

STUDENTS' SATISFACTION WITH A STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

As globalization has altered the way the world works, cross-cultural competence has become a vital skill that employers look for in the workplace. In order to further develop students' intercultural competencies, and meet the demands of the workplace, most business schools offer study abroad opportunities. These programs have consistently gained popularity over the years as business schools have strived to internationalize their curricula. In order to encourage more students to engage in study abroad programs it is important to assess the efficacy of these programs, as well as participants' satisfaction with the experience. The purpose of this exploratory study, accordingly, was to examine students' motivations for participating in a faculty-led study abroad program to Peru and their subsequent perceptions, personal development, and satisfaction with the program. This study utilized a qualitative approach to uncover key constructs and provide rich insights. Consistent with the confirmation-disconfirmation paradigm, this study examined both pre-program expectations and post-program outcomes. In-depth interviews revealed a high degree of personal and professional development, i.e., that post-program students were more interculturally proficient and global minded, and high levels of satisfaction and delight.

INTRODUCTION

As globalization has altered the way the world works, cross-cultural competence has become a vital skill that employers look for in the workplace (Loh, Steagall, Gallo, and Michelman 2011). Given the interconnectedness of people and businesses across the world it is vital that students enter the workforce with a global mindset, as employers are increasingly emphasizing the ability to work outside one's comfort zone and communicate effectively in intercultural situations (Trooboff, Vande Berg, and

Rayman 2008). To better ensure this vital skillset, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) requires business schools to "foster sensitivity toward and greater understanding of cultural differences and global perspectives" (AACSB, 2017, p. 7). There has also been growing recognition among policy makers that more students need to study abroad to be prepared for leadership roles in the global economy (Freidheim 2012). As a result, the U.S. Congress established the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Commission in 2005 (Durbin 2006)

with a goal to increase opportunities for study abroad to foster national security, economic competitiveness, and leadership on a global basis (Lincoln Commission 2005). During the 2018-2019 academic year 347,099 students participated in study abroad programs (NAFSA 2019).

Study abroad is not a new concept. Indeed, undergraduate programs began incorporating study abroad programs for credit in the 1920's (Hoffa 2007). In order to further develop students' cross-cultural competencies, and meet the demands of the workplace, most business schools offer study abroad opportunities. These programs have consistently gained popularity over the years as business schools have strived to internationalize their curricula (Shooshtari and Manuel 2014). Studies show that participation in study abroad programs helps to shape students into more globally minded individuals (Clarke, Flaherty, Wright, and McMillen 2009; Black and Duhon 2006; Wright and Clarke 2010; Passarelli and Kolb 2012) and to be more active global citizens (Tarrant, Rubin, and Stoner 2014). Multiple studies have found that study abroad programs enhance students' intercultural sensitivity and proficiency (Gullekson, Tucker, Coombs, and Wright 2011; Kehl and Morris 2007; Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, and Paige 2009; Loh et al. 2011; Nguyen 2012; Williams 2005; Wright and Clarke 2010), lead to greater appreciation of and openness to diversity (Wortman 2002; Clarke et al. 2009; Ismail, Morgan, and Hayes 2006), cross-cultural awareness (Black and Duhon 2006), and global competencies (Stebleton, Soria, and Cherney 2013; Petrie-Wyman, Murell, and Schultz 2020). Importantly, they have also been shown to result in greater career preparedness (Preston 2012; Heffron and Maresco 2014) and self-confidence (Black and Duhon 2006; Clarke et al. 2009; Nguyen 2012), an expanded network of relationships (Passarelli and Kolb 2012), and

an enhanced résumé (Toncar and Cudmore 2000). These benefits are especially notable, as a study by Giolando (2016) found that many employers prefer to hire students with study abroad experience. With the latter in mind, it is not surprising that 80% of the students who participated in a study program cited this experience during job interviews (Orahood, Kruze, and Pearson 2004).

