Assessing study abroad outcomes: Groundwork for change in curriculum

Avary Bradford

University of Northern Iowa

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ASSESSING STUDY ABROAD OUTCOMES:
GROUNDWORK FOR CHANGE IN CURRICULUM

An Abstract of a Thesis Submitted
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Designation
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Avary Bradford
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This Study by: Avary Bradford

Entitled: Assessing Study Abroad Outcomes: Groundwork for Change In Curriculum

has been approved as meeting the thesis or project requirement for the Designation University Honors with Distinction or University Honors (select appropriate designation)

Date ____________________________

Lori Johnson, Honors Thesis Advisor, Department of Communication Studies

Date ____________________________

Jessica Moon, Director, University Honors Program
DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my advisor Lori, and my mother Jenny.
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to determine the outcomes of participating in a short-term study abroad program. This study outlines experiences of undergraduate students from the University of Northern Iowa (UNI) who completed a three-week study abroad course in Southern Italy in May 2015. Data for this study were collected through the use of three online surveys. I compare and contrast survey results in order to provide a model for analysis such that study abroad programs like this provide both rigorous and relevant content and structure which increases the well-roundedness and global awareness of students. According to past studies, and findings from this study, the importance of studying abroad includes an increase in independence, self-awareness, intercultural skills, overall satisfaction with curriculum, and linking learning goals and objectives to the university’s mission and learning objectives for UNI students. These results suggest that short-term study abroad programs better develop students’ well-roundedness and global awareness, and lay groundwork for future change in curriculum.

*Keywords*: study abroad, undergraduate, well-rounded, UNI, global awareness
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Imagine sitting on a yacht in the middle of the Tyrrhenian Sea, soaking in the culture and knowledge of the people around you. That is exactly what students on the University of Northern Iowa’s short-term Southern Italy study abroad trip experienced. Over the course of three weeks, a group of 19 UNI students, accompanied by one faculty advisor, traveled from Rome to western Sicily in order to study natural resources, civilizations, environment, technology, and society. Students around the world are studying abroad in order to gain knowledge otherwise unattainable in the classrooms of their own universities. According to Goodman and Berdan (2014), “Making study abroad a part of their education is the most effective and accessible means for students to develop needed skills because it pushes a student to get out of her comfort zone to experience another culture, language, environment and education system” (para. 3). There is limited data on the outcomes of students participating in a short-term study abroad program, however, the ultimate goal for any collegiate institution is to prepare their students for life post-graduation. It is important to uncover and understand the effects that studying abroad has on an undergraduate student in order to discover whether or not it better prepares them for a diverse world post-graduation.

In this study, I am looking to determine the effects that a short-term study abroad experience has on an undergraduate student. I will provide information about the outcomes of the study abroad Italy experience, specifically the impact on students’ well-roundedness and experience with diversity. Since outcomes are the focus of this study, this new information may lay the groundwork for future changes to UNI’s curriculum. Changes to curriculum have the ability to better develop and prepare undergraduates for life post-graduation. This thesis will
discuss the research questions I was seeking to answer along with a review of the current literature regarding studying abroad, research methods, and a discussion my study’s findings.
Research Questions

The current research is a grounded theory of the student learning process related to a study abroad curriculum. The following research questions seek to uncover effects of studying abroad on undergraduate students.

**Research Question 1:** Does study abroad participation increase an undergraduate student’s well-roundedness? In that, can it lead to one becoming more comprehensively developed and well-balanced in a wider range or variety of interests, abilities, and/or fields?

**Research Question 2:** Does study abroad participation for UNI undergraduates develop students’ global awareness? In that, does it lead to an increase in one’s knowledge and interest in a multitude of cultures and global concerns?
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Research sheds light on short-term study abroad programs, outcomes of studying abroad, increasing well-roundedness and global awareness, and UNI’s current standings on students obtaining a diverse perspective. At UNI, short-term faculty-led study abroad excursions are offered annually, lasting two to eight weeks in length during winter, spring and summer breaks (“Study Abroad Center”, para. 4). Blake-Campbell (2014) describes short-term study abroad programs as, “a reflective, engaging, and effective educational approach to encourage a transformed worldview and foster civic global citizenship, which is now viewed as an educational and social imperative” (p. 60). Another study by Smith, MckAuliffe, and Rippard (2014) stated, “[f]indings suggest that international immersion through brief study abroad provides transformative learning opportunities” (p. 310). This study focused specifically on benefits that short-term programs provide to participants. Smith, MckAuliffe, and Rippard (2014) stated, “brief study abroad provides transformative learning opportunities” (p. 306).

