray discussed his application process and his doubt associated with that. He said, "I applied to [Sciences Po] on a whim... I knew the prestige of the university in the back of my head and the cynical part of me was like, 'There's no way someone from [my institution] is going there.'"

**Application paperwork.** Another deterrent for Rex and Dominic was the application paperwork. In terms of obstacles, Marcus elaborated, "The paperwork and everything... there are a lot of forms and a lot of due dates. I think people are scared [of] all the forms and deadlines." He added, "Finding an apartment was kind of a pain, too."
Rex shared, "The biggest challenge would be the application process and the challenge of getting denied."

**Family support.** The participants were asked about when and how they told their family about their decision to study abroad. Dominic faced doubt from his mother. He said:

I told my mom and she just laughed at me like, 'No way.' ... So when I told them, nobody believes you obviously because they think it's something in the movies. And then as you keep telling them and keep signing forms they're like, 'Oh my, are you really doing this?' And then she starts crying, and then she says, 'No, you can't do it.' My mom worries a lot.'

Rex waited to tell his parents. In response to when he told them, he said, "After I got accepted. I was telling them that I wanted to study abroad, but I didn't tell them the location or anything because they were dead set on Europe."

**Overcoming Obstacles**

After the participants discussed the obstacles they faced during their decision-making process, they were asked how they overcame the presented challenges. The following themes were identified as manners for overcoming the obstacles faced: support and encouragement, perseverance, being informed, and program fit.

**Support and encouragement.** The participants received support and encouragement from a variety of sources, including family, professors, friends, other study abroad students, and the university's Office of Study Abroad. When first asked the question about support, Justin shared as a general statement, "Everyone was super supportive." As a response to his hesitations with certain obstacles in study abroad,
Murray accredited his progress to general support received, “People were always kind of inching me along in the process.”

**Family and friends.** All of the participants received support at the hands of family and friends. As plans evolved, they spoke of how individuals in their lives were generally encouraging of this endeavor. The participants were asked how their family and friends reacted to their decision to study abroad. Each of them received relatively positive reactions upon sharing their decision with those individuals with whom they are close. Justin shared that both groups were “super” understanding and encouraging. Marcus’s family and friends responded positively, telling him his decision was “great.” Murray said that his family was informed and involved throughout his decision-making process and his friends were supportive along the way. Rex shared that his friends were some of his biggest encouragers for study abroad. When Dominic’s mother was hesitant to agree to his participation in a study abroad program, his extended family offered support. “My cousins talked my mom into it, like, ‘Oh, it’s a good opportunity!’ and that’s how my mom came around.” Marcus shared, “My mom was like, ‘Yeah, go,’” after he told his family that he was considering studying abroad.

As stated above by one of the participants, Dominic spoke about not telling friends until he had made a final decision. This was a common theme among the participants as they spoke about telling their friends, however once they did, they found their friends to be supportive. Two of the participants studied abroad with friends, which also helped them in maneuvering through the process. Dominic’s concerns were supported through a friend who studied at the same program. Dominic explained:
There’s an older guy in our house who had been to Germany for a full year. When Jack and I got into study abroad, we learned that he was there. So then we texted him and he ended up actually getting us the same apartment that he had.

**Institutional Support.** Faculty and staff were some of the people the participants talked about who inspired them to consider study abroad in the first place. These individuals also supported them throughout the various obstacles they faced. Dominic shared how hearing his professor Dr. Wolf talk about his experience helped him realize he could overcome the obstacles too; “Once you have a guy like Dr. Wolf tell you that [it’s doable], why not? That really sets you off.” In selecting the best program for him, Rex sought the advice of his faculty in deciding the location, “I didn’t know where I wanted to go… and I went to my mentors over in [the art department] and one of them was telling me, ‘You can go to Europe whenever you want; it’s a lot harder to find an excuse to go to Asia.’” This led Rex to select Japan, a location he would not have selected without the mentors encouraging him.

Participants identified that completing paperwork, understanding the financial pieces, and finding an academic fit were all obstacles they encountered and gaining support from the Office of Study Abroad was helpful. Dominic and Rex specifically identified the process and administrative support at the hands of their university’s Office of Study Abroad as one place they received assistance in overcoming the obstacles they faced. Dominic said about solving the problem of finding a program that suited both him and Jack, “It was [the study abroad Coordinator] and [everyone] in the office, basically. I was e-mailing back and forth all of the time.” Once Dominic made his decision he went to the office, “You just go to the study abroad office and they will do everything for
you.” When he and Jack were discouraged and concerned about finding a fitting program, he shared, “[the Coordinator] was still pushing us to go, anywhere.” Rex said of the office support, “I can’t recommend the study abroad Coordinator highly enough because he just streamlined everything, I didn’t actually do anything. I just signed a couple of papers, that was it.” In regards to the application process itself, he continued, “It was very streamlined... it was no big deal.”

**Perseverance.** Justin, Dominic, and Rex talked about being able to manage by persevering through their decision and taking ownership of their choices. The participants were asked to talk about a moment in which they thought they wouldn’t be able to study abroad. Justin declared, “When I know I want to get something done, I make sure it happens. So there was never really a point that I didn’t think it was going to happen.” Although facing concern, Justin said, “It was kind of just like jump into it and see what happens.”