In order to encourage more business students to engage in study abroad programs it is important to assess the efficacy of these programs, and participants' satisfaction with the experience. The purpose of this exploratory study, accordingly, was to examine students' motivations for participating in a 10-day, faculty-led study abroad program to Peru; and their subsequent perceptions, personal development, and satisfaction with the program. Understanding what contributes to a successful study abroad program from a student perspective can guide faculty and administration as they develop new programs and market these to students. Consistent with the confirmation-disconfirmation paradigm (Oliver 1980; Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1985), this study examined both pre-program expectations and post-program outcomes to better understand participants' satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with the study abroad program (Churchill and Surprenant 1982).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Key outcomes of the study abroad experience center around constructs such as intercultural proficiency and global mindedness. Intercultural proficiency has been broadly defined as "the knowledge, skills, and attitudes/beliefs that enable people to work well with, respond effectively to, and be supportive of people in cross-cultural settings (Clarke, et al. 2009, p. 174). As such, it is a multidimensional construct, encompassing global awareness, openness to diverse people, adeptness at intercultural

communication, and intercultural sensitivity. Clarke et al. (2009) state that a globally minded individual will value viewpoints that differ from their own ethnic, national, or religious perspectives. Intercultural communication is composed of those skills, such as empathy and adaptability, that enable one to engage effectively with others. Openness to diversity refers to the ability to embrace people from every economic status, ethnicity, religion, culture, sexual orientation, gender, age, disability, or social background. Finally, intercultural sensitivity is the degree to which an individual recognizes and acknowledges cultural differences and perspectives of people from other cultures (Clarke et al. 2009; Straffon 2003).

A similar construct is global mindedness, which Hett (1993, p. 143) defines as “a worldview in which one sees oneself as connected to the world community and feels a sense of responsibility to its members and reflects this commitment through demonstrated attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors.” Dimensions of global mindedness include responsibility, cultural pluralism, efficacy, global centrism, and interconnectedness. Hett (1993, p. 143) provides details for these five dimensions and describes responsibility as a deep personal concern for people in all parts of the world, and a desire to try and improve conditions in some way. Cultural pluralism is an appreciation of all cultures in the world and a belief that each has something of value to offer. Efficacy is a belief that an individual's actions can make a difference, while global centrism reflects a willingness to make judgements based on global, not ethnocentric, standards. Finally, interconnectedness is an awareness and appreciation of the interrelatedness of all peoples and nations around the world, and a sense of global belonging (See Hett 1993 for review).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This qualitative study was designed to examine students' pre-program expectations and motivations for participating in a faculty-led study abroad program; along with their post-trip perceptions, cultural development, satisfaction and delight. In doing so, open-ended questions were designed to tap into the various dimensions of intercultural proficiency and global mindedness. Research questions, in general, were as follows:

- 1) What were students' motivations for participating in the study abroad program?
- 2) What personal goals did students hope to achieve from study abroad participation?
- 3) What were students' professional goals from study abroad participation?
- 4) How did the program affect their understanding of global mindedness?
- 5) How has the study abroad program influenced their beliefs and values?
- 6) How has the study abroad program influenced their desire to work with culturally diverse populations?
- 7) What was their overall impression and satisfaction with study abroad participation?

METHODS

This study utilized a qualitative approach to assess students' perceptions and experiences regarding a 10-day, faculty-led study abroad program to Peru. Qualitative studies can provide rich insights and in-depth understanding of subjects' motivations, beliefs, values, and experiences (Creswell 2007). Previous researchers, accordingly, have recommended using qualitative methods to better understand study abroad participants' experiences (Stebleton, Soria, and Cherney, 2013). To the authors' knowledge, qualitative studies of study abroad programs in business are limited (Paul and Mukhopadhyay 2013; Wright and Larsen

2012). Structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted with each participant pre-departure and post-program. The interviews were conducted individually, audio recorded, and transcribed. A total of 16 participants were included in the study: 10 females and 6 males. Students, for the most part, were junior and senior business majors. The emphasis of the study abroad program was to provide business and cultural experiences to participants. During the 10-day program, students visited several local companies (e.g., an advertising agency, a manufacturer and distributor of personal care items, a digital marketing company, a manufacturer of kitchen cookware, etc.) attended lectures by local faculty, and participated in a variety of cultural activities (e.g., visiting local markets, festivals, and banquets) and tours (e.g., to various museums and to Machu Picchu).

