THE EFFECTS OF PARTICIPATION IN STUDY-ABROAD AND INTERNATIONAL SERVICE-LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES ON THE PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIVES OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effects of study-abroad and international service-learning experiences on the personal and professional lives of college students. Three research questions guided this qualitative study: 1. What types of international study-abroad and service-learning experiences did college students engage in? 2. What motivated college students to engage in study-abroad and international service learning experiences? 3. How did participation in study-abroad and international service learning experiences affect the personal and professional lives of college student participants? A survey was developed and administered to 231 college students over a two year period who participated in either a semester long or month long international study-abroad experience. Narrative data were compiled and common themes and distinctive responses from students served to answer the three research questions. Results: 1) The types of international service-learning experiences students engaged in ranged from event specific activities (e.g., working at the Special Olympics) to working in schools, community refugee centers, and hospitals. 2) Student motivation for engaging in study-abroad and international service learning experiences stemmed from: a desire to experience new cultures; a love of travel, a desire to live and study abroad; a belief that an international experience would benefit them professionally, a desire to meet new people; a desire for self-development; a desire to serve others and from family encouragement. 3a) The effects that study-abroad and international service-learning had on students personal lives were grouped into themed categories that included: personal growth (N=114); an expanded world view (N=112); gratitude / appreciation for what I have (N=46); a growing interest in service (N=32), and the development of friendships (N=20). 3b) The effects that study-abroad and international service learning had on students professional lives were grouped into the themes: increased people skills for professional use (N=100); increased cultural sensitivity (N=78); direct applications to education & business professions (N=67); self-determination in the work place (N=41); and working to serve others (N=22). These findings will be used to inform, expand and enrich the study-abroad and international service-learning opportunities that are currently offered to all our students at Elmhurst College.

KEY WORDS:
Study-Abroad and International Service-Learning, Personal and Professional Development

INTRODUCTION:

Over the past two decades, the number and variety of study-abroad and service-learning programs offered in institutions of higher education in the United States have increased significantly (Campus Compact,
LITERATURE REVIEW

A Historical Perspective of Study-Abroad and Service-Learning

De Wit (2002) notes that international programs in the United States were enhanced after World War II and through the Cold War until September 11th, 2001. The movement to internationalize international experiences in higher education was seen as very much a matter of satisfying national interests (Kiely, 2002, Hartmann & Rola 2000). Providing study-abroad experiences was seen as a method of allowing students to increase fluency in another language and to extend their disciplinary knowledge through study at a “foreign” university or in a similar program in another country (Brewer & Cunningham, 2009). However, participating in “field-experiences” outside the classroom was considered “unacademic” and difficult to measure. In many cases, study-abroad programs that included “field-experiences” or other experiential learning opportunities were automatically suspect in many home (American) universities and colleges, and in order to receive credit for a course taken abroad, the course had to closely resemble a course on the student’s home campus (Brewer & Cunningham, 2009).

Despite the fact that for many years, the benefits of studying abroad had been described as “enormously educational, life changing, personally and professionally transformative and provided an opportunity to bridge the (artificial) separation of academic learning from experiential and intercultural learning.” (Brewer & Cunningham, 2009), little was done to improve the quality of study-abroad offerings. Consequently, many colleges and universities remained rather reluctant to either grow or expand their study-abroad or international service-learning programs. However, in 1988, in response to the urgency to increase study-abroad participation rates among students studying in majors traditionally excluded from these international experiences, and to expand study-abroad opportunities beyond traditional western-European countries, a major philosophical shift occurred in many major universities and colleges (Hunter, 2004).

The primary impetus for expanding study-abroad in the United States was provided by the four primary recommendations in the 1988 report from the United States’ Advisory Council for International Educational Exchange (ACIE). Under the title “Educating for Global Competence,” the report noted that undergraduate study-abroad participation was particularly important to furthering the international dimensions of higher education and made the following recommendations: (a) increase undergraduate study-abroad participation by 10% by 1995, matching the European Union goals for its member nations; (b) expand study abroad participation to include students from under-represented majors and social groups as well as to include more potential leaders; (c) extend study-abroad to countries outside “Anglo-European” settings; and (d) place responsibility for the internationalization of colleges and universities at the highest administrative and leadership levels (Brewer and Cunningham, 2009).