In response to his parents’ hesitation to let him go abroad, Dominic owned his decision, stating, “I don’t want to say that it is whatever I say goes because [my parents] help me pay for everything, but it’s basically my decision.” Rex faced a couple of obstacles including not meeting the GPA requirement and his family not fully supporting his decision. He overcame the obstacle of meeting the GPA requirement by demonstrating that he was a good student, ultimately allowing him to be admitted as an exception. To prevent any tension between him and his parents, he waited to tell them his program choice until he was entirely committed. Rex also shared that he’d been getting cold feet leading up to his departure. When asked how he overcame this, he responded:
I just brute-forced it basically. There was no self-help book, it was just like, 'I'm already down the rabbit hole this far.' Friends knew me personally as a very stubborn person, so when someone says 'You can't do that,' I'm like, 'Oh, I'll show you.' I'm very stubborn about that. But the funny thing is there is no pressure. So no one was telling me I couldn't do it.

**Being informed.** The participants shared that gaining knowledge about their program generally and financially as well as planning ahead of time helped to combat previously mentioned challenges in study abroad. Being informed in general helped both Rex and his parents find peace in the transition. “[My parents] were worried because they’re not familiar with that side of the planet,” explained Rex, “but as soon as you tell them there’s like seven gun deaths a year, they’re like, ‘Okay, it’s not bad.’”

Program cost and travel expenses were of major concern to four of the participants. Justin, Dominic, Marcus, and Murray elaborated on how they were able to deal with this challenge. Justin overcame the financial obstacle through “loans. I pay for my college through student loans, so I just took out a student loan.” Murray also discussed how he obtained additional funding sources that made his program possible, saying, “Luckily through all of the scholarships that I had gotten and other money I had tucked back, I was able to [study abroad].” Dominic, too, spoke of the assistance of scholarships:

> Honestly I thought it was expensive until I actually started going [to the Office of Study Abroad] and the Coordinator started breaking down numbers for me and I’m like, ‘Wow, that’s really doable.’ And then there was a scholarship because there is a partnership, so the Coordinator was like, ‘If you write a paper and
[submit] two letters of recommendation, you will get all the school paid for.’ So I did, and I did. The only thing we had to pay for was housing, the plane ticket, and then our travel costs and food.

In regards to tuition and cost, Dominic said, “I remember talking about tuition [at Luneburg]. Everyone thinks it’s so expensive when I think I paid less for school in Germany than I do here. That’s what my parents thought at first, but it’s doable.” Because Dominic was aware of this concern, he worked to combat the financial obligation:

I always have a job. When I went home for Christmas break… I worked for a man [framing houses] for forty to fifty hours a week with decent pay. I worked for those two and a half months and spent it all in Europe.

Marcus considered the less-expensive cost of living in Asia in his decision making. “That pretty much swayed [my decision],” he said of the financial difference. “Once I realized it was spending money, airfare, housing, that’s it and it was cheaper than [my university], my mom was like, ‘Yeah, go.’”

Program fit. Finding a program that was a good fit – financially, academically, geographically – was posed as an obstacle for the participants, but they shared ways in which identifying the right fit put them at ease in light of these challenges. As explained as an obstacle, Marcus was not accepted into the Kansai Gaidai program in Japan and had to find another program option. “[The study abroad Coordinator] was like, “Well, we have Korea, and it would be cheaper than Japan.’ It was cheaper than here, which is the crazy part. Airfare included.”’ Murray shared his fear of not getting accepted in to the summer program at Sciences Po. After getting accepted, he said, “They proved me
wrong, and I’m happy for it. Luckily once I did [find a program that worked out], everything was effectively smooth sailing from there.”

Part of Justin and Rex’s program justification was rooted in location safety. In reference to England, Justin said, “It is a pretty safe spot for a person to go that is living on their own in Europe. London is pretty different [from the U.S.] but very similar, too.” Rex disclosed that his parents were concerned about his decision to go to Japan because they were not familiar with that part of the world. He added, “but as soon as I told them there are only like seven gun deaths a year [in Japan], they were like, ‘Oh, okay, it’s not so bad.’”

Language can be a barrier to studying abroad, and only one of the five participants selected an English-speaking country. Justin continued to share about his comfort in a London program, “Obviously they speak English [in London], so I wasn’t really that nervous about that.” While Murray, a French minor, spoke about seeking out a location he could further develop his language skills, “If you want to learn a language, the best way to do it is to go live in a place where it is spoken.” Marcus also spoke of a language barrier posing an obstacle in his program. He explained that as he was preparing for his departure, he missed the opportunity to sign up for the intensive Korean language course hosted at Sogang University. To overcome the language barrier, Marcus said he purchased a pocket book for language to use abroad.

**Benefits of Study Abroad**

The participants were asked questions regarding their perceived benefits of study abroad. These questions included inquiries about how their experience impacted them, how they benefitted from studying abroad, in what ways it changed them, and if they had
any regrets about their experience. Participants were also asked if family and friends have commented on how they have been upon their return to the United States. The participants spoke about having different perspectives and seeing things in new ways. They saw themselves as changed, perhaps on the inside but not necessarily visible on the outside.