PROCEDURE

The data was analyzed via standard qualitative procedures. Two researchers analyzed the data, using a three-phase approach. In the first phase, the researchers independently read the transcribed interviews in entirety several times. This helped to get a sense of the data before breaking it into codes and categories. The data were then reviewed and analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

In the second phase, the researchers coded the data into appropriate clusters to categorize, defined what the data represents (Creswell 2014) and identified themes (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

TABLE 1
Pre-Program Motivations for Participation in Study Abroad

- What really intrigued me was the program as a whole, being a business program. I am really interested in kind of the international business aspect. I didn't necessarily want that as a major because I didn't see me wanting a job in it later on but I really appreciate other people's outlooks on things, so it's really interesting to find out, especially other countries, how they do things, how they work with each other. So, for me it was broadening my knowledge. I know how the business world works sort of here in America, so kind of just broadening that and understanding other countries and their cultural viewpoints and such like that.
- I can figure out how their cultures work like, how the things, like how other people are because I feel like I have such like a one-minded attitude here. So, I definitely just want to see how other places are abroad, specially the business aspect, I think that's going to be very interesting, to learn some new things about myself through other people's eyes.
- Because I always wanted to study abroad in my college experience but I did not want to go a whole semester and summer... ten days were actually the perfect amount, I get to study abroad, I get to make money in summer and I don't get to miss the whole semester of college.
- I definitely expect to see a lot of new culture and things I haven't witnesses before and I am very intrigued to see what everything is like, especially around businesses like how that is different from businesses here and how they run things and everything.
- I am just really interested to see the world, as I mentioned, I spoke to my friend about her experiences in Peru and I think it's a fascinating place.

In the third phase, the researchers collaboratively compared and discussed the emerging themes until a consensus was reached.

ANALYSES

Motivations for Participation

Participants stated a variety of motivations for their interest in the study abroad program prior to departure. As can be seen in Table 1, themes included experiencing first time international travel, exposure to new cultures, gaining business experience and knowledge, location of the program, and length of the program. Further analyses revealed that these motivations pertain primarily to

interconnectedness (part of global mindedness) and openness to diverse people (intercultural proficiency).

Personal Goals and Development

Prior to departure, participants were asked about their personal goals and objectives. Afterwards, they were asked to comment on their personal development. Pre-program, the following themes surfaced: gaining new knowledge (about the culture, norms, business practices), new experiences, and practicing the Spanish language; which in turn relate to global awareness and interconnectedness. (See Table 2A for excerpts).

TABLE 2A
Pre-Program Personal Goals

- Personally, it will give me a lot of different experiences I have never had before.
- I just want to try all of the dishes. I already get a feel for all of their food and their ways of living so that's kind of like one thing that I really want to experience.
- Really just so learn more about their culture and what I think is one of the biggest ones to take something out of it and that it's not just a trip but like it's like a learning experience and everyone I've talked to who studied abroad has said it's like a life changing experience as a whole.
- I guess the personal goal is to learn something about myself, learn something about other people and the culture. I just want to be able to do something that I've never done before. So then that way I'm not afraid to do it in the future. So by going to another country now you know like with people that I've known with the school instead of by myself, I'd be a lot more lenient to do it by myself at a later date... I feel like once I take that first initial step, I won't be afraid to keep going.
- I am really just looking to learn kind of more about myself and what I really like and maybe how things outside of where I live or outside of where I work really are and get a firsthand experience on it.
- I kind of just think that everyone says when they go abroad that they kind of like come back a different person and their views are a lot more worldly and I kind of just hope to have a better understanding of the world afterwards.
- I want to learn how to speak more Spanish, get more into the language and if I could learn how to cook a few dishes, that would be great.
- I think it is just going to help me overall develop as a better person. I always hear of multiple people when they come back to say like how it like affected their life completely.

