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The Long-Lasting Effects of International Study Abroad Programs on College Graduates

Mary Katharine Rousopoulos
Taylor University

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THE LONG-LASTING EFFECTS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDY ABROAD
PROGRAMS ON COLLEGE GRADUATES

A thesis

Presented to

The School of Graduate Studies

Department of Higher Education and Student Development

Taylor University

Upland, Indiana

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Higher Education and Student Development

by

Katie Rousopoulos

May 2009

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<p>Higher Education and Student Development Taylor University Upland, Indiana</p>
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTERS THESIS

This is to certify that the Thesis of

Katie Rousopoulos

entitled

The Long-Lasting Effects of International Study Abroad Programs on College Graduates

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the
Master of Arts degree

in Higher Education and Student Development

May 2009

Randall Dodge, Ph.D. Date
Thesis Supervisor

Tim Herrmann, Ph.D. Date
Member, Thesis Hearing Committee

Scott Gaier, Ph.D. Date
Member, Thesis Hearing Committee

Tim Herrmann, Ph.D. Date
Director, M.A. in Higher Education and Student Development

ABSTRACT

Do the short-term effects of international study abroad programs (ISAPs) during the college undergraduate years continue post college? To determine whether ISAP participants perceive these benefits as long lasting, six college graduates from a small, mid-western, faith-based university were interviewed about their experience studying abroad. With the chance to share perceptions of their changed understanding or actions, the interviews focused on the following areas: career choice, personal values and behavior changes, relationships, spiritual growth, and intellectual knowledge. Results indicate that college graduates do perceive a number of lasting changes related to their time studying abroad.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION & RESEARCH QUESTION

Introduction

Research has established that International Study Abroad Programs (ISAPs) have a positive influence on college students (Armstrong, 1984; Beers, 2001; Gray, K. S., Murdock, G. K., & Stebbins, C. D., 2002; Hadis, 2005; Joseph, 2007; Kauffmann & Kuh, 1984; Kitsantas, 2004; Lewis, 2005; Sandell, 2007). The unanswered question is whether short-term positive influences carry over to become long-lasting impacts. Thomas L. Friedman (2005), author of the popular book *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*, realizes the importance of becoming a world citizen and the ways in which we are being influenced through our global interactions. Friedman says

When I say the world is being flattened, I don't mean we are all becoming equal. What I do mean is that more people in more places now have the power to access the flat world platform – to connect, compete, collaborate, and, unfortunately, destroy – than ever before. (pp. 205-206)

As our society recognizes the importance of having globally minded citizens, ISAPs are gaining more attention. A. E. Goodman, President of the Institute of International Education (IIE), said, “Many U.S. campuses now include international education as part of their core education mission, recognizing that increasing the global competence among the next generation is a national priority and an academic

responsibility” (as cited in Dessoff, 2006, p. 22). Colleges and universities seem to recognize that because of faster internet connections, cheaper airfare, and humankind’s natural curiosity of different cultures, our world is indeed becoming smaller and smaller.

The interaction that higher education has had with study abroad has increased over the years (Gardner, 1999). Higher education institutions provide many opportunities for students to study abroad and recognize the associated benefits of students’ participation in an ISAP. With new technology, international wars, accessible educational opportunities, new social norms, and a variety of other aspects, it is evident that our world is quickly changing. Educators only delude themselves if they cannot accept that the world has changed in significant ways during the past several decades. A need exists to educate students about these changes in order to continue transforming students to be globally minded. A very natural way to do that is through first-hand cultural experience, which is exactly what ISAPs allow students to do.

Studies have shown that a college student benefits by participating in ISAPs (Kauffmann & Kuh, 1985; Sandell, 2007; Ulrich & Wolfgang, 1991). The studies confirm that during the students’ time away, levels of intellect, spirituality, interpersonal growth, intrapersonal growth, and other developmental areas positively increase (Kauffmann & Kuh; Sandell; Ulrich & Wolfgang). The former president of Michigan State University, M. Peter McPherson, mentions that, “Study abroad is not a frill. Greater engagement of American undergraduates with the world around them is vital to our nation’s national security, economic competitiveness, and public diplomacy” (“International Education,” 2005, p. 2).

Schlossberg (1981), who studied and proposed an adult developmental theory, gives the example of a person who assumes something about his or herself and goes through an experience and notices a change in behaviors or relationships, then that person has taken part in what she calls the “transition theory.” An ISAP allows students to experience this kind of transitional change. As well as creating opportunities to make new relationships, participants get out of their normal routines and environment while studying abroad. This type of experience from ISAPs is one way that Schlossberg’s transition theory (Schlossberg, 1981; Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998) is put into practice. Schlossberg believes that these experiential factors will “determine the degree of impact a given transition will have at a particular point in time” (Evans et al., p. 107). This transitional experience of studying abroad generally forces students to get out of their comfort zones, which helps contribute to a more holistic development for an individual. This personal development is something that could be reported as a self-perceived change.