*Cambridge Dictionaries Online* defines being well-rounded as, “having or providing experience and knowledge in a number of different areas.” Areas can include cultural views, cultural interests, skills, abilities, and knowledge of a variety of fields. Studies done by Luo and Jamieson-Drake (2015) found several outcomes of the study abroad experience including increased understanding of moral and ethical issues, advancements in communication skills, academic performance, and overall satisfaction in the college experience. In relation to studies by Luo and Jameson-Drake (2015), individuals gain an immeasurable amount of knowledge and experience that leads to becoming a well-rounded student while studying abroad including the characteristics mentioned above. Another outcome and benefit to studying abroad is that those
who do so gain employment sooner post graduation, at higher salaries, and in their chosen fields (Cook-Anderson, 2012). Such data lends itself to the notion that studying abroad better prepares individuals for the competitive and diverse job market. This can also likely be accredited to the worldview gained by studying abroad, or the shift in interests, skills, and abilities previously mentioned.

It is crucial that one has the ability broaden their views, interests, and skills as they move into adulthood. According to Gunning (1997) individuals must not be, “arrogant perceivers of the world who judge other cultures based on the ethnocentric view of their own culture as the norm, people should strive to be world travelers” (as cited by DeFrancisco, Palczewski, and McGeough, 2014, p. 48). According to DeFrancisco, Palczewski, and McGeough (2014), “To be world travelers means to be ethnographers, to try to view other cultures from their members’ perspectives rather than one’s own. To be world travelers also means to recognize the interconnections between cultures.” (p. 48). This includes making connections between one’s own culture and other cultures in order to develop a better understanding of one’s own values and beliefs. According to Chandler and Munday (2011), oculartemnism is the, “ranking vision over other senses in Western cultures” (p. 301). In Western cultures, such as the United States, people value what they visually experience over what they do audibly. Becoming a well-rounded world traveler involves seeing the customs of another for oneself. Such is done so by actually traveling abroad and becoming immersed in another culture through studies done abroad.

Gaining global awareness is parallel to becoming a world traveler. According to Wollpert (2012), global awareness is defined as, “a conceptual understanding based upon an applicable knowledge [and interest] of global and cultural perspectives” (para. 1). Picardo (2012) discussed his views of global awareness through the viewpoint of an educator. He states that, “[g]lobal
awareness and international collaboration during the formative years results in more rounded individuals, encouraging our pupils to see things from different perspectives and helping them to make informed decisions, acquiring transferable skills that will be useful to them and will remain with them for life” (Picardo, 2012, para. 10). Furthermore, according to the Association of Graduate Recruiters companies cannot find enough applicants with the requisite skills to operate in an international market place, indicating that greater efforts by schools in fostering global awareness and international collaboration are needed to best prepare our students for life in the 21st century (as cited by Picardo, 2012, para. 10). The notion of transformation in learning for the 21st century was mentioned throughout several pieces of literature.

Mezirow (1997) explained transformative learning as, “when students challenge their frames of reference and points of view through critical reflection and reframe perceptions, beliefs, and meaning to be more inclusive and less ethnocentric” (as cited by Smith, MckAuliffe, & Rippard, 2014, p. 306). As previously stated, studying abroad immerses students into a culture as students use their studies to critically discuss and reflect upon their experiences. As discussed in “Study Abroad Outcome” (2012) there is a need for Americans to participate in transformative learning (through studying abroad) in order to perform well in the ever-changing, diverse global market. According to Goodman and Berdan (2014), “Despite the inevitable increasing global competition for jobs, American graduates lack the international experience, language capabilities and cross-cultural communication skills necessary to succeed in the global economy. With only about 10 percent of students studying abroad at some point in their academic career, we have a long way to go.” (para. 2). Even in an ever-evolving diverse world this number remains low. Blake-Campbell (2014) stated, “Higher education stakeholders have also recognized that intercultural competence is necessary to understand the interrelationships between cultures,
community, and commerce as well as negotiate across borders and explore sustainable solutions for the 21st century global and social economy” (p. 61). Those in postsecondary education have begun to understand the importance of gaining intercultural competence in order to succeed in the 21st century, however institutions continue to produce low numbers in their study abroad programs.

According to the University of Northern Iowa Strategic Plan, Strategic Goals: Priorities and Focus (2015), the first goal for UNI is to, “[b]e a leading undergraduate public university that provides a strong liberal arts foundation” (para. 1). The university’s liberal arts curriculum is meant to create well-rounded graduates. The website (2015) explained that an objective under the first goal is to, “[p]rovide a rigorous and relevant undergraduate educational experience that prepares students for the future” (para. 1). According to Strategic Goals: Priorities and Focus (2015) another goal for UNI is to, “[c]reate and maintain an inclusive educational environment that prepares students to thrive in a diverse global environment” (para. 4). The website (2015) states that an objective under this goal is to, “[e]nsure students are prepared to live and work successfully in a diverse world” (para. 4). Participating in a study abroad program through UNI clearly supports these strategic goals.

