

Why some students study abroad and others stay

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ABSTRACT

In a partial response to the increased emphasis by business schools to integrate multicultural studies into their curriculums, faculty-led study abroad programs have grown in both frequency and duration. The research has shown that study abroad programs do show measurable gains in a student's intellectual development. However, while the number of students participating in study abroad programs is increasing, the majority of the student population will not take advantage of these opportunities. The purpose of this research is to determine some of the factors that influence, both positively and negatively, a student's participation decision. Students at two universities participated in the research.

Keywords: study abroad student attributes; international studies; study abroad; globalization; DISC

INTRODUCTION

In the academic year 2011-2012 a little over 280,000 out of approximately 20,000,000 American college and university students participated in study abroad trips each year (NAFSA, n.d.). On the average, participation in study abroad is increasing at about two percent per year (Department of Education, n.d). The Institute of International Education (IIE) (2014) recently reports that the growth rate has increased to three percent in the most recent year. Table 1 (Appendix) gives the growth rates since 1990 as reported by the Institute of International Education (2014).

While the numbers are increasing, the percentage of students that study abroad in long-term or short-term programs is relatively low. Colleges and universities continue to emphasize the importance of international studies (Relyea, Cocchiara & Studdard, 2008); however, Americans lag in international exposure (Bollag, 2003). The importance of study abroad as a key factor in affecting international understanding has been supported since the early 1930s (Meras, 1932). As noted by Spiering and Erickson, “Students can develop new perspectives on academic subjects and real-world issues, achieve proficiency in a foreign language, experience personal growth, and develop valuable career skills” (2006). Study abroad offers the ability to learn by doing, interact actively through a trial and error approach and deal with lots of information; all factors that have appeal to Millennial students (Williams, 2013).

The decision to study abroad can depend on the country selected. The IIE Open Doors Report (2014) indicated that the United Kingdom, Italy and Spain were host to 32% of American students. Table 2 (Appendix) provides a more comprehensive look at destinations of U. S. study abroad programs.

The report also suggests that 53% of all study abroad destinations are in Europe. The same report indicates that in the 2011-2012 academic year, American students traveling abroad comprised of 60% juniors and seniors, 64% were female and 76% were white. Hispanics and African-Americans accounted for approximately 13% of students studying abroad.

Factors influencing student decisions to study abroad are varied and have not been widely studied in the international business and study abroad literature. The limited research on this topic suggests that a student’s intent to study abroad can be influenced by a number of factors, either real or perceived. Examples of factors influencing a student’s decision regarding participation in study abroad include difficulty of transfer of credits, lack of faculty/campus support, lack of foreign language proficiency, students with certain majors, age of the student, students with disability, and cost (Stroud, 2010). One study of European students suggested that the potential impact on family and personal relationships was a significant component in a student’s intention to study abroad (Souto-Otero, et al, 2013). Future job prospects, family expectations and administrative support are all significant factors in study abroad intentions (Schnusenberg, de Jong, & Goel, 2012).

The research on why students decide not to travel abroad is limited. The same factors that can influence one student to study abroad can influence another student not to study abroad. What causes one potential student to overcome either real or perceived factors related to study abroad and pursue an opportunity to study internationally may cause another potential study abroad student to view the same factors as insurmountable and choose not to participate.

A student’s personality characteristics can have an impact on decisions to study abroad. While the research on personality characteristics as a predictor of a student propensity to study abroad is somewhat limited, one study found that extraversion was a factor in how beneficial

study abroad was as a learning experience Miao & Harris (2012). Bakalis and Joiner (2004) identified students with a high tolerance for ambiguity and a high degree of openness as more likely to participate in study abroad activities while the opposite is true for students that scored low on these characteristics. Another research effort reported that extroverted-task oriented and introverted-relational students preferred study abroad more than introverted-task oriented and extroverted-relational students (Vrba, Mills, Deviney, & Ball, 2011).

The contribution to the literature of this paper is to look at personality and behavior characteristics of students in a selected group and explore how these similarities or differences may have impacted their decisions not to study abroad. The remainder of this study is organized as follows. The following section describes the instrument that was used to measure behavior tendencies of participants. The methodology is presented after that. Then we provide results of the study with related discussion.