In 2000, U.S. President, William J. Clinton issued a “Memorandum on International Education Policy” that stated, “To continue to compete successfully in the global economy and to maintain its role as a world leader, the United States needs to ensure that its citizens develop a broad understanding of the world, proficiency in other languages and knowledge of other cultures.” Following this movement, in 2003, the International Education and the National Association for International Education and Cultural Exchange (NAFSA) echoed Clinton’s statement, suggesting that U.S. citizens needed enhanced educational skills and knowledge to guarantee U.S. national security and economic competitiveness (NAFSA, 2003).
One immediate reaction to these policy statements and contemporary studies about study-abroad programs, and in response to world events (including September 11, 2001), America’s awareness about the importance of learning more about international politics changed dramatically. In 2005 the Lincoln Commission was established to examine what should be done to implement these changes in American colleges and universities (Lambert, 1996; Germann and Krupar, 2002; Bikson, et. al., 2003). The findings of the Lincoln Commission were implemented with the passing of the Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act (H.R. 1496 and S. 991) in 2007.

A major component of H.R. 1496 and S. 991 was the recommendation that study-abroad participation should be increased to one million American undergraduates by 2017 (Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program). Since the passage of the Simon Act, interest in initiating, promoting, and offering study-abroad programs has increased among members of the government, educational institutions, parents, and perhaps most significantly, among undergraduate students. Not surprisingly, U.S employers have also recognized that in the increasingly multinational workplaces and in the interdependent technological and economically connected world, students in the United States were unprepared to enter the global workforce (Hunter, 2004).

This realization was a further argument for the importance of increasing study-abroad and service-learning experiences in America’s college and university curricula. International exchange education and study-abroad programs were now seen as dominant components of meaningful, futuristic, and applicable education (ACIIE, 1997), and as having an important role in preparing American students to be globally competent individuals (i.e., individuals who have a developed appreciation of other cultures and the ability to interact with people from foreign lands, and who have the ability to become familiar with a new environment, or not causing a rift while experiencing something new, and can then reflect on the experience at its completion [Curran, 2003]). In short, study-abroad programs have become a robust vehicle for delivering these competencies (Brewer & Cunningham, 2009).

Community service and civic engagement offered in American colleges and universities and campuses have a much longer history than do study-abroad programs. Beginning in the 19th century and revisited in 1950, by the Truman Commission, community service and civic engagement began a renaissance. The Truman Commission which was convened to study and define the purpose of higher education, declared that “higher education should help students acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable them to live rightly and willfully in a free society and that without a broad liberal education, citizens are denied the opportunity to engage in the principal ideas and events that are the source of any civilization” (Hinck & Brandell, 2000, p. 869).

In 1999, the Wingspread Conference challenged research universities to move beyond intellectual separation, individualism and elitism, and to engage more fully in reflection and service for the public good (Boyle & Hollander, 1999). These programs found further revitalization in the 1960s and 1980s and include the Civil Rights Movement, Peace Corps, and Volunteers in Service to America [Vista] (History of Service-Learning in America, 2010). In the past decade, community service and civic engagement programs have continued to grow on college and university campuses in the United States. (Learn and Serve America, 2012).

Further recognition of the important roles that service-learning and community service have in American colleges and universities prompted President Bill Clinton to approve legislation that repositioned Serve America, Ameri-Corps and Senior Corps Programs under one roof with the creation of Learn and Serve America. (Learn and Serve America, 2000). Subsequently, and perhaps most importantly, college and university service-learning programs are now seen as important components of undergraduate education curriculum.

International service-learning is a pedagogy which, much like study-abroad programs, offers opportunities for meaningful student learning through active on-site project-based experiences. Recent studies have found that participation in international service-learning has a positive impact on students’ intercultural sensitivity, intellectual development and their sense of global citizenship (Kiely, 2005; Hartman and Heinisch, 2003; Monard-Weissman, 2003). While
providing service in a community, students must also apply theory and classroom knowledge about issues while working with members of that community.

The reflective component that is required after the service-learning experience is completed encourages students to think critically about their personal growth, social growth, intellectual growth, citizenship and meaningful preparation for the world of work and assessing these new and challenging environments provides a means for gaining new knowledge to address problems and allows the student to become an expert learner. (Duckenfield & Swanson, 1992).

Participation in international service-learning programs has also been found to enhance students’ engagement with the community, increase civic responsibility, and promote cross-cultural understanding. In order to benefit from these experiences, students need to be prepared to take part in activities outside the classroom, engage in meaningful community service often without supervision, and reflect critically on their experiences in these new surroundings and cultures (Hunter, 2004).

While it may be true that some of the goals that have been set for both study-abroad and service-learning programs may not always match the rhetoric (Boyer, 1996), the mission statements of most colleges and universities continue to demonstrate a commitment to expand and increase student participation in study-abroad, service-learning and civic engagement programs. In short, the effects that participation in study-abroad and international service learning have on students’ professional and personal lives include an increased sense of social responsibility, personal empowerment, a commitment to promote racial understanding, as well as many educational benefits (Astin et. al., 2000).