Although there is limited data on the outcomes of studying abroad, research suggests that participating in a study abroad program is imperative for collegiate students. Results provide evidence to support the idea that students become more well-rounded through their experience. Although a limited quantity of undergraduate students study abroad, those who do so gain valuable intercultural views, interests and abilities. Findings also reveal that those who travel become less ethnocentric, and more critically diverse in their views. Finally, information revealed UNI’s goals to develop students who will be prepared for the diverse world post-
graduation. My research was conducted to further understand the outcomes of the short-term study abroad experience. Specially, data was collected to measure effects in levels of well-roundedness and global awareness.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

I distributed and collected three surveys via the use of the online survey tool Survey Monkey. All of these surveys were structured following institutional review board (IRB) protocols. In order to receive a survey individuals needed to be a current undergraduate UNI student enrolled in the Southern Italy study abroad course from May 10-May 31, 2015. The first survey was a pre-travel questionnaire that was sent to participants three weeks before departure. Fifteen of the 19 students completed the pre-travel questionnaire. The purpose of this survey was similar to that of the Study Abroad Center’s (SAC) pre-departure survey. It also drew information about each student’s pre-departure emotions, values, beliefs, and skills before arriving abroad.

The second was distributed to all 19 student participants five months after the study aboard trip. Twelve students completed the first post-travel survey. This questionnaire drew information from each student about emotions, values, beliefs and skills after their completion of the international study abroad experience. Both the pre-travel and post-travel part one surveys included Strongly Disagree (SD) to Strongly Agree (SA) likert-scale functions. The post-travel survey also utilized an extremely low to extremely high likert-scale. To gain further understanding and insight, I sent a post-travel survey part two. I asked open-ended questions regarding the overall study abroad experience using a Survey Monkey form in order to collect individual testimonies on the effects of studying abroad. Six student participants completed this questionnaire.
Participants were recruited through the use of email. Students were sent individual emails that informed them of the availability of each survey. Since I was also a participant in the Southern Italy trip, it was necessary for me to minimize potential undue influence, coercion, or appearance of coercion by stressing the fact that participating in my surveys was completely voluntary and that there would be no penalties for not participating in the surveys. Finally, in order to protect identities students identified themselves using a seven characteristic code rather than using their name.

**Data Analysis**

Responses derived from the pre-travel and post-travel part one quantitative research questions, as well as the post travel-part two qualitative research questions were analyzed. Quantitative data collected from the pre-travel and post-travel part one surveys were reviewed based upon the most common response(s) to each of the survey questions. Qualitative data from the post travel-part two were reviewed, examined, and organized according to each research question. Data were represented based on major commonalities throughout the collection of responses.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

Participants

All participants were current students attending the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar
Falls, Iowa, where almost 12,000 students are enrolled. Short-term faculty-led study abroad
excursions are offered annually, lasting two to eight weeks in length during winter, spring and
summer breaks (“Study Abroad Center”, para. 4). This study abroad trip to Southern Italy was a
first study abroad experience for all of the student participants. The group of participants was not
diverse; 92.86% of survey participants were white, and 86.67% were females, and all
participants ranged in ages from 19 to 25. Student participants’ varied in their fields of study, and
had twelve different majors including accounting, biochemistry, communication, and interior
design.

Results of Pre-Travel Survey

I relied on students to self-report their personal reflections and perceptions as accurately
as possible. Fifteen respondents answered the pre-travel online survey that asked for their
perceptions of why they chose to study abroad, their personal skill and abilities, and their
experience at UNI. Outside of questions pertaining to demographics, the questions asked used a
likert-scale response function.

As shown in Figure 1.1, when asked why they chose to study abroad, as it related to
opportunities and interests, 80% of students surveyed indicated they strongly agreed that
traveling abroad would be an opportunity to gain knowledge outside of the United States and
UNI and an equal amount (80%) indicated they wanted to study abroad for fun. Students were
then asked about their current (at that time) experience at UNI. Using the same scale, 73.33%
strONGLY AGREED that going abroad was an opportunity to learn about other cultures, while 60% somewhat agreed they were taking the course to gain more intercultural skills. Approximately 50% of participants somewhat disagreed that they have a variety of friends that differ from their cultural background, and the same amount somewhat agreed that their intentions for traveling were related to interest with global concerns including poverty, hunger, climate change, and health. Finally, only 40% of respondents strongly agreed that they were studying abroad to broaden their knowledge about globalization.