Post program, themes focused on being more accepting of people with differences, being more open to new things, having learned more about themselves, and being happier and more appreciative. (See Table 2B). Overall, these themes reflect cultural proficiency dimensions of global awareness,

openness to diverse people, intercultural sensitivity, and the cultural pluralism aspect of global mindedness. Importantly, the comments clearly indicate that students were more culturally aware and globally competent post-program.

TABLE 2B
Post-Program Personal Development

- It really opened my eyes to new cultures and a new experience. I thought I had it all figured out because I've travelled before and in reality I couldn't have expected that in the least so it really make me want to go out and learn about other cultures and more about other countries and kind of continue to grow as a person.
- Knowing all these things kind of expand your mind, it keeps you growing as a person and intellectually.
- More respect for other cultures I would say. To understand that everyone is made differently and have different standards and ways of living.
- I found out a lot more things about myself. I now am more aware of things and open to things so it definitely gave me a new perspective on doing things.
- It made me a lot more accepting to people doing things that might not be my way. The world isn't black or white, there are a lot more shades of grey that we don't understand, doesn't necessarily mean it's wrong or right, it is just different.
- I feel like whenever people travel and they come back, you are just happier. I did this and I feel good about it so it just made me happier to just go out and do that...
- I think it changed me a lot... it was definitely different in a good way for sure. I think I would like to keep travelling.
- I haven't travelled much and I have always been shy so like being in a completely different place and different people I had to open up more, branch out... In my own little shell, it helped me open up, I think it helped me, even in classes now I can sit down and have a conversation and make the friends faster.

Professional Goals and Development

Participants were asked about their professional goals prior to the program and about their professional development post-program. Pre-program, the following themes emerged: gaining knowledge about international business, developing better communication skills, becoming more marketable, experiencing an international workplace and gaining potential networking opportunities. In context, these themes reflect adeptness at intercultural communication and responsibility. (See Table 3A).

Post-program students were asked about their professional development. Emerging themes indicated a greater understanding of international business and the impact of culture on business practices, enhanced interpersonal communication skills, and a desire to use what they have learned in the future workplace; which, in turn, are reflective of cultural pluralism and efficacy. (See Table 3B). Overall, comments indicated significant professional development among participants.

TABLE 3A
Pre-Program Professional Goals

- Some of the goals, I like to learn about how they do business or ... how the etiquette is like, I know it's different than the United States...
- I think it's critical to understand how other countries operate in a business realm because our world is so diverse and there are so many different cultures ...so I think it's great to have a broad knowledge of how to interact with different types of people in order to help yourself through the business but also help them feel comfortable working with you.
- Professional goals, I would hope that companies and employers would view my resume or would see something that I've had experience with business in other countries and that will hopefully help my resume.
- I am actually really intrigued about the business world of Peru, I think that would overall give me a perspective of the business world in general.
- I really just I'm excited to hear about the business, like the business culture abroad because I know it's different everywhere. There are certain ways you greet people in different countries that are kind of different than here... interested to learn so that I can grow professionally.
- Big part for me is kind of seeing how people actually work in other parts of the world... but I am more interested in seeing how working conditions and working expectations and professionalism is perceived different in other parts of the world.
- I think professionally it's going to help me in the workplace by kind of understanding other people's point of views especially...
- Learning how other countries do business I think is very beneficial, can overall differentiate myself from my peers.
- To learn about other countries, maybe work on communication skills and more to how to work with other people that don't come from the same cultural background or even use the same languages as you.
- I definitely think it would look good really professional on an application for a job because I want to apply for international jobs, I feel like this would definitely give me a competitive edge.