As the commitment by colleges and universities to expand and improve study-abroad and service-learning programs continue, the formation of collaborative international community-university partnerships provide a rigorous focus on education in democratic values, citizenship and the development of global competencies. By continuing to draw upon the insights of students who participate in both study-abroad programs and international service-learning experiences, we will learn more about the effects of these experiences on the professional and personal lives of our students. Thus colleges and universities can continue to provide educational and service opportunities that will empower students with a wide range of cultural, linguistic, and global competencies and help create globally competent U.S. citizens capable of thriving in the increasingly inter-dependent world and the twenty-first century workforce (Hunter, 2004).

While there are similarities between study-abroad and international service-learning programs (e.g., participation in either or both requires students to “live” in a new and different culture; participation in either or both requires students to “leave behind” many pre-conceived expectations), the extent to which combining study-abroad and international service-learning experiences effect the personal and professional lives of college students and enhances the global competencies of participants tends to remain ambiguous (Kiely, 2004).

**CONTEXT OF THE STUDY**

Currently, the International Studies and Service-Learning Programs at Elmhurst College offer students an array of international study-abroad and service-learning experiences. Students have the option to participate in courses led by either Elmhurst College faculty or the Upper Midwest Association Intercultural Education (UMAIE) consortium faculty. Students can select either long term (i.e., a year-long or semester in length) and/or short term (one to four weeks in length) study-abroad experiences. Many of these experiences have international service-learning opportunities woven into them.
The majority of Elmhurst College students who participated in this study chose the short term options for their initial study-abroad and international service-learning experiences. To address this issue, students from a consortium of colleges and universities from around the United States who participated in a 16 week study-abroad semester in Greece (“Odyssey in Athens”) sponsored by the University of Indianapolis, Athens, Greece were included in this research project. Many of the students enrolled in this program also engaged in service-learning activities as part of their long term study-away.

Collaborating with our international faculty partners in Athens provided the researchers with a sample of college students who participated in both the long and short term international study-abroad and service-learning experiences and the inclusion of these students added to the breadth of student-participation in the study.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**

Three specific research questions guided this study.

1) What types of international service-learning experiences did college students engage in?

2) What inspired college students to engage in study-abroad and/or international service-learning experiences?

3) How did a study-abroad and international service-learning experience influence the personal and professional lives of college students?

**METHODOLOGY:**

**Sample:**
The participants in this study were 231 college students, ages 18-33 years. There were 63 males and 168 females. The demographics of the participants were: Caucasians = 168, Hispanics=13, African Americans = 12, Asian = 10. The academic standings of the group were: Freshman=20, Sophomores =41, Juniors=85, Seniors =68, Graduate Students =7, Post Graduate Students =5 and Alumni =5. The participants reported a total of 35 different majors with the top six majors listed as follows: Education = 51, Business = 35, Psychology = 20, Nursing = 12, Geography = 10 and Biology = 10.

This was their first international study-abroad and service-learning experience for the majority of students in the study. Forty two students reported this was their first long-term full semester abroad and 158 students reported that this was their first international short-term course (1-4 wks.).Ten students reported this was their second long term study-abroad experience and 27 students reported that this was their second time in a short term study-abroad program. Four students reported that this was their third long term study-abroad experience and 19 reported this being their third short term experience. **(see table 1 below)**
Table 1: Participants’ Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>International Travel Experiences</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female: =168</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; Long-term = 42</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; Short-term = 158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-21 yrs. = 171</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Long-term = 10</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Short-term = 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male: =63</td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; Long-term = 4</td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; Short-term = 19</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>Engagement in Service-Learning</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22-25 yrs. = 55</td>
<td>Yes =141</td>
<td>No = 90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-33 yrs. = 4</td>
<td>Academic Standing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>African-American = 12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asian = 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caucasian = 196</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic = 13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freshman = 20</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sophomore = 40</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Junior = 85</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Senior = 68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alumni / Graduate Students /Post Grad Students = 17</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection:

Students who were enrolled in either a short-term (1-4 week) study-abroad and/or international service-learning experience at Elmhurst College or in a long-term, (1 semester) study-abroad program entitled “Odyssey in Athens” at The University of Indianapolis’ Athens Greece campus participated in this research study. The central data source for the current study was an open-ended survey questionnaire that was developed and piloted by the research team. During the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 academic years, participants were asked to complete this survey questionnaire at the end of their study-abroad and service-learning experiences. The survey took about 15 minutes for students to complete.