**A new global perspective.** Studying abroad is not like traveling for vacation. Students identified that living abroad for a longer period of time not only gave them opportunities to explore, but also to learn about the culture and lifestyle in that part of the world. Justin and Dominic discussed the value of spending time in a new location and being able to explore it. Dominic shared this perspective, “I thought it was going to be fun going in and just being dropped in a different country not knowing anything. I wouldn’t change that. It was an obstacle, but I don’t think I would change anything.” Justin thought he would get out and travel more, but found that he had enough opportunities where he was, sharing, “I went to the places that I wanted to go. London is huge. If you are not able to travel as much as you would like to, London is the best city to be stuck in.”

The participants identified that this opportunity to live in another country increased their global perspective which they viewed as a benefit of their study abroad experience. “I have a new perspective on the world,” said Rex. Murray shared, “It has really just kind of expanded my worldview, which is exactly what I was hoping would happen going abroad. It has really helped me think of people differently.” He added, “Study abroad has really helped increase my worldview on things, be more open to new
perspectives, in anything.” Justin elaborated on his global perspective and the implications it has had on his life back home:

Just seeing different perspectives [is a benefit]. I feel like, especially in the country that we live in, it is easy to get wrapped up in how America is the center of the world. It’s easy to get wrapped up in that and not be conscious of other countries and cultures. It gives you more of a worldly perspective on things and not just America and how America is everything.

Dominic spoke of his broadened perspective using the following story:

You can put yourself in someone else’s shoes and gain a new perspective about how everyone lives halfway across the world… They live halfway across the world and have such a different culture, everything’s different, different language, but at the end of the day, everyone’s the same. I remember there were some big problems with the Syrian refugees [in Germany] and a big terrorism problem. I was in a group project with a kid from Syria and he was the nicest kid ever. He is a refugee from Syria and just because he was born in a different country, we – I don’t want to say fear him, but he doesn’t have a good stature. People don’t look up to him.

Murray talked about his interactions with others in France and the impact they had on his perspective. “The conversations with the people that I met there were so fluid between getting to know one another and our interests and personal experiences into national mentalities or their view on the world versus mine.” Murray elaborated on how these experiences influenced his perspective:
I think it's really helped me gain more of an appreciation for people's backgrounds and their life stories because being here in the states, and especially for me growing up here, I am much more alike with 90% of the people I'm around than I am different.

Rex observed cultural similarities and nuances between the United States and Japan. "I was really surprised how much American culture and Japanese culture share," Rex said. Humor was a characteristic that he said was consistent in both the Japanese and American cultures. Rex identified a difference, too, "When people say Americans are super ignorant and stuff – going abroad… It's incredible. Say what you want about people being racist, all three of those big countries – China, Japan, Korea – hate each other with a passion. Hate each other.” Rex acknowledged that the American culture may get wrapped up in ego- and ethnocentrism, but those levels are not as extreme as he witnessed in the Japanese culture. This reflection helped Rex to see cultural ignorance on a large global scale, broadening his perspective from what he once observed through a narrow, American lens.

Gaining international experience can also influence how the United States is viewed, as evidenced by the participants' stories. Rex described how his international experience has given him a greater perspective on his American identity, "Going abroad makes you appreciate America, too… I have a new appreciation for my homeland. I have a new perspective on my own home. It has almost made me a little more patriotic in a way.” He was asked to elaborate on his intentions behind this statement, in which he continued:
How tolerant we are. We look like the most liberal paradise ever compared to other countries… We think we have it really bad but because we were founded with having a lot of people we encouraged immigration. No other country really encouraged immigration.

The participants spoke initially about wanting to study abroad for a variety of reasons, including their curiosity about living in another part of the world. This curiosity was only furthered through their experiences abroad and viewed as a benefit by all of the participants. An international experience sparked within Marcus, Justin, and Rex a heightened interest in other cultures and a continued desire to travel. Marcus spoke about how experiencing another culture was a major benefit for him and declared, “I loved it and I would definitely go back. I would go anywhere, really.” Rex demonstrated his interest in the culture by expressing a regret of his: “One regret is that I didn’t immerse myself enough into the culture. I almost felt like I was in a bit of a bubble sometimes, because I would hang out with American friends.” Justin shared his perspective:

It has definitely made me more interested in other cultures. More curious. I want to know more things. [Before studying abroad], if it wasn’t within these borders, it didn’t really affect me. But now I realize how huge the world is and it makes me want to be more of an explorer and not just sit in the same place my whole life.

Living abroad put these participants in contact with a variety of new people. Establishing international friendships was a perceived benefit of study abroad for Murray, Rex, and Dominic. Murray, who studied in France shared, “The thing I cherish the most
about doing the study abroad program was the people that I got to talk to,” Dominic, who
spent his semester in Germany, explained the following about his global friendships:

We made tons of friends to be honest. We're all friends on Facebook and I have a
reason to go to Australia now because our international group in Germany had
like 90 people in it, two from Australia that we got super close with, and they're
like, 'Yeah, whenever you're in Australia, just come!' and we're like, 'Okay, when
you're in Chicago, come!' Definitely connections and networking, that has to be
the greatest benefit.