MEASUREMENT OF BEHAVIORAL TENDENCIES

The Excellence for Learning – Student Version (DISC) was used to measure each student's behavioral tendencies. This instrument was derived from William Marston and published in *The Emotions of Normal People* (1928). Bill Bonnstetter (Bonnstetter & Suiter, 2007) has completed considerable research and developed the DISC used in this research. The DISC report uses a four quadrant matrix with polar opposites: Task-Relational and Introvert-Extravert. The four quadrants are labeled D – Dominance, I – Influence, S – Steadiness and C – Compliance. The computer generated report categorizes students into 384 different behavioral styles (Bonnstetter & Suiter, 2007).

The four quadrants are defined as follows (Bonnstetter & Suiter, 2007):

Dominance. Dominance style of behavior is direct and decisive. This individual feels that it is important to achieve goals, they do not need to be told what to do, and they set high standards. When projects take too long they grow impatient: they enjoy competition and want to win. They are sometimes blunt and come to the point directly. "D" individuals tend to be direct, controlling, risk-taking, pessimistic, judging, extroverted, change-oriented, and fight-oriented.

Influencing. The Influencing behavior style reflects outgoing, optimistic individuals who love to communicate, and are people persons. These individuals tend to participate in team and group activities; they like the limelight though may not want to lead. "I" individuals prefer to be direct, accepting, risk-taking, optimistic, perceiving, extroverted, change-oriented and flight-oriented.

Steadiness. The Steadiness behavior style shows sympathetic, cooperative behavior. Helping others and fitting in are important to these individuals though they are hesitant to implement change and do not like to be in the limelight. "S" individuals tend to be indirect, accepting, risk-assessing, optimistic, perceiving, introverted, continuity-oriented, and flight-oriented.

Compliance. Compliance behavior style tends to be reliable and trustworthy. These individuals will plan out a strategy considering all the facts and possible malfunctions, and they prefer to work alone. "C" individuals prefer to be indirect, controlling, risk-assessing, pessimistic, judging, introverted, continuity-oriented, and fight-oriented.

The reports students receive contains two graphs indicating his or her natural style and

adapted style. Adapted style reflects how students are responding to his or her environment while the natural style reflects how they respond when the environment is not influencing behavior. It also reflects how they will respond when there is significant stress. As noted in Figure 1 (Appendix), the two graphs are labeled Graph 1 Adaptive and Graph 2 Natural. Also note that at the 50% mark there is a bold line called the Energy Line (Bonnstetter & Suiter, 2007). Students scoring above the Energy Line are considered to be high in that area. For example, refer to Figure 1 (Appendix). This particular student scored an 83 on the S component and 81 on the C component. The other two are below 50 therefore would not be considered as high. The S and C component both have a substantial influence on behavioral tendencies. It is important to note that a person is a combination of all four components. For purposes of this research, only the “high” components were observed since they impact behavior more strongly.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this paper is to report on the descriptive data collected. Future research analysis will consider the statistical significance of study abroad intentions based on behavioral styles. The data collected in this survey involved several universities but the majority was collected from one major university in the southern mid-west of the United States. Students, both graduate and undergraduate, took part in the survey. While mostly business students were chosen, there were some students from other disciplines participating. Qualtrics was used to collect student information about intentions.

The Excellence for Learning – Student Version (DISC) was selected to measure student behavioral tendencies. This instrument is intended to measure the “how” about behavior and does not attempt to measure values or other personality characteristics. For example, it will measure how they communicate, introversion/extroversion, task/relational tendencies, tolerance for risk, level of optimism, behavioral adaptation and other behaviors. The cost of the instruments was provided by a university grant.

Students taking the Excellence for Learning – Student Version (DISC) were provided with a report on his or her behavioral style. This report was used to determine the intensity and influence of the D, I, S and C on behavior. Figure 2: Graph 2 Natural Behavior with Energy Line (Appendix), was contained in the report and is an example of the graph from which data was extracted.

The vertical axes on Figures 1 and 2 (Appendix) - range from 0 to 100. At 50% there is a bold line which is called the Energy Line. The distance above the energy line represents the intensity of the dimension to one’s behavioral style (Bonnstetter, 2006). As mentioned above, the makeup of a person’s behavioral style is a blend of all four dimensions (D, I, S and C). However, the fact that a person is above the energy line for a given dimension means that the dimension has a significant impact on his or her behavioral style.

There were 233 usable surveys extracted from the Qualtrics data reflecting student intentions. This was used to report some of the data. However, when merged with the DISC data, only 191 surveys were usable. This was used to report information about the behavioral tendencies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 3 (Appendix) indicated the gender of those participating in the research. As noted, there was an almost even split between males and females. The research indicated that the percent of female students participating in study abroad programs outnumber male students, 64.8% to 35.2% respectively. (IIE, 2014).