This survey consisted of 20 questions which were divided into 3 sections.

Section I focused on student demographics (gender, age, ethnicity, academic standing and academic major and international travel experiences). The first research question that asked: “what inspired the student to enroll in a long or short term study-abroad program?” was included in this section.

Section II focused on the effects of international service-learning experiences on the personal and professional lives of participants. There were 4 questions in this section that asked students to indicate if they participated in service-learning activities as part of their study-abroad experience, the duration of the service work and the type of service students engaged in. There were two open-ended questions that asked students to describe how their international service-learning experiences have influenced their lives both personally and professionally.
Section III focused on the effects of study-abroad on their personal and professional lives. Specifically, participants were asked to respond to 2 open-ended questions that asked students to describe how their study-abroad experience affected their lives both personally and professionally.

All surveys were administered to students by course instructors who accompanied them on their study-abroad trips. Completed surveys and signed informed consent forms from each participant were returned to the researchers by faculty instructors when students returned home from their courses.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process followed the teachings of Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Denzin (1989). We used a repetitive inductive process described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), through which data were coded into descriptive units of shared meaning. All student responses on the survey instrument were transcribed capturing all comments. The qualitative data analysis followed a sequence of reading, interpreting, re-reading, noting patterns, categorizing and identifying themes. Initially, each researcher examined the data separately. We identified key points and repeated elements through repeated reading of the data. We noted what we recognized as phrases / sentences being significant that we identified as units of meaning and coded them. Through interpretive analysis (Denzin, 1989) these points were categorized as to the shared meaning they generated. These categories were then scrutinized and when appropriate were collapsed under other categories / themes. Two sets of major themes emerged from student responses to questions on the effects that study abroad and international service-learning had on their personal and professional lives. Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts and percentages were also used to analyze parts of the data which is a common practice in content analysis.

RESULTS:

The results are organized around each of the specific research questions that guided our study.

**Question 1: What inspired students to engage in study-abroad and international service-learning experiences?**

All students were asked to describe what motivated them to participate in study-abroad and international service-learning experiences. The most frequently stated reasons students gave were, a desire to experience new and different cultures, their love of travel, and their desire to live and study abroad. Students also indicated that an international experience would benefit them professionally; their desire to meet new people, seeking self-development as a person, and a desire to service others were also key motivators in their decision to participate in study-abroad and international service-learning experiences. Finally students reported that encouragement from family, friends and professors, the need for a course that fit into their schedules and a desire to learn and improve speaking another language were reasons why they enrolled in these study and travel courses.

**Question 2: What were the duration and types of international service-learning experiences that college students engaged in?**

*Duration of Service Learning Experiences:*

Of the 231 students who participated in this study, 61% reported that they participated in some sort of service-learning component and 39% reported having no service learning experience affiliated with their study-
abroad courses. The duration of time students spent engaged in service-learning experiences varied. One hundred thirteen students reported that they spent between one and two weeks doing service work while abroad. Twenty-eight students reported spending one semester (4 months) engaged in service-learning experiences across their semester abroad.

Types of Service-Learning Experiences:

Students from several study-abroad sites reported participating in a wide variety of service opportunities that were embedded into their study-abroad courses. In Greece, 44 students worked in a refugee center where they engaged in teaching English as a second language and helped in a soup kitchen feeding the homeless. Another service-learning site in Athens was the Special Olympics World Summer Games in 2010. Twenty-two students assisted disabled athletes and teams with special equipment needs, distributed awards and answered questions for athletes.

In Jamaica, 20 students worked in elementary and secondary schools in Montego Bay, assisting teachers in classrooms and teaching music. They also worked as tutors and mentors in an after-school program at a Boys and Girls Club. In Costa Rica, 19 students worked in food pantries and also assisted in after school programs working with under privileged children as tutors in the city of La Promesa.

In Australia, 11 students taught and worked in a K-12 school in Brisbane. Students assisted teachers in classrooms and taught music and classroom activities to children who ranged from preschool to high school levels. In London, 9 students engaged in planning and delivering lessons to students in three different schools in the Barking District.

In Africa several groups of students engaged in various service-learning projects. Nine students traveled to Dakar, Senegal and distributed school supplies in two elementary schools and passed out shoes to children in the streets. In Cape Town South Africa, 7 students worked in a children’s convalescent hospital serving infants, toddlers and young children with HIV/AIDS, others worked in a primary school in Langa Township outside of Cape Town, and assisted in a child care center.