TABLE 3B
Post-Program Professional Development

- Professionally I think the business meetings were well worth the trip, it was well worth being there... it taught me a lot of lessons along the way. I was very fortunate to have that.
- I learned a lot! I learned that they are very different in their business style ...
- I really liked it because of the different businesses we went to and I thought they were really different from each other, I feel like I learned a lot.
- Academically, I learned how business can be improved, especially when it came to marketing... I learned how to negotiate and in business that's very important.
- It was interesting going to different Peruvian businesses and seeing how different their culture is versus the fast paced American culture that we are used to and being able to talk to people over there and being able to still have communication, it was really interesting to see how different these people live.
- It helped me grow a lot professionally. It gave us a chance to see how businesses in international country work so it helped me grow more professionally and to have a wider knowledge base.
- They (*referring to Peruvian business people*) kind of start of getting to know people and gaining their trust and then going into business with them, so for me, that was really cool, and an inspiring way of doing business so I would really love to kind of apply later on when I'm working in the future, with all the trust in people and understand the way they like to do business and then kind of build on to that, as we work together.
- Learning that being open minded is important... just be open minded even though it sounds cliché but literally nothing was the same, even walking around I was learning from that...
- More than anything it opened up my mind even more to see people doing different things than you expect. In the business world, it is very valuable knowing that and it might not even be outside the country, it may be the different parts of the country that people are maybe doing business in different ways than we expect them to just because we live close to the city and this is what we expect them to know.

Perspectives on Global Mindedness

Participants were asked about their understanding of “global mindedness” both pre- and post-program. Prior to the program, students’ comments reflected a broad, though not deep, understanding of global mindedness. Emerging themes pertained to global awareness and openness to diverse people, cultures and their norms, an acknowledgement of different viewpoints, and being aware of what is socially acceptable and not socially respectable. See (Table 4A).

Post-program comments seem to indicate a deeper and more meaningful understanding

of global awareness. Participants’ comments were more focused on the acceptance of cultural differences and being more open to different thoughts, norms, and cultures. Themes include being more globally aware and open minded, a willingness to challenge oneself, being more accepting and less judgmental, and greater cultural knowledge. (See Table 4B). Importantly, these comments indicate a more genuine appreciation of cultural pluralism and efficacy, greater intercultural sensitivity, and more openness to diverse people.

TABLE 4A
Pre-Program Understanding of Global Mindedness

- I feel like global mindedness would mean having multiple views and being able to put yourself in somebody else's shoes to see how another person feels and how they experience life.
- I think that's just like being open to other cultures, ... understand that everything is run differently at other places. So I think it's really just like being, ... accepting that people live differently.
- Just understanding how although we're all different, we're still all the same.
- Well cultured, that is what I would kind of say, just having the knowledge of different countries and being aware and being open-minded to it.
- Being aware of your surroundings and just understanding that people think and do things in different ways and more than anything just being aware that your way of doing is not right or wrong but partially your cultural determines the way you act and I think we all have social limitations on things that are allowed and things that aren't normal but in a different place with different people, some of those things change.
- It is about respect for other people's cultures.
- Global mindedness means that you are aware and incline to know more. You don't necessarily know the politics or economics, you just need to be aware that there are other cultures out there and you are not the center of the universe so just basically being aware, being mindful of other cultures and respecting that.

Table 4B
Post-Program Understanding of Global Mindedness

- ... think it's very important to keep your mind open to other cultures and other ways they do business and their expectations and their traditions, in order to appreciate kind of what they do and how they live... Being mindful of that not everyone does things the way you do or they don't have the same tradition as you do, so understanding where they come from will really help you when you're interacting with them. Being mindful that not everyone shares the same beliefs and tradition and culture.
- I would say before it probably meant more general, but now it's different because when you're actually there and you realize what's going on and what's wrong and what's different in every single country around the world because no country is the same. Everybody has different cultural expectations.
- Overall, being exposed to different cultures out there that do things differently is okay and you just have to understand and respect that so just being mindful of differences in your day to day life.
- Being aware and being responsible to know that there are people of different cultures, different backgrounds and being open to connecting and accepting to everyone no matter what.
- Basically, understanding and learning other people's perspective...
- Just been able to accept and being open to learn, really don't hinge yourself based on people's culture, ethnicity, backgrounds, being really willing to challenge yourself to learn and just being aware of everything that is going on at the international level.