Figure 1.1 – Reasons for Studying Abroad

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Weighted Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to learn about other cultures</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
<td>73.33%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to gain knowledge outside of the United States - UNI</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
<td>80.00%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broaden knowledge about globalization: process of interaction and integration among the people, companies, and governments of different nations</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>40.00%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have a variety of friends that differ from your cultural background?</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
<td>21.43%</td>
<td>21.43%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to gain more intercultural skills</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>60.00%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in global concerns (poverty, hunger, climate change, war, clean water, health, etc)</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>46.67%</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For fun</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
<td>80.00%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As illustrated in Figure 1.2, in response to the question on students’ current experience at UNI, 60% somewhat agreed they were able to discover patterns and preferences in oneself through experience of travel and living situations. A lesser amount, 46.67%, somewhat agreed that the institution challenged student beliefs and nurtured shifts in points of view and self-knowledge through meaningful interactions with peers, scholars, representatives and local community members. The same number of recipients (46.67%) were able to recognize the roots to social conflict through historical knowledge broader than one’s own personal experiences.
Again, 46.67% of students *strongly agreed* that they are able to learn to function with relative self-sufficiency and able to take responsibility for pursuing self-chosen goals while attending UNI. Six students (40%) *somewhat agreed* that through curriculum they recognize that cultural norms are constructed by noticing the validly of alternative ways. Finally, 33.33% students were neutral and another 33.33% *somewhat agreed* that they were able to experience other cultures in order to recognize distinct aspects of U.S. culture.

**Figure 1.2 – Experience with the University of Northern Iowa**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Weighted Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Challenging student beliefs and nurturing shifts in points of view and self-knowledge through meaningful interactions with peers, scholars, representatives, and local community members.</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
<td>26.67%</td>
<td>46.67%</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discovering patterns and preferences in oneself through the experience of travel and living with other people.</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
<td>26.67%</td>
<td>60.00%</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning to function with relative self-sufficiency and to take responsibility for pursuing self-chosen goals.</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>46.67%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing that there are distinct aspects of U.S. culture by experiencing another culture.</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>26.67%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing that cultural norms are constructed by noting the validly of alternate ways of life.</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>40.00%</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing the roots of social conflict through historical knowledge as broader than one’s own previous experiences.</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
<td>26.67%</td>
<td>46.67%</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the final scale, as illustrated in Figure 1.3, participants rated themselves from *extremely low* (1) to *extremely high* (10) as they related to each statement. Six (40%) students indicated they were slightly *below average* (5/10) in their knowledge of other cultures. The same number of respondents indicated their level of well-roundedness was only *slightly above average* (6/10). Additionally, 33.33% indicated they had a *somewhat high* (7/10) ability to think in a variety of ways and to be independent. Five (33.33%) students chose mildly high (8/10) in their knowledge of their own passions. Four (26.67%) students claimed they had a *below average* (5/10) experience with other cultures. Four (26.67%) students reported they were *mildly high* in their satisfaction with personal experiences. The same number of students chose *mildly low* (3/10) in their knowledge of other languages.
All but three of the students (12 of 15) completed the post-travel survey. Students were asked identical quantitative questions asked during the pre-travel survey. First, student participants were asked reasons why they would study abroad in the future. As shown in figure 2.1, 50% of students strongly agreed they may study abroad again as an opportunity to learn about other cultures. Exactly 50% also strongly agreed that it was an opportunity to gain knowledge outside of the United States and UNI. Again, 50% of participants strongly agreed they would study abroad again to broaden their knowledge about globalization. Approximately 50% also strongly agreed they would study abroad to gain more intercultural skills. Seven (58%) of participants indicated they strongly agreed they may study abroad due to their interest in global concerns including poverty, hunger, climate change, war, clean water, and health.
Figure 2.1 – Reasons for Studying Abroad Again