The information gathered in this study contributes to the field of study abroad by paving the way for further exploration of the long-lasting effects that ISAPs may have on college graduates. This particular study showcases the impact that ISAPs have had on alumni from a small, mid-western, faith-based university, referred to in this thesis as ‘the sending college.’ The study will illustrate the changes that the ISAP experience had on aspects of their holistic development and how it has influenced their self-perceptions. After an analysis of the short-term mission trip results from the [*The Sending College’s*] *Intercultural Inventory*, a previous study conducted by Dr. Stephen Snyder (2008), the following areas have been recognized to have increased growth for short-term ISAP

effects: behaviors, knowledge, and attitudes of intellectual, interpersonal, and spiritual development. These areas helped shape this study's focus when conducting the semi-structured interviews. After reviewing self-reports of lasting influence in these areas and more, the study's implications and recommendations will be discussed.

Research Question

Research has established that ISAPs have many positive short-term effects on college students during their time abroad (Joseph, 2007; Kauffmann & Kuh, 1985; Snyder, 2008). Due to the current lack of research surrounding a postgraduate's on-going impact from an ISAP, the researcher proposes the following research question: What lasting effect(s) do ISAPs have on college students after they graduate? Based on literature that indicates a positive short-term impact on a student (Armstrong, 1984; Joseph, 2007; Kauffmann & Kuh, 1985; Kitsantas, 2007), the hypothesis of this study is that the postgraduate's ISAP experience also has long-lasting effects. The impact will be found in the following areas of his or her life: the postgraduate's view on his or her career choice, personal values and behavior changes, relationships, spiritual growth, and intellectual knowledge.

Definitions of the Five Focus Categories

To understand the self-perceptions in this study, five focus categories were used in question development and later in coding responses from the interviews. The five focus categories and their working definitions are listed below.

Career Choice: Self-perceptions of career choice were identified when participants developed an understanding, skill, or interest during their ISAP experience that had influenced their career path or decision in studying a specific field.

Personal Values and Behavior Changes: The participants' perceptions of changed personal values or behaviors were identified when they were able to recognize differences of culture while studying abroad and a change in the way they acted, spoke, and thought about those differences. These changes included gaining greater confidence, independence, tolerance, levels of responsibility, views of stewardship, recognition of the importance of education, generosity, social justice, and more.

Relationships: Self-perceptions of relationships were identified when participants voiced a change of attitude toward others, and as a result, changed the ways they interacted with, related to, keep in touch with, and learned from people of a different culture, their ISAP peers, and their own family and friends in the United States.

Spiritual Growth: Identification of self-perceived spiritual growth occurred when participants shared about how their view of God, Christianity, church denominations, spiritual gifts, and views of ministry changed while studying abroad.

Intellectual Knowledge: Participants' perceptions of their intellectual knowledge were identified when they were able to express their own cognitive thoughts. This occurred when they were able to understand and recall different facts, skills, and truths they learned inside and outside the classroom. These changes include identifying knowledge of the culture's history, governance and educational systems, cultural norms, languages, and more.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Colleges and universities are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of educational programs that promote global understanding and the necessity of a global community. Faculty members and administrators are looking for new ways to transition student learning into the global arena, and a study abroad program is an effective way of doing so (Pickert, 1992). The Commission of the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program predicts that by the academic year 2016-2017, one million U.S. students will study overseas (Joseph, 2007). Knowing that studying abroad can and often does have a great influence on college students' holistic development (Kauffmann & Kuh, 1985; Sandell, 2007; Ulrich and Wolfgang, 1991); higher education institutions should recognize the consequence of incorporating ISAPs into their academic curriculum.

It is important to both learn about the growth that occurs during students' time abroad and to assess the lasting benefits experienced by those students once they graduate. The hypothesis of this current study is that the ISAP experience influences the postgraduates' perceptions about their career choices, personal values and behavior changes, relationships, spiritual growth and intellectual knowledge. This literature review will connect the already established short-term effects and the possible outcomes of long-term effects.

What are ISAPs?