Rex also told of the diverse friendships he established in Japan:

I had Japanese friends and especially very multi-cultural friends. A good friend
of mine was Australian as well as an Egyptian and then I had some Argentinian
friends. I loved that aspect. Everyone - no matter what political spectrum - we're
not so different. It's incredible how [similar] we are. Every news agency in the
world has told us [the Egyptians] hate us and they don't like our culture, they want
to obliterate us. It's totally not true. This was a big shroud being lifted off my
back.

A changed sense of self. All of the participants commented on how they have
changed as individuals as a result of their study abroad experience. When asked how his
study abroad experience impacted him, Rex shared:

It's completely changed me as a person. I have a new outlook on life because
before, truth be told, I just wanted to get by in life... but now looking at the
world, it's huge. There is so much to see, I'm like, 'I have got to see this!'... I
definitely see this as a pivotal moment in my life... I feel like this completely
changed me as a person. I used to be kind of a Debby Downer and everything, almost like nihilistic to a point. But seeing that there’s a whole new world, it changes you. You just want to see it all.

In response to how his experience changed him, Rex explained:

I feel more motivated. I feel like there’s the bigger world. I’m more curious about things now. I was closed-minded for a couple of things, especially in the art world… but I’m definitely way more open-minded when it comes to that stuff… it changed my work ethic.”

In response to this same question, Murray simply said, “Personal growth, really.”

Dominic made various self-observations, stating, “I think I have become a more well-rounded person… I feel like I have matured way more.” After further reflection Dominic added, “I seem more relaxed and I listen to people instead of jumping in and arguing. It’s sitting back and listening to people, seeing where they are coming from. Gaining a new perspective is what I would say.” Justin also spoke of developing a more relaxed approach:

It has made me more patient… I’m a lot more patient now, a lot more calm. I used to have a short fuse and snap easily, but after [studying abroad] I’m so much more calm now. That definitely helped. When you’re traveling you can’t be freaking out about little things that go wrong. You have to be real calm, patient, and not nervous. It is easy [in the United States] to get wrapped up in all the petty drama that’s going on. When you’re gone and out of school for a semester you see how there is no reason people should be fighting and bickering. Ninety-nine
percent of the stuff isn’t going to matter, so you learn to enjoy yourself more and not be so dramatic.

Marcus also identified a greater sense of independence within himself. “I do think I’m a little more independent because I did this. I come back and I’m like – if something is bothering me, I just move on. Or I’m more able to go out and do things by myself.”

Murray shared a story of how he gained greater insight on his nationality while abroad:

The first weekend I was [in Paris], my U.K. friend asked me if I was proud to be an American, which was the first time anyone has actually legitimately asked me that. I had to stop and sit back and think about it. It’s those things, that I appreciated and helped me grow the most while I was there and really what I miss the most.

For Justin it was also about the professional benefits of a study abroad experience. “Every employer that I’ve talked to says that an internship abroad, especially in London, a big business city, [is marketable] … it definitely provided me with good experience and it looks really good on a resume.”

The experiences these men had provided them with life experiences they could not get by staying at their home institution in the United States. Dominic summarized this personal benefit of study abroad when he said, “It’s just the perfect and cheapest way to do it. When else do you have the opportunity to live in a whole different society for five months for the amount of money that I spent?” For Murray, this life experience was achieved through different ways of approaching viewpoints:
It has made me take a step back from everything. I force myself to try and take a step back and consider things from different angles even more than I did before. I think that being uprooted and stuck somewhere else and forced to do that is a very helpful thing.

Dominic was able to provide a concrete example of how his experience has impacted his daily life back in the United States:

Today in my health communications class the Statue of David came up. In my mind, I’m like, ‘Oh wow, I’ve been there, I’ve seen that, it’s awesome.’ It’s stuff like that when people talk about things and you’ve actually been there and you know what they’re talking about and you can picture it in your head… I think that’s awesome.

Summary

A number of themes surfaced as the five male participants shared of their study abroad decision-making process and the motivating factors behind their decisions. Each participant expressed a distinct acknowledgment of the points in which they became aware of study abroad and when they ultimately committed to go abroad. A variety of academic, personal, and social factors influenced their decisions. Obstacles were present in each student’s pursuit of study abroad, but the participants identified ways in which they overcame each challenge. Lastly, the participants described their perceived benefits from participating in study abroad program.
CHAPTER V

Discussion

The present study was performed to explore the influencing factors that motivate male study abroad participation. This study was guided by five research questions: At what point do college men begin thinking about participating in a study abroad program; who and/or what influences a male student’s decision to study abroad; what obstacles were faced by the male students during their decision-making process; how did the men overcome the presented obstacles; and what are the participants’ greatest perceived benefits of the study abroad experience? This chapter will discuss the significant findings of this study, present conclusions, and offer suggestions for future research on the topic. Recommendations for students, faculty and staff, parents, and university study abroad offices will also be provided in this chapter.