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>0.00%</th>
<th>2.00%</th>
<th>4.00%</th>
<th>6.00%</th>
<th>8.00%</th>
<th>12.00%</th>
<th>16.67%</th>
<th>25.00%</th>
<th>33.33%</th>
<th>66.67%</th>
<th>100.00%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to learn about other cultures</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to gain knowledge outside of the United States – INI</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broaden knowledge about globalization; process of interaction and integration among the people, companies, and governments of different nations</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have a variety of foods that differ from your cultural background?</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>66.67%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to gain more interpersonal skills</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in global concerns (poverty, hunger, climate change, war, clean water, health, etc)</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
<td>0.67%</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>66.67%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similar to the pre-travel survey, students were asked to reflect upon their experiences at UNI. As shown in Figure 2.2, in response to the question on students’ current experience through UNI, the majority of respondents indicated they strongly agreed with each of the statements. A large portion, 75%, strongly agreed that their experience at the institution has enabled their ability to recognize that there are distinct aspects of U.S culture. Eight (66.67%) students thought their involvement with UNI led to discovering patterns and differences in oneself through the experience of travel and living with others as well as increasing their ability to learn to function with relative self-sufficiency and able to take responsibility for pursuing self-chosen goals. Six (50%) students strongly agreed that UNI challenges students’ beliefs and nurtures shifts in points of view and self-knowledge through meaningful interactions with peers, scholars, representatives and local community members; second they are able to recognize the roots to social conflict through historical knowledge broader than one’s own personal experiences, and third as an
indication one’s ability to recognize that cultural norms are constructed by noting the validity of alternative ways of life.

Figure 2.2 - Experience with the University of Northern Iowa

Also, similar to the pre-travel survey students were asked to reflect upon their opportunities and interests, but this time it was asked in a general manner rather than in relation to choosing to study abroad. As illustrated in Figure 2.3, 50% of respondents indicated they they had an extremely high (10/10) opportunity to gain knowledge outside of the United States and UNI. Approximately, 41.67% of students deemed their opportunity to gain intercultural skills to be moderately high (9/10). Four students (33.33%) indicated that they had an extremely high opportunity to learn about other cultures, and four students also reported they had an extremely high interest in global concerns. With a wide spread of answers, there was an overage of scoring of 6.83 out of ten, somewhat high indication of students’ knowledge about globalization. Again, responses were diverse in that there was an average response of 2.35 out of ten, moderately low in relation to students’ variety in friends from different cultures and backgrounds.
Figure 2.3 – Personal Skills and Abilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Category</th>
<th>0.00%</th>
<th>0.00%</th>
<th>8.33%</th>
<th>8.33%</th>
<th>8.33%</th>
<th>0.00%</th>
<th>33.33%</th>
<th>8.33%</th>
<th>16.67%</th>
<th>16.67%</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your experience with other cultures</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your knowledge of other cultures</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your ability to think in a variety of ways</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your ability to be independent</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your knowledge of your own passions</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your satisfaction with personal experiences</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your knowledge of other languages</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your level of well-roundedness</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results of Post-Travel Part Two Survey

Responses collected during the post-travel part two surveys provide direct support to this study’s research questions. Participants (N=6) were encouraged to fill out an open-ended survey to give details on a variety of topics relating to their study abroad experience. Students were asked to discuss the study abroad experience, what they learned about themselves, knowledge gained about fields of study, and how the experience impacted their views on other cultures, individuals and their education. Information gathered was deconstructed and organized according to which research question it most supported.

Research Question 1: Does study abroad participation increase an undergraduate student’s well-roundedness? In that, can it lead to one becoming more comprehensively developed and well-balanced in a wider range or variety of interests, abilities, and/or fields?

The first open-ended question asked respondents to comment on the study abroad experience in terms of what stood out for them about the trip, the impact of learning from another culture, knowledge gained on one’s own emotional and interpersonal shifts, what they learned about the other culture in general, and what they learned about their own culture.
One participant stated:

\[t\]here is absolutely no way that I could have learned what I did without experiencing it for myself and being immersed within the Italian culture. It impacts how I see the world today as well as people from different cultures. While on the trip, I gained greater insight to what is truly important to me through learning about other cultures and the different way of life.

\emph{Living abroad for three short weeks was an incredible eye opening experience.}

Another participant replied:

\[t\]hrough this trip I gained critical thinking skills that have helped me to better understand my field. It has helped me to push the boundaries and strive to dive deeper and search for direction or information I do not already know.

Another stated, “\emph{I learned a lot about myself and it gave me time to reflect on my life and how I want to live it.}” All respondents had only positive feedback in regards to this question. Almost all discussed how the trip allowed them to grow as an individual in various ways.

Respondents were asked for specifics in regards to they learned about themself including intellectual, emotional, and interpersonal dimensions.

One participant stated:

\emph{I truly believe that this trip changed me and my perspective on life for the better. There is no better way to learn more about yourself than putting yourself in an unfamiliar situation (immersed in an entirely new culture) where you are forced to step outside your box and think critically. I gained a new respect for other cultures and their way of life. Sometimes we as humans can be very quick to judge and I find that very naive of us. After being in Italy for 3 weeks and trying to understand a new culture and way of life, I became very inspired; to look at life from a different angle every day.}
Another simply responded, “I have learned to be more independent, adventurous, and open to new friendships.” Students reflected on how the trip opened their eyes in a multitude of ways.