Impact on Personal Beliefs and Values

Shortly after returning from the program, participants were also asked how the study abroad experience impacted their personal beliefs and values. Emergent themes include: inspired to travel more, gratefulness, appreciation of different thoughts and values, and greater realization of economical differences. (See Table 5). Although they were “in country” for only a short time, students came away with a greater

understanding the influence of cultural values and norms on the way that people live and work. Many of the participants also indicated they were humbled and were more appreciative of what they have. Overall, these themes relate to cultural pluralism, interconnectedness, intercultural sensitivity, and indicate enhanced levels of global mindedness and intercultural proficiency.

Table 5
Post-Program Personal Beliefs

- But the one thing that I was really impacted by was how kind and caring and generous the Peruvians were toward us... I was greatly impacted by their culture and it was a great experience to understand better their history.
- I would say it absolutely did. You start to appreciate the things a lot more... but for beliefs wise it kind of opened my mind up to tons of things like culture.
- It definitely made me want to travel more.
- Perspective, you need to walk a mile two miles in their shoes to really understand where they are coming from, you can't just really assume or make stereotypes. I really learned perspective, I think it is really important to take a step back and take a look at somebody else's point of view.
- It makes you appreciate that where we are from is you know we are definitely very lucky. I definitely want to make it my main goal to explore the world more. Peru was just the beginning. My priorities haven't changed but I have made it that my priority to do.
- More than anything it made me want to travel more and see what other people are doing around the world, it was definitely really interesting to see something that we are not used to or something that we don't see every day. I definitely knew I wanted to travel but I didn't have the time or made the time to do anything to travel. Especially now I really really want to travel and set a goal to travel, the trip to Peru made me realize that it is possible to do it now.
- I would say I feel very blessed just being able to go there is a huge thing but seeing how they live compared to how I live was like a big thing and how much our money is worth there like economical differences are big.
- It just made me more grateful I can say, the things we have in America... have made me more grateful to the opportunities and things that we have in America that other countries don't. And kind of seeing their environment made me grateful to the things we have and where we live and we are blessed with.

Working with Culturally Diverse Population

In order to better detect any changes in students' viewpoints, they were also asked whether the study abroad participation had any impact on their desire to work with culturally diverse population. Themes that

emerged include: desire for more diversity at the workplace, recognition of opportunity for work internationally, and appreciation of the Peruvian work culture; which in turn are reflective of an openness to diverse people and greater adeptness at intercultural communication. (See Table 6).

Table 6
Post-Program Desire to Work with a Culturally Diverse Population

- It definitely influences me to want to travel to many places and work with other cultures so I think this experience made me want to do more.
- I think I kind of always wanted to work international, I am not sure if want to live overseas but like I think this experience made it more obvious...
- It made me want to do that much more, honestly, it made me not settle for a job that doesn't include domestic as well as international travel. I want to look for jobs that are more internationally inclined, this made me realize that there are so many opportunities and I am looking at it from one perspective, this experience made me realize I want to do more with international travel and business as well.
- It made me want to travel more and learn more about different cultures and different people because experience was just great...
- I definitely am more open to it now...
- I would love to ... I don't really know how easy it would be, but from seeing how the Peruvians work with us, I feel like it would be really easy in the future to maybe accept a job.
- I definitely want to do that eventually. I think it presents a new challenge definitely because you need to adapt to them but a lot of large opportunities especially going forward to future because a lot of US companies are obviously looking at international expanding.
- Definitely made me more open to trying new things, I think something like this may come up in the future with work or something so I will be more looking forward to it rather than being worried about it.

Overall Impressions and Satisfaction with the Study Abroad Program

Participants were also asked to describe their overall impressions of, and satisfaction with, the experience. Students' comments clearly indicate confirmation of expectations, and a

high level of satisfaction. Moreover, many of the comments go beyond satisfaction and indicate delight (Oliver, Rust, and Varkie 1997). Comments clearly indicate a high degree of personal and professional development, and that post-program students were more interculturally proficient.