**Question # 3 a: How have study-abroad and international service-learning experiences influenced the personal lives of college students?**

The 231 college student participants in this study who engaged in study-abroad and international service-learning experiences reported they were personally influenced by their experiences in many important ways. Student responses to this question were grouped into 5 major categories/themes. Several sub-themes emerged from these major categories. These 5 personal themes and sub-themes are reported below and also displayed in Table 2.

**Personal Theme # 1: Personal Growth:**

The first theme was in the area of personal growth (N=114). Students reported there were many ways that they each “grew as a person” from their participation in these international service and study experiences. Many students reported becoming more confident, independent and self-sufficient. Other students mentioned that they learned humility, patience, compassion and tolerance for others. Students also reported that they became better able to adapt to change and accept challenges, solidified their love and interest in traveling
abroad, and learned about their strengths and weaknesses. Several examples of student’s responses to how they “grew as people” included the follow.

“I feel like I am more independent and self-reliant. I have been in complicated situations where I had to figure things out quickly and in another language that I would never had encountered in the U.S. I learned to be more comfortable and confident in myself”

“I saw my life from a brand new perspective and I will take this with me when working with people from all walks of life. This experience has made me more compassionate and appreciative.”

“I feel I experienced true independence for the first time. I realized how capable I am of being independent and exploring new places. I’m going to take away my new found confidence as well as a greater love of travel, exploring and learning.”

Personal Theme # 2: Expanded World View:

The second personal theme that emerged was that of an expanded personal world view (N=112). Students reported that they gained an overall appreciation and respect for cultural differences. Students believed that their perspective of the world and others cultures was broadened, and that they gained understanding and compassion for individuals who were different from themselves. They also reported that by participating in their study-abroad and international service-learning experiences their previously held biases and stereotypes were shattered, their interest in actually living in a different country increased, and their realization of the need to learn a second language increased. Students had much to say about their expanded world views. Some examples follow

“I now have more cultural acceptance, more respect for different languages and customs and so much more respect for diversity.

“Every time I travel my tolerance broadens and my mind opens up a little more. It amazes me how much bias and stereotyping can be imprinted on a person and in just one experience in a different culture it can be changed”

“I have learned a lot about another culture. I specifically want to take with me the sense of community and caring that I saw and felt in South Africa and instill that into my daily life.”

“I have learned personally to become more globally aware of other cultures and lifestyles. I learned to appreciate these differences and also appreciate my own culture as well.”

Personal Theme # 3: Gratitude:

The third personal theme was gratitude. Forty-six students reported that they gained amuch greater appreciation for what they had in their lives after they completed their international travel and study experiences. Specifically, thirty-three students mentioned that they realized that they took a great deal for granted in their lives (e.g., their families, homes and modern conveniences). They also stated that they had an increased pride in their own cultures and of “being an American”, expressed having a greater sense of “joy” in their lives and a growing appreciation of their many freedoms. This “new found” sense of gratitude was expressed in the following statements made by the students.
“I now realize how lucky we have it in America. Many countries are in a state of turmoil and are not getting any better. We Americans often complain about things these people would never dream of having. This experience had put culture in perspective for me now.”

“I gained a better sense of joy in my life. After observing and participating in various activities such as going through markets and eating traditional dinners, I have noticed many things that give people joy. Even though they experience adverse times, they still somehow return to joy.”

“My service-learning experiences have shown me that we are extremely privileged with all we have at home. I learned not to take all the blessings and freedoms in my life for granted.”

“I realize now that people can be happy while having nothing and something as simple as providing people with some pairs of shoes could change their lives.”

“Being in Cape Town and seeing all of the surrounding townships made me realize how much I take for granted at home. I need to switch my focus off of material things and refocus instead on the joy of just living life.”

Personal Theme # 4: Service:

The fourth personal theme was service (N=32). Many students reported that they developed a new interest in providing service after engaging in the service-learning activities that were embedded into their international courses. Students reported that they gained an understanding that people need help around the world and face many difficult challenges. They also reported being inspired to take a helping role in their communities at home and realized that making a difference in someone’s life is a powerful experience. Students had these things to say about their recognition of the importance of engaging in service work.

“This experience has opened my eyes to the living conditions that people experience every day. It has made me more appreciative of what I have and I now know that I want to give back more to those in need in my own community.”

“I learned that many people in this world have nothing. Doing a little can make a big difference in someone’s life.”

“Personally I have gained so much insight into how big and crazy this world is. I have seen a lot of sad and happy things and knowing my service work affected people directly is an amazing experience.”

“Many people around this world need help and if we give of our time we can make a big difference in many small ways to improve things for them.”