**Research Question 2**: Does study abroad participation for UNI undergraduates develop students’ global awareness? In that, does it lead to an increase in one’s knowledge and interest in a multitude of cultures and global concerns?

An important aspect of studying abroad is to gain experiences and knowledge that aid in students’ ability to think globally and diversely.

Students were asked to reflect upon how and if there was an impact of and learning from the visit to an agency or program.

One participant stated:

*I could talk for hours about how much I learned and experienced abroad. There is nothing better that I could have done to gain that insight into other cultures past and present history than to travel abroad and experience it myself. I have gained an immense amount of knowledge that I more than likely could not have learned from a textbook nor would I have ever remembered if I had to read and be tested over it. Experiencing it myself was much more valuable.***

Another participant simply said, “I feel that any time you travel and are exposed to another culture it affects everything that you do.” Both respondents explained the long-term effects studying abroad can have on an individual.

Finally, participants were asked to discuss the impact of interacting with fellow participants, and the value of going on the trip versus the on-campus course.

One individual stated:

*Being able to experience the sights of another country is something that cannot be replaced*
by reading a textbook or looking at videos. Actually being there makes it so much more personal and we are able to see behind the scenes of what media outlets want us to see.

Finally, another participant stated:

[t]here is a difference between absorbing information and participating in EXPERIENCE. There is a complete disconnect when learning about cultures online or in a book. Online, in a book, or in a lecture setting you are absorbing information only at a surface level of simply thinking about it and considering the significance. Seeing, feeling, touching, smelling, [and] hearing. These senses can only truly be engaged by EXPERIENCE, such as visiting a cultural site, and these sense significantly contribute to a deeper understanding and memorable attachment to what was being learned about.

Through engagement and experience with an entirely new culture, students were able to increase their knowledge and interest in other cultures.

Comparison of Quantitative Results

Changes occurred after undergraduate students participated in a short-term study abroad program. Figures below display differences in results from the pre-travel survey to the post-travel survey part one. Figure 3.1 compares averages of individuals’ reasons for studying abroad. The figure shows the outcomes of changes in interests. Students were less likely to study abroad for fun or to gain knowledge outside of the United States and UNI. Student participants indicated they were more likely to study abroad due to their interest in global concerns including poverty, hunger, climate change, and health. Participants also became more likely to study abroad in order to gain friends who differ from their cultural background. Shifts show that students became more interested in global awareness and diverse individuals after studying abroad. This is shown by an
increase in individuals’ interests in global concerns and gaining relationships those who differ in cultural backgrounds.

**Figure 3.1 - Reasons for Studying Abroad Comparison**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Pre-Travel Weighted Average</th>
<th>Post-Travel Weighted Average</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to learn about other cultures</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>-0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to gain knowledge outside of the United States and UNI</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>-0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broaden knowledge about globalization</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>-0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have a variety of friends that differ from your cultural background</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>+0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to gain more intercultural skills</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>-0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in global concerns</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>+0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For fun</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.2 illustrates difference in responses to experience at UNI from the pre-travel survey compared to the post-travel survey part one. The most significant changes occurred in several areas. First, students were better able to recognize that there are distinct aspects of the U.S. culture by experiencing another culture. Student participants also increased in their abilities to recognize the roots of social conflicts through historical knowledge broader than their own perspectives. Finally, students indicated they were able to discover patterns and preferences in themselves more effectively after studying abroad. The change in results show that students grew in their abilities to think globally and diversely as results show that students gained the ability to further understand a multitude of cultures. By increasing their understanding of cultural norms and social conflicts, individuals increased their knowledge of cultural views and global concerns.
### Figure 3.2 - Experience with the University of Northern Iowa Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-Travel Weighted Average</th>
<th>Post-Travel Weighted Average</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Challenging student beliefs and nurturing shifts in points of</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>+0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>view and self-knowledge through meaningful interactions with</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>peers, scholars, representatives, and local community members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discovering patterns and preferences in oneself through the</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>+0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experience of travel and living with other people.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning to function with relative self-sufficiency and to take</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>+0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>responsibility for pursuing self-chosen goals.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing that there are distinct aspects of U.S. culture by</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>+1.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experiencing another culture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing that cultural norms are constructed by noting the</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>+0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>validity of alternate ways of life.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing the roots of social conflict through historical</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>+1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>knowledge as broader than one’s own previous experiences.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Shifts in personal skills and abilities are displayed in figure 3.3. On average, students indicated there was an increase in all of the mentioned skills and abilities. The most significant difference was an increase in students’ experience with other cultures. The second most prominent change occurred in students’ ability to be independent, as it increased substantially. Participants also became more satisfied with personal experiences. Finally, students indicated they gained a greater level of well-roundedness. Shift in results show multiple outcomes. First, students grew in their experience with other cultures, which is imperative in today’s diverse world, and became more globally aware. Finally, there was a clear indication of increase in well-roundedness. Participants experienced an increase in their abilities to think and function independently, broadening of their cultural experiences, and clearly indicated an increase in their well-roundedness.
### Figure 3.3 - Personal Skills and Abilities Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-Travel Weighted Average</th>
<th>Post-Travel Weighted Average</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your experience with other cultures</td>
<td>5.27</td>
<td>7.17</td>
<td>+1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your knowledge of other cultures</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>+1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your ability to think in a variety of ways</td>
<td>7.53</td>
<td>8.08</td>
<td>+0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your ability to be independent</td>
<td>7.33</td>
<td>8.42</td>
<td>+1.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your knowledge of your own passions</td>
<td>7.93</td>
<td>8.25</td>
<td>+0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your satisfaction with personal experiences</td>
<td>7.93</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>+1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your knowledge of other languages</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>+0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your level of well-roundedness</td>
<td>6.87</td>
<td>7.92</td>
<td>+1.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