Discussion

Study abroad is an opportunity for students to study and earn academic credit at a foreign institution for any length of time varying from one week to an entire academic year (He & Chen, 2010). This study provides further evidence that the student decision to study abroad is a complex one, as it is influenced by a variety of factors, such as academics, individuals like faculty, family, and friends, the student’s background, awareness, campus support, program fit, and the student’s own personal desire and determination (He & Chen, 2010; Pope et al., 2014; Salisbury et al., 2009; Salisbury et al., 2011; Thomas, 2013). However, the participants identified various benefits to their experience as found in previous studies (Bates, 1997; Latiner Raby et al., 2014; Luo &
Deciding to study abroad. Three of the participants expressed that they had always been aware of the concept of study abroad and began thinking about it before they came to college. It was through study abroad promotion and conversation at campus orientation days that made the students actively aware of the opportunities that their university had to offer. It must be assumed that more students are thinking about studying abroad than is made public or obvious, especially men. Each of the five interviewed individuals made the decision to pursue their interest in study abroad during their sophomore year of college. This provides us with evidence that college men’s freshman year is the vital time to begin conversations about studying abroad to prepare them for committing during their sophomore year.

The participants shared a variety of factors that influenced their study abroad decision. Elements of the program such as academic offerings, location, culture, timing, and cost were prioritized by the participants in their choice. The students were intentional about selecting a program that offered courses that worked towards their major or minor degree. Salisbury, et al (2009) stated that students of certain majors – specifically those in the social sciences – are more likely to study abroad, which was the case for the participants in this study. It was important for the participants of this study to identify a program that would allow them to take the classes they needed to continue to be academically productive and work towards their degree and graduation. They did not want this to halt their pursuit of a degree.
Program cost was also another strong consideration by the students when considering study abroad opportunities. McMurtrie (2009) reported that the inexpensive cost of living in underrepresented countries in study abroad such as those in Asia and Africa compared to those in Europe is making these sites more desirable to students. This was a point posed by Marcus in his interview, who selected an Asian country over one on Europe when he found out it would be cheaper. Prospective study abroad students want to find a way to make their program affordable and thus weigh the program cost and opportunity for scholarships against that of the tuition of their U.S. institution, seeking comparable solutions.

**Framing the decision.** Four of the participants were driven to study abroad by their personal desire and determination. This influencing factor can be framed through the application of Schlossberg’s (1995) theory of transition. A transition, as defined by Schlossberg (1995) is any event or non-event that an individual has perceived to have altered their life in some way. An event could be planned, like a student knowing they wanted to study abroad, or unplanned, like a sudden death of a loved one. Schlossberg identified four coping mechanisms that can be applied to all types of transitions: situation, self, support, and strategies, commonly known as the four S’s. Partaking in a study abroad opportunity was a planned event for each of the participants and they put great thought into each of the four S’s. Determining to study abroad compelled the men to think about the situation, such as where they want to study abroad and how they were going to make it happen.

The students discussed the support they receive from family, faculty, and the study abroad office. The encouragement received from the influential people in the lives
of each student strongly influenced their study abroad decision. The students were supported not only from immediate family members, but also extended family members, cousins, aunts and uncles, and friends. Faculty and staff who shared their personal stories left an impression on these students. Each of these five men demonstrated through their stories that the faculty and staff inspired them to study abroad through their open dialogue and encouragement to pursue their aspirations. It was in the stories that these role models shared that the participants began to see themselves gaining similar experiences. Whether or not these academic mentors knew they had such an influence on students, the participants shared that the conversations and interactions had with faculty in regards to international experiences influenced their decision to study abroad.

In response to the obstacles they faced in committing to study abroad, the students discussed the strategies they used to overcome the challenges of going abroad and ultimately have a successful experience. Not only did the students have the campus Office of Study Abroad as a support system, they strategically worked with the office personnel to get clarification and improve the challenging situations they faced such as arranging finances and program fit. The study abroad office, specifically the Study Abroad Coordinator, also made an impact on the students’ study abroad process, especially in terms of supporting them throughout the logistical pieces of study abroad that also influence student decisions – securing an appropriate program, getting classes approved and transferred for credit, and ensuring they understand the financial component of their program.

The men considered themselves as individuals – who they were, where they were developmentally, and what they valued. The participants were confident enough in
themselves to undergo the decision-making process on their own. Although the men identified a variety of resources for personal support, none of them told their close friends and family about their decision to study abroad until after they had committed. They obtained the support and identified the strategies before they shared their situation with others. Perhaps this sequence of events and the students’ hesitations to disclose their decision was a result of their personal desire and determination to study abroad, which was another influencing factor to their study abroad decision. It is also possible that they did not want to let anyone – including themselves – down if for some reason it ultimately did not work out.