Table 4 (Appendix) reflects responses of students by gender when asked about their willingness to participate in study abroad. A higher percentage of female students responded with a “yes.” Interestingly, male students were more definite in responding with a “no.” This would more closely align with the recent national data on who actually participates in study abroad programs.

As would be expected, the study consisted of mostly younger students below the age of 30 as reflected in Table 5 (Appendix).

When asked about the amount of hours worked, a little over half of the respondents indicated they worked over 20 hours per week. As suggested in the literature review, personal obligations could have an unfavorable impact on any intentions to study abroad. Table 6 (Appendix) reflects the data when comparing the response to this question and their intentions to go on a study abroad program. Reviewing the percentages would suggest that those working over 40 hours per week would factor their work into their intentions to study abroad.

As shown in Table 7 (Appendix), of the 233 respondents, only 37% said they would go on a study abroad program. There was a high percentage of undecided.

When questioned about their apprehensions to participating in a study abroad program, the top three were cost; language differences; and safety/security. Table 8 (Appendix) reflects the complete list.

Students were asked, “Assuming cost was not a limiting factor, in which of the following countries/locations would you be interested in doing a Study Abroad?” They could check all that would apply. The most popular destination was Australia, 78%, while only about 3% actually go there. Students indicated that Europe was another popular destination and this result aligns with the recent national data on destinations. Specifically, England was a popular destination as a student choice. Student data indicated that Brazil aligned with the national data. New Zealand was also a popular student choice. While the cost (Mercer, 2013) and flight time to Australia and New Zealand could be limiting to some students, it is a destination with strong student interest.

To determine the personality components of the respondents the Excellence for Learning – Student Version (DISC) reports were used. There were 191 usable data points. As mentioned, the personality component of individuals scoring above 50% or the Energy Line in any one of the elements (D, I, S, or C) will play a significant role in his or her behavioral tendencies. To determine which behavioral tendencies were suggestive that a student would tend to travel abroad, the DISC data was compared to the question “Would you participate in a Study Abroad Program if the opportunity presented itself.” Most students will have more than one DISC element above the Energy Line. Table 10 (Appendix) gives a summary of how many students had high D, I, S and Cs. There were more students that had high I and S than D and C areas.

When the data is normalized, and the percentage of high D, I, S or Cs that responded to the question as “yes,” “no,” or “maybe” are considered, the results are inconclusive as shown in Table 11 (Appendix). There appears to be a slight preference of Is (46%) interested in study abroad while Cs (21%) are more definite in their “no” response.

The Excellence for Learning – Student Version (DISC) report contains behavioral hierarchy factors in which respondents are rated and ranked according to tendencies. Table 12 (Appendix) contains a list of the behavioral hierarchy attributes. For purposes of discussion a delta of 10 was used to compare respondents that answered the question about participating in a study abroad. Deltas greater than 10 are shaded. As reflected in Table 12 (Appendix), it appears that students indicating they would participate in study abroad as compared to those indicating they would not, like frequent interaction with others, have a preference for less of an organized work space, are less drawn to data and are people oriented. These factors are defined as follows:

Frequent interaction with others. A strong people orientation, versus a task orientation. Dealing with multiple interruptions on a continual basis, always maintaining a friendly interface with others.

Organized workplace. Systems and procedures followed for success. Careful organization of activities, tasks and projects that require accuracy. Record keeping and planning for success.

Analysis of data. Analyzing and challenging details, data and facts prior to decision making and is viewed as an important part of decision making.

Information is maintained accurately for repeated examination as required.

People Oriented. Spending a high percentage of time successfully working with a wide range of people from diverse backgrounds to achieve a “win-win” outcome. Source: Target Training International, Anne Klink (personal communication, November 24, 2009)

According to Bakalis and Joiner (2004), students that participate in study abroad programs tend to have a high degree of openness and a high tolerance for ambiguity. This research provides some support for their conclusions. As shown in Table 12 (Appendix), students who answered “yes” to participating in study abroad rated organized workplace and analysis of data lower than those answering “no.” This would suggest that these students have a higher tolerance for ambiguity. Additionally, students who answered “yes,” appear to have a stronger preference for frequent interaction with others and are people oriented which suggest they have a higher degree of openness. Perhaps those answering “no” need more detail and assurance to lessen the ambiguity of study abroad.