“Study abroad by scholars and professionals dates back as early as 500 B.C., when educated people gathered in Athens, Greece,” and “scholarly migration for purposes of learning and teaching seemed characteristic of most societies throughout history” (Sandell, 2007, p. 12). With such a long history of learning abroad, it seems odd that it is a challenge to define the study abroad experience. In their study of ISAPs, Ulrich and Wolfgang (1991) focused on four different study abroad programs, each containing a unique approach to the educational components, duration of time, guidance, and accommodations of the experience. Though the four programs are very different, each is considered an ISAP experience. The sending college’s own international travel opportunities such as their short-term mission trips, Spring Break trips, semesters abroad, summer trips and academic January interterm courses all include different characteristics and to varying degrees, holistic learning experiences. However, this does not mean that each of them is considered to be an ISAP.

What is an ISAP? Kitsantas (2004) gives a very simple definition of “all educational programs that take place outside the geographical boundaries of the country of origin” (p. 441). Gray, Murdock, and Stebbins (2002) also have a simple way of categorizing an ISAP. They believe that a “short-term study abroad is focused. Its goals are varied and include the development of linguistic fluency and regional, cultural, and area studies” (p. 46). No matter where one looks, the definitions of study abroad are quite varied. For the purposes of this study, ISAPs will be defined as any academic course that takes place in a country other than the student’s native land and home institution and

spans an entire academic semester. This length is chosen simply to narrow the scope of this research.

Reasons to have ISAPs

The President of Goucher College, Sanford J. Ungar, expresses the need for ISAPs best when he states, “You don’t have to look any further than the front page of the nearest newspaper to see that global events have a direct and immediate influence on all of our lives” (as cited in Dessoiff, 2006, p. 26). Throughout history, one can recognize the impact that international events have had on America. Events such as the pro-democracy rallies at Tiananmen Square in China, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the end of the Cold War (Gray et al., 2002) have had a ripple effect felt around the world. There is no doubt that the United States is intricately connected to the world, both through historical events and modern technology. Former U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan expressed

Perhaps more than ever, international understanding is essential to world peace...globalization, migration, economic integration, communication, and travel are bringing different races, cultures, and ethnicities into ever closer contact with each other combining the familiar with the foreign can be a source of powerful knowledge and insight. (Sandell, 2007, p. 12)

This study presents several compelling reasons as to why higher education should consider implementing increased ISAP experiences in their curricula. “If the U.S. is to be a leader in international education, we must strengthen our own study abroad programs,” says Marcum (2001, p. 2). Kitsantas (2004) believes that “rapid global development and a growing demand for cross-cultural adaptability in employees puts pressure on study abroad programs to provide high quality outcomes for their growing enrollment” (p. 441).

Continuing to look at the impact that globalization can have on a career, Joseph (2007) believes that “for students to succeed in today’s competitive marketplace, they should seek an education in which they gain exposure to other cultures” (p. 40). She goes on to add, “exposure to other countries and foreign students can open eyes and minds not only to different cultures and traditions but also to new ways of doing business and solving problems” (p. 40). In addition, when students have the chance to get hands on experience, such as an internship while studying abroad they will see “the connection between policy and practice in ways they could never have learned in a textbook,” mentioned Gilin & Young (2009, p. 39).

Kauffmann and Kuh (1984) suggest that ISAP experiences benefit college students when it immerses them “into another culture, not just superficial contact, [and] can challenge students to acquire a more sophisticated, complex view of themselves and the world” (p. 18). Now a quarter century later, with arguably even more need for global understanding and cross-cultural experiences, how much of a continuing concern should it be for today’s students? Results from a December 2005 poll commissioned by the former National Association for Foreign Student Affairs (NAFSA): Association of International Educators revealed that 90% of Americans “believe it is important to prepare future generations for a global society” (Joseph, 2007, p. 40). If this is the case, then what role should college and university educators play in increasing opportunities for study abroad experiences?

The Role of Higher Education

The author of *Developing Intercultural Competence & Transformation: Theory, Research, and Application in International Education*, Victor Savicki (2008) has many

unanswered questions about higher education's role in helping students become globally minded. Questions that remain for him include:

- How on earth will we prepare students to be the next generation of global citizens if study abroad is yet to be seen as an essential component in a student's university career?
- How, as educators, will we help students meet the demands of the twenty-first century if we fail to engage them in learning that prepares them to think and behave in more culturally sensitive ways? (p. 92)

If the role of an educator is to prepare students to go beyond the classroom and develop skills that will help them succeed, then one should be asking these types of questions.