Findings help prove the need for UNI to include studying abroad as a curriculum requirement for graduation. Survey results show an increase in undergraduate students’ well-roundedness post-travel. Participants self-reported an average of a 1.5 point increase in well-roundedness, and a 1.64 point increase in their ability to be more independent after studying abroad. Results also reveal that students who studied abroad gained knowledge and experience that is imperative for today’s diverse world. Participants indicated a 0.62 point average increase in UNI’s ability to challenge their beliefs and nurture shifts in points of view and self-knowledge after studying abroad. Student also showed a 0.77 point average increase in their interest in global concerns, which leads to one gaining a worldview as opposed to an ethnocentric view. As previously mentioned in earlier chapters, there are many other studies that also show benefits and positive outcomes of studying abroad. My survey results indicate that relevant experience is gained by studying abroad that contributes to a more well-rounded and independent student, and leads to better preparation for the future through gaining global awareness.

The data I collected supports ideas previously introduced in the Literature Review chapter. Authors Behnke, Seo, and Miller (2014) discussed a need for international exposure, especially for college students. With these survey results, it is clear the true impact a study abroad experience can have on undergraduates. Luo and Jamieson-Drake (2015) discussed the positive outcomes that occur after participation in the program. These studies combined with my findings support the notion that studying abroad creates significant and beneficial outcomes. Indication of such outcomes lay the foundation for future changes in UNI’s curriculum. In the future, I suggest that surveys are distributed to all UNI study abroad participants both before
travel and post-travel. This would mean acquiring permission from the study abroad center, and all program faculty advisors. It is imperative that outcomes of studying abroad are documented, as significant results could lead to reformation of curriculum.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This study illustrates the strong impact that studying abroad has on undergraduate students. The positive outcomes produced from studying abroad suggest that actions be taken to prompt more students to participate in study abroad programs in order to better prepare students for today’s diverse world. The goal of any university is to positively impact students. UNI students in my study experienced distinct shifts in their understanding of who they are, the systems within which they live, work and learn, and the skills they need for their future careers. Undergraduate student participants became more well-rounded and globally aware after participating in a short-term study abroad program.
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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Informed Consent Statement

Introduction
This research is being conducted by Avary Bradford at The University of Northern Iowa to determine the short and long term affects that studying abroad has on college students.

Procedures
You will be asked to complete an online questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of 15-20 questions and will take approximately 15 minutes. Questions will include details about your demographics, studies, personal beliefs and opinions. You will be taking this survey three different times: pre-travels, during travels, and post travels.

Risks/Discomforts
There are minimal risks for participation in this study. However, you may feel emotional discomfort when answering questions about personal beliefs.

Benefits
There are no direct benefits to subjects. However, it is hoped that your participation will help researchers learn more about how influences of the study abroad program on students personal and educational growth.

Confidentiality
All information provided will remain confidential and will only be reported as group data with no identifying information. All data, including questionnaires will be kept in a secure location and only those directly involved with the research will have access to them. After the research is completed, the questionnaires will be destroyed. Confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. Specifically, no guarantees can be made regarding interception of data sent via the Internet by third parties.

Participation
Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time or refuse to participate entirely without jeopardy to your class status, grade or standing with the college.

Questions about the Research
If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Avary Bradford at bradfaab@uni.edu or Anita Gordon, IRB Administrator at anita.gordon@uni.edu or 319-273-6148.

I have read, understood, and received a copy of the above consent and desire of my own free will and volition to participate in this study.