CONCLUSION

Over 200,000 more students participated in study abroad programs in 2012 than in 1989, and yet this continues to represent a relatively small number of the overall 20,000,000 American college and university students who are enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs. There is a wealth of information describing validated benefits for American students who study abroad. These benefits range from positive career impact upon graduation to benefits in the classroom based on learning that took place during the study abroad program to increased maturity that can result due to study abroad experiences. Yet there are barriers that would appear to be preventing students from electing to participate in study abroad opportunities. These can vary from costs for the program, possible lack of family support, difficulty in transferring courses back to a curriculum that has little room for variation in courses, and personal relationships.

There is some evidence from the current study that students who elected to study abroad tended to be stronger in people orientations, have a higher tolerance for ambiguity, a stronger

preference for frequent interaction with others and a higher degree of openness. It is likely that the current approaches to study abroad appeal to students with these characteristics and meet needs for study abroad opportunities.

If we are to better meet the needs of all students in the area of study abroad, it may be necessary to re-examine the model being used for study abroad. There was a time when study abroad represented a full year of studying abroad in another country and was only available to the wealthier students. As globalization has become more widespread and the numbers of students pursuing degrees in higher education has increased, the concept of a year for study abroad has evolved through several stages: a semester, a summer or even one summer session to the popular 10 – 14 day study abroad programs.

One question that might need to be considered is how Colleges and Universities can find ways to make short term study abroad participation more widespread regardless of students' behavior preferences. Colleges and Universities are aware of the potential value to all students of participating in study abroad opportunities. Businesses are aware of the increasing impact of globalization in their customer base and their need for employees who are comfortable interacting with employees from varied backgrounds. Perhaps there could be opportunities for partnerships between businesses and universities to help with matching funds to encourage growth in participation of a broader group of students in short term study abroad programs, especially when the areas being visited were related to areas where the companies have an established base of clients. It appears unlikely that globalization will decline in the near future so further research to find ways to increase participation of a broader base of students in study abroad is needed.

FURTHER RESEARCH

As Colleges and Universities look for ways to increase student participation in study abroad programs, it is as important to know why students currently choose not to participate in study abroad programs as it is to know why students do make the choice to participate. Becoming aware of barriers, whether perceived or real, is a step toward learning how to help students eliminate those barriers and help increasing numbers of students realize that the benefits of study abroad opportunities are within their reach.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, one possibility could be as simple as providing information in a more detailed format that would appeal to students who are detail oriented more than people oriented. Finding a way to help students plan in advance to be prepared for the costs of a study abroad program could help with one of the major concerns identified by a number of potential study abroad students. If students are contacted as freshmen and educated about the value and potential benefits of study abroad opportunities and educated about the options that could be available at the end of their junior year, maybe they could be encouraged to start saving with that goal in mind. In some Colleges, there are planned rotations for study abroad programs where students could know well in advance what would be available and be encouraged to plan early to make that part of their University experience.

Learning more about the students who choose not to study abroad and those who do choose to study abroad and why they make that decision can be the basis for learning how to make study abroad fit the needs and goals of more students. Further research into this area is certainly a real need for today's graduates and those who are just beginning their journey into higher education.

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APPENDICES

Table 1 U. S. Students Studying Abroad for Academic Credit						
Year	89-90	95-96	99-00	03-04	07-08	11-12
Students Studying Abroad	71K	89K	144K	191K	262K	283K

"Institute of International Education. (2013).Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange. Retrieved from <http://www.iie.org/opendoors>"

Table 2 Leading Destinations of U. S. Study Abroad Students	
Country	Percentage
United Kingdom	12%
Italy	11%
Spain	9%
France	6%
China	5%
Australia	3%
Ireland	3%
Germany	3%
Costa Rica	3%
Japan	2%
Other	43%

"Institute of International Education. (2013).Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange. Retrieved from <http://www.iie.org/opendoors>"