Personal Theme # 5: Friendship:

The last personal theme to emerge was friendship (N=20). Here, students reported that they developed many new and diverse friendships. Students mentioned that they believed that studying abroad and participating in international service-learning activities broadened their ability to interact with diverse people. They also stated that they learned a great deal about group dynamics and how to get along with a variety of different personalities. Finally students said that they formed strong bonds with their fellow students. Some examples of student statements that reinforce this theme follow.
“Personally I have made many good friends from different backgrounds. This experience broadened my ability to interact with and understand people from different backgrounds and cultures.”

“I have learned a lot about myself and group dynamics because when you travel with a group and are with the same people 24-7 you quickly learn about your personality and those of others. You also learn how to work together as team.”

“I gained a whole new appreciation for cooperation and respect for all people. It has been amazing to see both people in our group and people on the streets bond and support each other in a way that I did not think was possible. There are a lot of wonderful people in the world.”

Table 2: Major Themes and Sub-Themes

Personal Effects of Study Abroad and International Service-Learning Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme # 1: Personal Growth</strong></td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subthemes:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Gained confidence, independence and became self-sufficient (N=52)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learned humility, patience, compassion and tolerance for others (N=33)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Developed adaptability to change and accepted challenges (N=15)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Gained appreciation and interest in traveling abroad (N=8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learned about personal strengths and weaknesses (N=8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme # 2: Expanded World View</strong></td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-Themes:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Broadened perspective of the world and other cultures (N=62)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Gained understanding and compassion for different individuals (N=31)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Shattered previously held biases and stereotypes (N=8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Strengthened interest to live in another country (N=6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increased awareness of the need to speak a second language (N=5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme # 3: Gratitude</strong></td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-Themes:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Gained appreciation for things taken from granted (N=33)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Increased pride in own culture… being American (N=8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Gained a greater sense of joy in life (N=3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Developed appreciation of freedoms (N=3)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theme # 4: Service

Sub-Themes:
- Gained understanding of needs of people around the world (N=14)
- Inspired to take helping role in home communities (N=12)
- Realized that making a difference in lives is powerful (N=6)

Theme # 5: Friendship

Sub-Themes:
- Broadened ability to interact with diverse people (N=13)
- Learned about group dynamics and personalities (N=4)
- Bonded as a team with fellow students (N=3)

Question # 3b: How have study-abroad and international service-learning experiences influenced the professional lives of college students?

All student participants were asked to project how their study-abroad and international service-learning experiences would influence them in their professional careers. All responses were again organized into 5 major themes. Each of these themes also had several sub-themes that emerged. All 5 professional themes and sub-themes are reported below and displayed in Table 3.

Professional Theme # 1: People Skills for Professional Use

The first professional theme that emerged was people skills for professional use (N=100). Students reported developing more acceptance, understanding, compassion and empathy for others, a growing sense of open mindedness, tolerance, and flexibility with themselves and others, and an increased ability to interact with all types of people. They also mentioned a heightened ability to deal with challenging situations in their work, improved communication skills and recognition of the importance of providing equal opportunities to persons with disabilities in work settings. Students provided the following statements to demonstrate this theme.

“I plan to go to medical school. I will apply my increased compassion to enhance the bedside manner of my profession which seems largely lacking in many doctors today.”

“My professional career will put me in contact with people from a variety of backgrounds. A federal agent has to be a well-rounded individual that understands and respects people from all over the world. This experience will help me be open-minded in whatever situation that arises professionally.”

“I have learned how to be flexible and adaptive in situations which are very important especially in nursing. I now feel that I can handle anything that life throws at me.”

“This experience has helped with my communication and explanation skills. When the class did not understand part of the lesson, we would have to find another way to explain the message.”

Professional Theme # 2: Cultural Sensitivity
The second emerging professional theme was cultural sensitivity (N=78). Students reported that they developed an appreciation of individual differences and other cultures, gained a “global” awareness, perspective and sensitivity, got to practice a second language and improved their ability to speak it and had a heightened interest in making international travel a part of a future career choice. They described their growing cultural sensitivity in the following ways.

“I now have a better understanding of how most people in the world live, not just the minority I experience every day as an upper-middle class American. This experience will help me better understand cultural differences and most definitely will help me in my future workplace.”

“I am not exactly sure just what my professional career will be but this international travel experience can only broaden my horizons and help me realize and respect differences in cultures.”

“I want to have a traveling aspect to whatever career I choose. I’d also like to work with other cultures and a diverse group of people.”