**Understanding the decision-making process.** The student study abroad decision-making process as described by the five participants of this study closely aligns with the college choice theory presented by Hossler and Gallagher (1987). During the predisposition stage, the men began gaining an interest in study abroad as they became more informed and aware of the different opportunities available at their institution. Some entered college with an intent to study abroad, while others did not. However, during predisposition, they started to develop professional and educational goals which included studying abroad. They then entered the second stage of the college choice theory as they intentionally searched for programs that fit their needs. They relied on support from family, friends, mentors, and the study abroad office during this time. Lastly, they chose the specific program that they would attend and embarked on their study abroad journey. The experiences that each man encountered as he navigated the decision-making process followed the college choice theoretical model and ultimately led them through stages one, two, and three, and ultimately to studying abroad.
Obstacles to studying abroad. The participants in this study identified the obstacles they faced in committing to study abroad and selecting a program. A surprising challenge that the men shared in the interviews was that study abroad is not a topic of discussion amongst their peers or role models. Justin said that prior to studying abroad he had never met another male who participated in a study abroad experience. The concept was not present amongst their peers and thus was not talked about. The male participants did not initiate this conversation with their peers, classmates, professors or family prior to fully committing to their program for fear of losing credibility if they disclosed this information to people and then did not follow through on studying abroad. If for some reason the students’ plans to study abroad fell through, they did not want to have to face people and explain why they did not go after publicly professing their decision to study abroad.

Another obstacle faced by the male participants was that of program fit and specifically finding a program that met all of their needs. Since cost, timing, and academic fit were influencing factors to the men’s study abroad decision, their prioritization of these components brought forward various challenges. It was complicated finding a program that offered courses that would be approved to transfer for credit towards their major, and in some cases, there was challenge in meeting the program GPA requirement. In line with staying academically productive during their study abroad experience, the male participants sought to arrange their study abroad program so that it would fit with their academic plan and extracurricular involvement and not delay their expected graduation date. This can be harder for some students, especially those who have specific institutional scholarships or are actively committed to
extracurricular activities on or off campus. It was also expressed that the application process in general was overwhelming and intimidating to students. Students talked specifically about getting assistance from the study abroad office in completing their paperwork and finding the right academic-based program.

There were also unknown factors associated with the study abroad experience that the participating males identified as a challenge. For some, it was their first time traveling outside of the country alone or without a family member. Rex shared that he was getting cold feet and reconsidering his decision as his departure date approached. Along with traveling alone, a few of the students worried about linguistic unknowns. Those planning to study in a county whose primary language was not English expressed their hesitations concerning a language barrier.

Students highly value the support of their friends and family when making a consideration as drastic as participating in a study abroad program. The men in this study all indicated that they waited to tell family and friends until they were confident the trip was happening, but even then they downplayed the fact that they were actually going to do it. When students do not receive the support or encouragement they hope to get from their loved ones, it can be really challenging to continue to pursue such a commitment. Perhaps the participants’ perceived lack of support from family and friends subconsciously triggered a defense mechanism within them that kept them from disclosing their plans. This apprehension could have been an attempt to guard them from having to defend themselves against family and friends who may not have been supportive of their decision. For some prospective study abroad students, it can be hard enough for them to gain the courage to share their interest in an international experience
with their parents, and is almost impossible to continue moving forward with plans if they do not receive the support they need. With that, none of the participants spoke about faculty, advisors, or staff who told them they could not or should not study abroad for any reason. None of the responses at the hands of members from the institution were discouraging, which should give the students more confidence in openly discussing this process with others.

**Overcoming study abroad obstacles.** For each of the obstacles faced during the study abroad decision-making process, the participants acknowledged specific ways in which they overcame the presented obstacles and continued to pursue study abroad. The importance of support has been emphasized, and the value in this continues as one of the most important elements to overcoming study abroad obstacles. Students attributed their ability to study abroad to the support of important individuals in their lives – family, friends, professors, and the university study abroad office. Close relatives were understanding of the students’ decision and even forwardly encouraging them to go. Students received support within the institution as well, from both faculty mentors and members in the Office of Study Abroad. Faculty not only inspired students by sharing their own personal experiences, they talked through the possibilities with them and helped the students to rationalize their decisions. The study abroad staff supported the students from an administrative position, assisting in the completion of paperwork and ironing out the logistics of the study abroad experience, as well as identifying programs for the students that would comfortably fit what they were looking for in a study abroad experience. Because of consistent, positive support as well as affirmation and assistance,
the men were able to successfully transition through the decision to study abroad and ultimately gain this experience (Schlossberg, 1995).

In certain circumstances, the participants spoke of having to persevere through the challenges they faced and embrace the decisions they made, enduring all that came with it. Many of the intimidating unknown factors – language barriers and independent travel – were overcome through personal determination and ownership of their study abroad decision on the students’ part. The dedication to studying abroad also gave the students confidence in confronting those individuals in their lives who had hesitations about study abroad or were not as supportive as others.

A final major way that the men were able to overcome the obstacles they faced was by being as informed as possible about the program and study abroad process in general and sharing this knowledge with those in their lives who had expressed concern in regards to study abroad. Acting on their concerns and gathering information served as a strategy for coping with their transition (Goodman et al., 2006). When concerned about the cost of study abroad, the men found programs that fit within their budget and found means to counteract the cost such as through loan options and scholarships. Being informed also allowed the men a chance to plan ahead. Murray talked about having to plan ahead of time and work bit by bit to overcome some of the more daunting tasks associated with committing to his program.

I’m not that organized of a person, so I was packing 30 minutes before my dad and I left to go to the airport. The first month and a half it hadn’t really sunk in that I was going… [but] as each box got ticked off, I was like, ‘Okay, this is actually happening now.’
Encountering obstacles during the study abroad decision-making process is inevitable. If the student was determined to make the experience happen, they found ways to overcome the challenges they faced. An obstacle is only an obstacle to those who want to go abroad; it is an excuse to stay home for those who do not.