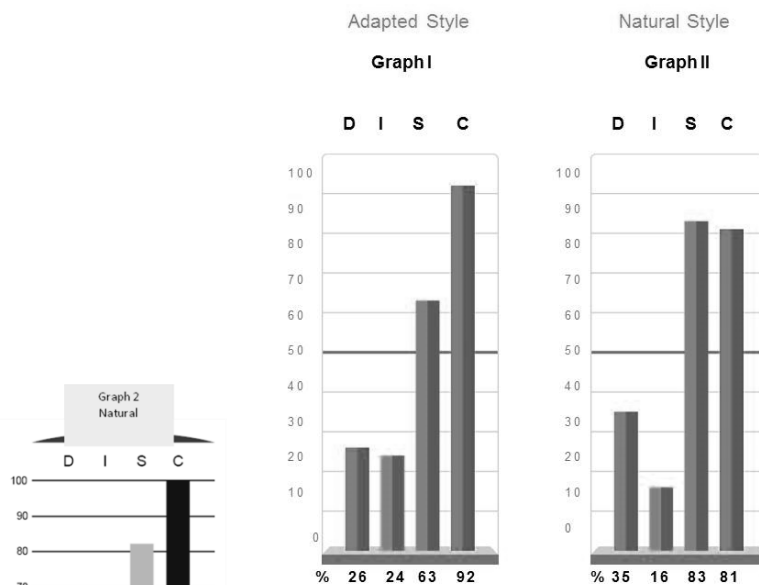


Figure 1: Adapted and Natural Style Graphs

Figure 2: Graph Natural Behavior with Energy Line

Table 3: Gender

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Male	116	50%
2	Female	117	50%
	Total	233	100%

Table 4 – Participation by gender

		Gender		
		Male	Female	Total
Would you participate in a Study Abroad Program if the opportunity presented itself?	Yes	36 41.9%	50 58.1%	86 100%
	No	32 74.4%	11 25.6%	43 100%
	Maybe	48 46.1%	56 53.9%	104 100%
	Total	116	117	233

Table 5 Respondents Age

#	Answer	Response	%
1	22 or younger	114	49%
2	23-29	70	30%
3	30-39	24	10%
4	40-49	12	5%
5	50-59	9	4%
6	60 or older	4	2%
	Total	233	100%

Table 6 Participation by Employment

		Would you participate in a Study Abroad Program if the opportunity presented itself?			
		Yes	No	Maybe	Total
In a typical week,	20 or less	30	19	53	102

how many hours do you work?		29.41%	18.63%	51.96%	
	21 to 30	24 48%	9 18%	17 34%	50
	31 to 40	21 43.75%	5 10.42%	22 45.83%	48
	More than 40	11 33.33%	10 30.3%	12 36.36%	33
	Total	86	43	104	233

Table 7 Study Abroad Participation

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		86	37%
2	No		43	18%
3	Maybe		104	45%
	Total		233	100%

Table 8 Study Abroad Concerns

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Cost of the trip		188	81%
2	Distance from home		49	21%
3	Safety/Security		101	43%
4	Customs of the host country		48	21%
5	Traveling with people I don't know		43	18%
6	Flying on an airplane		23	10%
7	Language differences		114	49%
8	Other (please specify)		17	7%

Table 9 Respondent Favored Destination

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Canada	81	35%
2	Brazil	112	48%
3	China	52	22%
4	Hong Kong	34	15%
5	Europe	126	54%
6	Japan	50	21%
7	Saudi Arabia	18	8%
8	Egypt	59	25%
9	Mexico	27	12%
10	Central America	49	21%
11	Australia	181	78%
12	South Africa	66	28%
13	England	135	58%
14	India	30	13%
15	South Korea	17	7%
16	New Zealand	98	42%
17	Russia	41	18%
18	Vietnam	13	6%
19	Scandinavian Countries	34	15%
20	Other	17	7%

Table 10 – Percentage of Students With High DISC Elements (D, I, S, and/or C > 50%)

Excellence for Learning (DISC) Element	Number of Students	Percentage of All Students (N=191)
D	71	37.2%
I	129	67.5%
S	151	79.1%
C	92	48.2%

Table 11 – Percentage of High D, I, S and C Students Responding Participating in Study Abroad

Excellence for Learning (DISC) Element	Students Responding to Question		
	Yes	No	Maybe
D	27 (38%)	11 (15%)	33 (46%)
I	59 (46%)	13 (10%)	57 (44%)
S	60 (40%)	24 (16%)	67 (44%)
C	32 (35%)	19 (21%)	41 (45%)

Table 12 – Behavioral Hierarchy Responses Compared to Intent to Participate in Study Abroad

Behavior	Yes	No	Maybe
Urgency	42.3	43.0	44.7
Frequent interaction with others	66.4	51.1	62.3
Organized workplace	44.8	62.4	50.5
Analysis of data	46.5	62.6	51.1
Competitiveness	50.0	49.3	52.6
Versatility	54.2	46.3	53.0
People oriented	72.4	61.1	69.2
Frequent change	54.5	46.5	52.8
Customer relations	70.8	69.2	71.5