Professional Theme # 3: Application to Education (Teaching) and Business Professions

This theme emerged as a result of the high number of students who declared themselves as either education majors (N=51) or business majors (N=35). Many of the student responses focused on applying what they had learned in their study-abroad and international service-learning experiences directly to their future careers in teaching and business. Students reported that they learned new teaching techniques and strategies that they could apply in their future classrooms. They also mentioned the importance of teaching about different cultures and in emphasizing the value of cultural diversity in their teaching. Other students stated that they learned about work ethic, economy and production processes in international industries and that they had cultivated an interest in helping others in the work place develop an appreciation for including service work into their jobs. These themes are exemplified in the following student quotes.

“From observing teachers perspectives and how they develop relationships with their students, I have been motivated to try to do the same with my students back home.”

“I will be able to share my experiences with students in my classroom and create lessons that apply to a new culture. I can use my pictures and souvenirs with my students so they can appreciate a new culture.”

“I have learned about the effects that India and the US have on trade and the 24/7 production schedule.”

“I plan to teach English to middle school and high school students. I am more confident in doing so from teaching English to adults in Athens. I hope to share my experiences with my future students in hopes that they will someday engage in volunteer work in their communities.”

Professional Theme # 4: Self-Determination / Self Efficacy in the Work Place

Self-determination /self-efficacy in the work place was the fourth professional theme to emerge from the data set (N=41). Here, students described how they gained ability to adapt to change and think critically, developed and refined their leadership skills, and developed a greater sense of independence and the ability to
take risks. They also reported having an increased level of persistence / perseverance in overcoming adversity, a heightened understanding of teamwork, and learned about the importance of bringing enthusiasm and optimism to the work place. Some of these key learning experiences are highlighted below.

“I will use the events I have seen as motivation to succeed and go beyond my comfort zone. I will encourage those around me to take risks and serve the special needs community in order to give them perspective on what achievement really means.”

“Studying abroad showed me that I am well-rounded and open to new experiences. I will not be afraid to take risks in my future professionally.”

“I will be more patient with people I work with, and I’ve really learned how to work well and problem solve with a group.”

“I learned that I will not let anything stand in my way of achieving my goals professionally. These athletes at the Special Olympics have shown me that no matter what one is faced with in life, you can overcome adversity.”

**Professional Theme # 5: Working to Serve**

The last professional theme was working to serve (N=21). Although not all students engaged in serve-learning activities as part of their study-abroad experience, the ones that did were very moved by the work they participated in. Several students expressed a desire to make a career choice into a service field and others intended to include service as part of a future job. The service work that many students experienced left a lasting impression on them and they described how they intended to embrace the volunteer spirit in their future professional careers in these ways below.

“My professional work, although not chosen yet, will include service, whether it is working for a non-profit or an organization in the service field. Through these intercultural experiences I have been exposed to many facets of service, and I am especially drawn to the way that global service works.”

“I will apply what I have learned by serving more in my own community, working a finding a cause, being grateful for what I have and become more aware of my actions and what I see in the society around me.”

“As sociology and international relations major, I plan to work with second and third world countries in communities of need.”

“I will keep with me the same attitude and love for helping people in my professional career.”

“I feel that volunteering and helping people that deserve equal opportunities will be something that I will continue doing throughout my professional career.”
## Table 3: Major Themes and Sub-Themes

Professional Effects of Study Abroad and International Service-Learning Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme # 1: People Skills for Professional Use</strong></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subthemes:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Developed acceptance, understanding, compassion and empathy (N=43)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Developed open-mindedness, tolerance, flexibility in self and others (N=26)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increased ability to interact with all types of people (N=17)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increased ability to deal with challenging situations in work place (N=7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Improved communication skills (N=5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Recognized importance of equal opportunity for disabled (N=2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme # 2: Cultural Sensitivity</strong></td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-Themes:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Developed better understanding of individual differences &amp; cultures (N=55)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Gained a “global” awareness, perspective and sensitivity (N=13)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Practiced a second language and improved my ability to speak it (N=8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Desired to make international travel a part of a future career (N=2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**Theme # 3: Application to the Education (Teaching) and Business Professions</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-Themes:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learned new teaching techniques and strategies for use in classrooms (N=32)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Learned importance of teaching about different cultures (N=18)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learned about the work ethic, economy &amp; production in industries (N=12)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cultivated interest in helping students develop an interest in service (N=5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme # 4: Self-Determination /Self-Efficacy in the Work Place</strong></td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-Themes:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Gained ability to adapt to change and think critically (N=10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Developed and refined leadership skills (N=9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Developed greater sense of independence and ability to take risks (N=8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Developed a sense of persistence (never giving up) (N=7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Developed a better understanding of teamwork (N=5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learned importance of bringing enthusiasm &amp; optimism to work place (N=2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme # 5: Working to Serve</strong></td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-Themes:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Desired to make a career choice into a service field (N=11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Intended to include service as part of a future job (N=10)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this study was to contribute to the growing body of literature about the effects that participation in international study-abroad and service-learning has on the personal and professional lives of students. Examination of the data reveals that there were many reasons why students were motivated to engage in international travel, study-abroad and service-learning experiences. These include: a desire to experience new cultures; a love of travel, a desire to live and study abroad; a belief that an international experience would benefit them professionally, a desire to meet new people; a desire for self-development; a desire to serve others, and support and encouragement from family. In addition, participants in this study reported many personal positive outcomes from their international travel, study-abroad and service-learning experiences. These included, increased personal growth, an expanded world view, an increased sense of gratitude, a growing interest in service to others, and the development of diverse friendships. The students also reported that the positive impacts on their professional lives of students included: increased “people skills” that would be helpful during professional interactions, increased cultural sensitivity, direct application of lessons-learned to their educational and business professions, a desire to achieve a greater degree of self-determination in the work place, and a decision to select a career in which one is working to serve others.

