

# Students Speak Out: How Should Universities Prepare Students for Study Abroad Experiences?

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# Literature Review

- Academic Learning Outcomes and Study Abroad: Dwyer (2004): In a longitudinal study of study abroad program impacts spanning 50 years, reported a positive correlation between length of participation in a study abroad and specific learning outcomes.
- Personal Growth Outcomes and Study Abroad: Orahod, Woolf, and Kruze (2008): reported that participants described themselves as better-rounded, having learned more integrity, stronger communication skills, and interpersonal skills. Many participants described their experience as “invaluable.”
- Long-Term Career Impact, Professional Development and Study Abroad: Orahod, Kruze, & Pearson (2004): Students who completed a study abroad experience were more likely to consider job positions with an international component over those who did not study abroad. Also, students who completed a study abroad experience were actively searching for job postings in foreign countries.

# Purpose of the Study

- The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe what undergraduate students believed could be done to help them succeed in a classroom outside of the U.S.
- Immersive Study Abroad Experience: An experience abroad lasting at least six weeks but no longer than an academic semester (16 weeks).

# Significant Life Experience Research

Significant Life Experience Research (SLER) is generally used within the discipline of environmental education to assess and understand significant experiences that influence people's environmental concerns and behaviors (Chawla, 1998).

## For the Purpose of this Study:

- *Significant Life Experience Research* is a method to understand a revealing, formative experience in a person's life that in turn influences their feelings or behaviors and the way they interact with others and in diverse environments (Defined after reading through the works of Chawla).

# Data Collection and Analysis

- The focus group guide was developed based on current research.
- Student recruitment through Study Abroad Recruitment Coordinator.
- Two focus groups were conducted with a total of 10 undergraduate students with majors in a College of Agriculture and who completed an immersive study abroad experience lasting at least six weeks.
- The focus groups were audio recorded on multiple technology devices for later verbatim transcription.
- Domain analysis used to analyze focus group data.
- Themes were discovered in both data sets, they were color-coded and then compared across each focus group. Key domains were identified and interpreted.
- Two peer reviewers were selected to analyze the data and their findings were compared to the researcher's.

# Results: Critical Thinking/Problem Solving

- “I don’t think I did a lot of critical thinking or problem solving before hand (traveling abroad), but I can’t really remember, (I did not use critical thinking/problem solving skills) not in class, because (I was on) on my own in college and I’m figuring stuff out.”
- “I don’t, I don’t remember any classes going like oh I really figured out how to figure out a problem.”

# Results: A Global Classroom

- “I think Dr. Duncan’s global class kinda gives you an idea of maybe their educational style when you see all the different presentations.”
- “So like oh this kinda shows (how) they format something or how they would present information.”
- “That a really good point that I haven’t really thought about I was just thinking how content and stuff cause that’d be a way that UGA didn’t prepare me ...education systems are so different in different countries and it’s just not just learning a new culture not just learning a new subject matter not just learning another language learning a new education system like classrooms are run totally differently in Brazil and in Costa Rica from the US.”

# Recommendation for Research

- Repeat this study with students in College's of Agriculture in other states as well as with students not in a College of Agriculture. This may help understand how, if at all, College of Agriculture students differ from other students in regards to preparation techniques.

# Recommendation for Practice

- A College of Agriculture must make a conscious effort to develop a seminar class into the curriculum of immersive study abroad participants that allows them to prepare before they depart, reflect during their immersive experience, and unpack their experience upon return (Rodriguez & Roberts, 2011).

# Thesis Work

- Understanding the Impact of Immersive Study Abroad Experiences on College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences Student Soft Skill Development
- Any Questions?
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