

Influenced Decisions: Study Abroad Effects on Students' Decision-making Skills

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Introduction

- How do we decide?
- Can we refine our decision-making skills?
- USDA prioritizes soft skills and career competencies
 - Teamwork
 - Problem-solving
 - Professionalism
 - Decision-making



Decision-making

- Personal Factors that influence decision-making
 - Nationality
 - Religion
 - Sex
 - Age
 - Employment
 - Personality
 - Education?
- Education has an ‘allocative effect’ on decision-making, empowering learners and producers



Decision-making

- Behavioral factors influence decision-making
 - Referent groups
 - Rewards and sanctions
 - Codes of conduct
 - Ethics
- Environmental factors influence decision-making
 - Location
 - Proximity



High-impact Experiences

- High-impact experiences
 - Internship
 - Global learning
 - Capstone courses
 - Service learning
 - Undergraduate research
 - Writing-intensive courses
 - Learning communities
 - First-year seminars
 - Collaborative assignments



Global Learning

- Study abroad increasing every year for the last decade
- Previous findings on study abroad and soft skills included “enhanced”
 - Global perspective
 - Professionalism
 - Cultural competencies

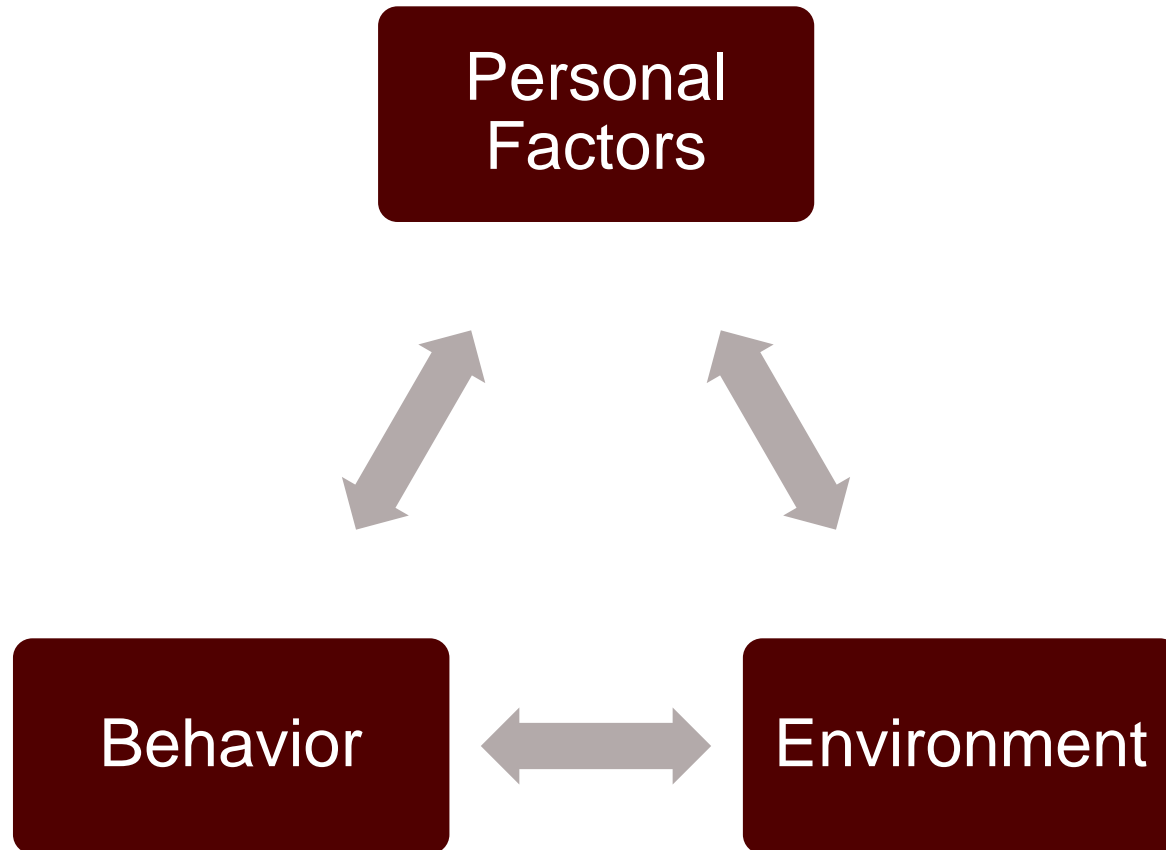


Statement of the Problem

- Post-secondary agricultural educators have a need to develop decision-making skills in an emerging workforce
- Universities and administrators have increasing value invested in study abroad programs
- Do study abroad experiences facilitate enhanced decision-making?



Theoretical Framework



Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory



Methods

- Purpose
 - Describe TAMU self-perceived changes in decision-making skills after agricultural study abroad program
- Participants
 - Costa Rica and Namibia (2017-2018) study abroad programs
 - N=76
 - Similar assignments and coursework
 - Consistent instructors



Methods

- Pre-Post reflection questions
 - Open-ended, administered online
- Constant Comparative analysis
 - Triangulated for credibility with instructor observations, field notes
 - Frequent peer debrief



Findings

Pre Themes

- Confidence in decision-making
 - ‘Steady’ / ‘Logical’
- Behavioral factors
 - Codes of conduct
 - Rewards and sanctions

Post Themes

- ‘Broader views’
 - Causes
 - Effects
- Personal factors
 - Cultural differences and similarities



Conclusions

- Global agricultural experiences may contribute to changed views on decision-making processes
- Participants noted cultural considerations played a larger role in their decision process after study abroad experiences



Recommendations

- For educators
 - Plan for programmatic engagement with cultural dynamics
 - Incorporate meaningful reflection about decision-making in international and global learning settings



Recommendations

- For researchers
 - Develop quantitative measures for decision-making and other soft-skills or career competencies
 - Compare changes in DM between study abroad and campus-based HIEs
 - Compare potential differences based on study abroad location