The outcomes of this study are similar to those found by (Berry & Chisholm, 1999; Hartman & Roberts, 2000), including increasing participant’s global awareness and the development of humane values; building intercultural understanding and communication and enhancing civic-mindedness and leadership skills. However, the results of this study also add clarity to positive outcomes that can occur as a result of participation in international travel, study-abroad, international education and service-learning on college campuses.

Providing students with international educational and service opportunities as part of their college experience affects them in several ways. First, it allows students to make personal and social transformations, whereby students learn to critically examine their beliefs and come to understanding and accept those who are different (Meyers, 2009). Participation in international study-abroad and service-learning experiences provided our students with opportunities to become more self-aware, appreciative of diversity and helped them see that they could become agents of social change.

Second, when considering the issue of global competency (i.e., the ability to work effectively in different international settings; an awareness of the major current of global change and the issues arising from such changes; knowledge of global organizations and business activities; the capacity for effective communications across cultural and linguistic boundaries and a personal adaptability to diverse cultures), (Hunter, 2004), Lambert (1996), suggests that engaging in study-abroad and international service-learning experiences are avenues by which students are able to move toward becoming “globally competent citizens.” Results of this study indicate that the students reported that they grew in all of these areas. Additionally, the findings and positive outcomes reported in this study also correspond closely with outcomes reported in previous research on study-abroad and international service learning and their effects on college students (Astin, Vogelgesgang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Hartman & Heinisch, 2003; Monard-Weissman, 2003; Kiely, 2005).

LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results of this study. First, as is the case with most qualitative research, the data collected from our sample size (231 college student participants), should not be viewed as a representative sample of all college students.
Second, the survey results rely on self-reported findings with no supporting data from additional sources (e.g. course syllabi, reflective journals, observations, or interviews) to triangulate or confirm the findings. Third, while our student sample was limited to participants from one small mid-western college and one international study-abroad program, 65% of the participants were from 15 states within the United States.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Despite the efforts of many college and university faculty and administrators toward embracing the primary mission of preparing students to become “globally competent citizens,” there remains a gap in operationalizing a curriculum that embraces the global competencies needed to provide substantive international study and service-learning programs on many campuses to support this mission. In order to move forward and to more vigorously prepare students who are globally competent, future research needs to focus on clearly identifying specific global competencies that need to be embedded into curriculum.

A second area of research that might be continued in this arena is one that addresses the connections between study-abroad, international service-learning and students’ academic performance and critical thinking skills. By further examining the link between these three student experiences, we will be able to provide more evidence and support for the important roles that these programs can have on college campuses. A third research focus is to try to gain a better understanding of what motivates faculty members to engage in service-learning activities with their students and how faculty evaluate student learning outcomes from these experiences. This is important because without the leadership roles of faculty, many, if not all of these programs would not be offered across college campuses in the United States.

In closing it should be noted that this study is just one by a growing number of researchers who have responded to the call of Kiely & Hartman who in 2004, suggested that it is important that we continue to develop a deeper understanding of the changes, context in which those changes occur, and the processes that are important to students who participate in study-abroad and international service-learning programs. While it is not easy to evaluate the effects that study-abroad and service-learning have on participants, this study has attempted to provide insight into these effects, and as we move forward we will strive to continue to obtain a deeper understanding of what motivates American students to accept the challenges and excitement that are the hallmarks of a study-abroad and or an international service-learning experience.

**REFERENCES:**