**Benefits of study abroad participation.** There are innumerable benefits to studying abroad as determined by previous research, many of which were further supported by the men in this study (Bates, 1997; Latiner Raby et al., 2014; Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2015; Mohajeri Norris & Gillespie, 2009; Salisbury, 2011; Selingo, 2013; Young et al., 2015). These benefits include broadening global perspective, strengthened American identity, and personal growth such as greater patience, maturity, and independence.

Enhancing international competence and gaining global perspective was one of the greatest benefits identified by the participants of this study. The immersion in a culture different from their own and having the opportunity to interact with individuals with different backgrounds and establish international friendships heightened the students’ interest in and understanding of other cultures. Creating cross-cultural friendships advances the students’ development of mature interpersonal relationships (Chickering and Reisser, 1993).

Mohajeri and colleagues (2009) identified that an international experience would increase students’ professional marketability when they began to pursue jobs after graduation (Mohajeri Norris & Gillespie, 2009). Marcus, Murray, Rex, and Dominic enhanced their foreign language skills by studying in non-English speaking countries. The study abroad experience also strengthened the participants’ identity and made them
more self-aware, as Justin shared he grew more patient during his time in London, Marcus gained independence, and Dominic became more calm and mature. Not only were the participants able to become more self-aware, Rex said that his time abroad was a “pivotal moment” in his life that helped him to find purpose and motivation (Latiner Raby et al., 2014). Through this experience, Rex was developing his purpose, navigating Chickering and Reisser’s sixth vector of identity development (1993). Dolby (2004) demonstrated that an international experience challenges students to acknowledge their national identity and how that fits in a global context. Rex and Murray spoke of a greater awareness of their American identity and how their nationality influenced them and their experiences.

**Recommendations**

**Students.** If a student is even remotely interested in studying abroad, they should do their research to get answers to any questions they have at whatever point they are in the consideration process of this opportunity. Students must discuss the possibilities with their academic instructors and advisors, parents, friends, the campus study abroad office, as well as reach out to study abroad alumni, especially those who studied in regions that the prospective student is interested in. Interested students gravitate towards those who have had experiences similar to that which they are seeking and want to hear firsthand that there is value in study abroad. Study abroad alumni and prospective students need to talk about study abroad. Rather than keep it to themselves until after they have fully committed, prospective students would benefit from being open and curious and reaching out to others. Study abroad alumni must make themselves known and be actively involved in study abroad promotion and recruitment to connect with prospective study
abroad students. It is never too soon to start planning a study abroad experience, and the sooner a student starts planning, the more time and ease they will have in sorting potential obstacles faced with the study abroad process.

**Faculty and Staff.** Faculty and staff who have studied abroad have a significant influence on students' perception of a study abroad experience. These individuals should be encouraged to share their stories and experiences as often as possible and in as many different environments within which they are involved. They must model this behavior for students who have had similar experiences. Students admire the professional mentors they encounter during college, and will be impacted by the conversations they have with these individuals. Students are impressionable, especially during their underclassmen years, so by having conversations with students about studying abroad and sharing their personal experiences, faculty and staff can paint a picture of a relatable experience that inspires students to begin to consider how an international experience would fit in their own lives. Faculty and staff ought to find opportunities to give college men space to discuss study abroad and initiate the dialogue by asking the students questions. This effort encourages students to seek out these experiences. Since college men do not talk about study abroad leading up to their decision, faculty and staff can create the conversation.

Faculty must understand study abroad from an academically enhancing perspective. They need to let students step away from campus to learn, encourage them to engage in cross-cultural opportunities, and educate them on how this experience can benefit their academic performance. By demonstrating their support as well as
understanding and promoting the benefits of study abroad, they can use the authority they have over students in an influential manner (Lewis, 2013).

Student affairs staff and professionals do not have a place in this study, but they should. Staff interact with students on a consistent and personal basis and greatly influence a student's undergraduate career. There is the potential that staff that work closely and regularly with students on campus could dissuade them from studying abroad in an attempt to keep them on campus. Students who are highly engaged are more likely to study abroad, but the staff that supervise them may want them to stay on campus to continue holding their leadership positions.

Parents. Parents have an incredible influence on whether students study abroad. Each participant acknowledged the support of their parents as a positive element that played into their study abroad decision-making process. Parents must be open to the concept of study abroad and engaging in conversations with their students about the opportunities this presents, especially if their child expresses an interest in an international experience. Parents should be aware of the resources available to students and collaborate with them to be informed and offer support. Support happens in different ways.

Office of Study Abroad. Each participant disclosed that the pivotal moment in their study abroad decision-making process was during their sophomore year of college. Thus, the Office of Study Abroad must target freshman students with strong advertisement to make study abroad a tangible option available to these individuals during this transitional time. The conversations should start before the student is even enrolled at the university, which could be done through admissions informational
packets, the institution website, open houses, and orientations. In order to promote examples of international experiences set by faculty and staff, study abroad offices should keep track of faculty and staff who studied abroad and use them in presentations and promotional efforts. The study abroad office must be persistent with their promotion of study abroad and creative in the outlets they use to reach and recruit students.