Please click the link below to provide your consent for participation and to start the survey.
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Pre-Travel Survey Questions

1. Please enter your name. For confidentiality purposes, your name will be your six-digit birthdate and first name initial. Ex: 031394a

2. Indicate your gender (female, male, other).

3. Indicate your race (white, black, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian, or from multiple races).

4. Indicate your age (18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, other).

5. What is your major?

6. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree, rate the following on why you chose to study abroad.
   a. Opportunity to learn about other cultures
   b. Opportunity to gain knowledge outside of the United States and UNI
   c. Broaden knowledge about globalization: process of interaction and integration among the people, companies, and governments of different
   d. To have a variety of friends that differ from your cultural background
   e. Opportunity to gain more intercultural skills
   f. Interest in global concerns (poverty, hunger, climate change, war, clean water, health, etc.)
   g. For fun

7. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the low and 10 being the high, rate the following as they apply to you personally.
   a. Your experiences with other cultures
   b. Your knowledge of other cultures
   c. Your ability to think in a variety of ways
   d. Your ability to be independent
   e. Your knowledge of your own passions
   f. Your satisfaction with personal experiences
   g. Your knowledge of other languages
   h. Your level of well-roundedness
8. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree, rate the following on your current experiences at UNI.

a. Challenging student beliefs and nurturing shifts in points of view and self-knowledge through meaningful interactions with peers, scholars, representatives, and local community members
b. Discovering patterns and preferences in oneself through the experience of travel and living with other people
c. Learning to function with relative self-sufficiency and to take responsibility for pursuing self-chosen goals
d. Recognizing that there are distinct aspects of U.S. culture by experiencing another culture
e. Recognizing that cultural norms are constructed by noting the validity of alternate ways of life
f. Recognizing the roots of social conflict through historical knowledge as broader than one’s own previous experiences

9. What do you most hope to learn through your experience abroad?
Post-Travel Survey Part One Questions

1. Please enter you name. For confidentiality purposes, your name will be your six-digit birthdate and first name initial. Ex: 031394a

2. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree, rate the following on why you chose to study abroad.
   a. Opportunity to learn about other cultures
   b. Opportunity to gain knowledge outside of the United States and UNI
   c. Broaden knowledge about globalization: process of interaction and integration among the people, companies, and governments of different
d. To have a variety of friends that differ from your cultural background
   e. Opportunity to gain more intercultural skills
   f. Interest in global concerns (poverty, hunger, climate change, war, clean water, health, etc.)
   g. For fun

3. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the low and 10 being the high, rate the following as they apply to you personally.
   a. Your experiences with other cultures
   b. Your knowledge of other cultures
   c. Your ability to think in a variety of ways
   d. Your ability to be independent
   e. Your knowledge of your own passions
   f. Your satisfaction with personal experiences
   g. Your knowledge of other languages
   h. Your level of well-roundedness

4. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree, rate the following on your current experiences at UNI.
   a. Challenging student beliefs and nurturing shifts in points of view and self-knowledge through meaningful interactions with peers, scholars, representatives, and local community members
   b. Discovering patterns and preferences in oneself through the experience of travel and living with other people
   c. Learning to function with relative self-sufficiency and to take responsibility for pursuing self-chosen goals
   d. Recognizing that there are distinct aspects of U.S. culture by experiencing another culture
e. Recognizing that cultural norms are constructed by noting the validity of alternate ways of life
f. Recognizing the roots of social conflict through historical knowledge as broader than one’s own previous experiences
Post-Travel Survey Part Two Questions

1. Please enter your name. For confidentiality purposes, your name will be your six-digit birthdate and first name initial. Ex: 031394a

2. Comment on the study abroad experience in terms of: (a) What stood out for you about the trip/experience; (b) the impact of and learning from the cultural immersion experience; (c) what you learned about yourself as an individual, including the emotional and interpersonal dimensions of the trip; (d) what you learned about other cultures; (e) what you learned about your own cultures (e.g., U.S. culture).

3. What have you learned about yourself as an individual, including the intellectual, emotional, and interpersonal dimensions from the trip?

4. How has the trip affected your understanding of your field of study?

5. What have you learned about other cultures (e.g., Italian culture or subcultures)?

6. What have you learned about your own culture (e.g., U.S. culture or subcultures)?

7. What has been the particular impact of and learning from the visit you made to an agency or program?

8. What has been the particular impact of visits to historical and cultural sites?

9. What has been the particular impact of being with fellow participants? What has been the value of (a) having the trip vs. (b) only have the online course that you took, with readings, videos, and discussion board?

10. Should undergraduates be required to study abroad? Assuming it is financially and educationally manageable.