Table 7
Post-Program Impressions and Satisfaction

- That was incredible for me and something that I would want to do again!
- It was life changing and but it was probably one of the most growing experiences for me, personal and business growth was huge...
- I would say it definitely outperformed my expectation. It was set up really well. It opened up my eyes.
- I think it is the best experience I have had ever since I have been to [the University]. Amazing! I think everybody should study abroad I think it was great and it was definitely worth the money, it was definitely worth the time, it was definitely worth all of that because what you get back from it.”
- It was just a great experience. Amazing, just one word, amazing. It was a great program. Overall, it was an amazing experience and honestly, I would love to go back if I ever have the opportunity to go back, in a heartbeat I would.
- My experience was incredible. The great part was that we did so much and ... it was really amazing.
- I think everything looked up to my expectation and more. It definitely was a great experience. It definitely was an eye opening experience.
- It was great. It opened my eyes a lot of how the world is I guess. I learned a lot and also learned how to feel comfortable when no one speaks your language so that was interesting. Overall, it was a great experience!
- I think it was definitely a really really good experience. I think the program was great! It was definitely a great experience, worthwhile.
- That was very unique and then I think I learned and grew the most from really experiencing such a vast amount of experience in a short amount of time.
- It was eye opening to see so many different things within such a short amount of time and really opening up the perspective how lucky we are...
- Well, first of all, I would say, it was very eye opening for me because I've never been outside the country.
- It was really interesting since I've never been out of the country before, getting to experience and getting to figure out customs...

DISCUSSION

Today's workplace is globally connected and interdependent. Companies constantly interact with customers, suppliers, employees, and intermediaries from around the world. In today's economy, companies are very keen to hire employees who are not only talented at their profession, but also who have intercultural skills, with an ability to understand different cultural contexts, and cultural sensitivity (British Council 2013). As a result, academic institutions have been integrating various forms of international experiences within their curricula – including study abroad programs – to better prepare students with a global mindset and intercultural skills (Hilton 2007).

Prior to the study abroad program, most participants in this study had very little, if any, international travel experience. Gaining more global experience, hence, was a primary motivation. The relevance of the program to their degree, the location of the program, and the length of the program (10 days) were important factors in their decisions. Personal goals centered around growth as an individual and insight into other cultures. Professional goals included learning about international business practices and enhanced cross-cultural communication skills.

Qualitative analyses of comments strongly indicate confirmation of students' pre-program personal and professional goals, and a high level of satisfaction with the program. Participants felt that they attained a greater appreciation and understanding of other cultures, and gained greater self-confidence. Professionally, they came away with greater insights as to how local conditions can affect business practices and were more comfortable communicating in an intercultural environment. Importantly, their open-ended responses indicated heightened levels of global mindedness and intercultural

proficiency. Students came back with a greater sense of interconnectedness, global awareness, and intercultural sensitivity. The study abroad experience also enhanced their intercultural communication skills. Many were not only highly satisfied with the program, but also delighted!

Overall, these results provide confirmation that with an appropriate mix of professional activities, cultural tours, and personal interaction even relatively brief study abroad programs can significantly enhance students' global outlook and cross-cultural skillsets. To attract students, it is necessary to balance time and cost constraints. Although some have debated the merits of short- versus long-term study abroad programs (Carley, Stuart, and Dailey 2011), this study, consistent with previous research (Lewis and Niesenbaum 2005; Schuster, Zimmerman, Schertzer, and Beamish 1998) clearly shows that there are many benefits of the former.

Our study is limited, of course, in that it included only a relatively small sample of students and focused on a single study-abroad program. Nonetheless, in assessing confirmation-disconfirmation this study complements previous findings (Wright and Clarke 2010) that have documented positive outcomes such as being more globally minded, better communication skills and increased cultural sensitivity. Based on participants' comments, it is clear that they benefitted both personally and professionally. A greater understanding of what best facilitates these changes can help faculty and administration to understand to improve the study abroad experience even more. It is recommended that future studies follow up with study abroad participants, early on in their careers, to better assess the efficacy of these programs.

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