Because of the influence that parents have on their student’s study abroad decision, professionals in these offices should involve parents more to keep them engaged in the process and ensure that they feel equally as informed and invested as the students. A relationship between the office and parents could be built in a variety of ways. The study abroad office could partner with admissions to send home materials about study abroad with parents and students when they first come into contact with the institution. The office could host various panels and workshops during campus events such as Family Weekend or New Student Orientation. They could also use their website to intentionally communicate with parents through frequently asked questions and parental testimonials made available online. Establishing this type of intentional relationship with parents may lead to more men considering this option.

Students must hear consistent messages about the feasibility and accessibility of study abroad beginning at an early point in their collegiate career – as soon as their first visit to campus. Each aspect of the decision-making process plays an enormous role in influencing students. Professionals, family, and friends alike must support their students during their study abroad decision-making process, even during challenging times that may pose obstacles to the student’s success. The “support” element of Schlossberg’s
transition theory is necessary for them to be wholly involved in study abroad (Goodman et al., 2006).

**Future Research**

This study presents a plethora of opportunities for continued research. One suggestion would be to expand and diversify the study location and participant population. This study was conducted at a mid-sized institution in the Midwestern United States. In order to diversify the results and make them more applicable to other institutions, this study should be replicated at various sized colleges and universities in different regions around the United States. It would be particularly interesting to perform this study at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, tribal colleges, religiously affiliated institutions and small, private colleges that may have a unique study abroad culture. One could also broaden the participant base by interviewing male international students who are studying abroad in the United States and compare and contrast the motivation behind domestic and international study abroad participation. This research could be expanded upon by interviewing male students who created a study abroad program application or pursued study abroad but did ultimately did not participate in the program to explore the factors that prevented them from going abroad. Lastly, a future project could include both male and female participants and compare the influencing factors that affect participation.

**Summary**

This study was conducted in a qualitative manner to examine the motivating factors behind male study abroad participation and the perceived benefits of participating in a study abroad program. The presented research represented the personal experience
of five participants. The results of this study demonstrated that male college students enter the university aware of the concept of study abroad and commit to participating in a study abroad program during their sophomore year. The decision is influenced by a variety of factors: academics; individuals in the students’ lives like family, friends, and faculty mentors on campus; the Office of Study Abroad; and personal desire and determination. The obstacles faced during the study abroad decision-making process include academic and program fit, finances, timing, unknown factors, lack of support, and lack of conversation about study abroad or role models with international experience. The participants overcame these obstacles by becoming informed, finding a program that suited their needs, persevering, and relying on support from family, friends, and the institution. For these men, the obstacles did not prevent them from moving forward in their pursuit of study abroad; they were simply elements to the decision-making process that required additional effort to get through. Adopting a new global perspective, gaining a greater sense of self, increasing awareness of their American nationality, and establishing international friendships were all posed benefits of studying abroad. Institutions must work to inform parents and students alike on the opportunities and lifelong benefits of study abroad as well as acknowledge the common obstacles and present ways for students to easily overcome them.
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Appendix A

Interview Protocol for Study Abroad Participants

1. Tell me about yourself.
   a. What is your major?
      i. Has this changed since you started college? If so, why?
   b. What are you involved in on campus?

2. Tell me about your experience at EIU so far.

3. Do you have siblings?
   i. What is your relationship like with them?

4. What is your relationship like with your parents?

5. How have these relationships changed since you started college?

6. Did your family travel or take vacations growing up?

7. What did you do as a family growing up?

8. Tell me about your friend groups.

9. What is your relationship like with professors/staff/faculty on campus?
   a. Do you have any mentors? Tell me about them.

10. What was your experience with travel prior to coming to college?
    a. Tell me about one of your favorite trips.

11. When did you first hear about study abroad?
    a. What was your initial reaction to this concept?

12. Tell me about your process for selecting where you wanted to study abroad.
    a. Who influenced this? How did they do so?
    b. What challenges did you face in selecting a location?
c. How did you tell family/friends about your decision?

13. Tell me about groups or individuals who influenced your study abroad decision.

14. In what ways were you pressured to go abroad?

15. At what point did you commit to your study abroad program?
   a. Tell me about this process of deciding and committing.
   b. How did you know you were ready to commit?
   c. How did this feel?

16. What obstacles did you face in your pursuit of study abroad?
   a. Did you face any obstacles? Tell me about them.
   b. How did you overcome these challenges?

17. Tell me about a point where you thought you couldn’t study abroad.

18. What are other factors that influenced your study abroad decision?

19. If you could change one thing about your experience, what would it be?
   a. Do you have any regrets about your experience?
   b. If you could do it again, is there anything you would do differently?

20. Has this experience impacted you as you reflect on what you went through?
   a. How did you benefit from studying abroad?
   b. In what ways did studying abroad change you?
   c. What challenged you while you were abroad?
   d. How did you overcome these obstacles?

21. In what ways are you the same person you were before you left?

22. Have family and friends commented on who/how you are since returning?

23. Is there anything else you want me to know about your study abroad experience?