Educators have the challenge of preparing graduates who are competent to work in a global marketplace (Pickert, 1992). Colleges and universities usually provide courses related to education, politics, and religious beliefs, yet many times these courses do not focus on the international components, which can offer much more to the students' education. As mentioned before, today's educators are increasing the quest for global competence and they view this as a national priority (Dessoff, 2006). "Global education can no longer be viewed as a secondary consideration; we must recognize that it is central to developing graduates who can cope creatively with the modern, independent world" says Wood (1991, p. 10). Gray et al. (2002) simply agree and believe that "the general aim of the college's international program is to give students more international experience and exposure" (p. 46). This will be no easy task for colleges and universities to implement right away; instead, it will be a continuing process. "American institutions

must work harder to broaden understanding of world events by offering the perspectives of other cultures” (Pickert, p. 5).

Exposure to international studies through firsthand experience does not equate to engaging in an on-campus cross-cultural study credit. Students who stay on campus do not experience another culture firsthand, nor do they experience the challenges that an ISAP may include. An example of this is language proficiency. According to Armstrong (1984), after immersing themselves into a different culture that speaks a foreign language, students learned the language quicker and at a higher level of comprehension compared to students who studied strictly in an American classroom. In light of what Kauffmann and Kuh (1984) found in their study of the educational impact of actually being immersed into the culture and not learning in a superficial contact, it is important to have an understanding of the significance that an ISAP has on students who engage in our world.

The Transition Theory in Action during an ISAP

Generally, any student who participates in an ISAP will go through some type of transition. Transitions for the student can include traveling abroad for the first time, experiencing a new culture and new foods, living with a host family, and much more. As stated earlier, Schlossberg (1981) describes that “a transition can be said to occur if an event or non-event results in change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one’s behavior and relationships” (p. 3).

Students commonly undergo some kind of culture shock while traveling abroad and having to learn to survive in their host country with customs that are unfamiliar. This culture shock is not a negative occurrence, but rather it is an experience that will trigger a

“good deal of self-reflecting” (Hadis, 2005, p. 7). This self-reflection is a major catalyst for change and can later serve as a reminder of the lessons that the student has learned while abroad. Experiencing culture shock is not the only way a student can experience a transition and experience growth because of studying abroad.

The ISAP experience will “push participants beyond their comfort zone, with the goals of encouraging teamwork and building self-esteem, self-confidence, and respect for others” (Gray et al., 2002, p. 45). For many students who study abroad, it is their first time in a culture where almost everything is new to them or unknown. The students are “confronted with real challenges, such as communication barriers and lack of familiarity with regional customs, forcing them to quickly become active learners” (p. 51). These times are often uncomfortable and stressful for the student and cause them to face a crisis (Beers, 2001). These transitions are usually positive and stimulate great amounts of personal growth.

The Short-term Effects of ISAPs

The ISAP experience should be included into higher education curriculum if for no other reason than the short-term impact it has on college students (Gardner & Steen, 1999; King & Young, 1994; Lewis & Niesenbaum, 2005; Thomlison, 1991). Not only is the ISAP experience beneficial to a student’s education, but it also enhances a student’s personal development and spiritual awareness (The Barna Group Ltd., 2008). Looking at ISAP from a student development point of view, one can see that there are many positive developmental benefits from being away from home and a comfortable support structure. These events can help the student grow in their independence, define who they are and develop more maturity. Most students will have had the chance to encounter

Schlossberg's transition theory previously mentioned, but also experience positive momentum along Chickering's seven vectors of identity development while abroad without even realizing it (Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Chickering's theory proposed seven learning stages that would contribute to a person's identity development. These seven stages include: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy towards interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing an identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity. These vectors build upon themselves and people move through these stages at different rates depending on their interactions with others and experiences they have (Evans et. al, 1998).

Studies have shown that during a student's time abroad, the student increases his or her understanding or an awareness of several intellectual and personal aspects as well as becomes more globally minded (Armstrong, 1984; Gray et al., 2002; Hadis, 2005; Kauffmann & Kuh, 1984; Kitsantas, 2004; Sandell, 2007; Savicki, 2008). "Surveys indicated benefits from cultural immersion as the single most important aspect of study abroad," according to research from Gray et al. (p. 49).

Growth in global mindedness, intellectual development, and personal development are three effects that are common results found throughout study abroad research. The first category of students' cross-cultural understanding is usually a positive, mind-expanding result. These areas of intellectual development include a better understanding of world affairs, international issues, cultural diversity, globalization, and a greater knowledge of their host culture (Gray et al., 2002; Kauffmann & Kuh, 1984; Lewis & Niesenbaum, 2005; Savicki, 2008). By being immersed in the host culture and

experiencing everyday life there, the students may engage in that country's economy, government, and the education system. This allows students to gain a better cross-cultural understanding and a better appreciation of differences.

Other than a greater insight into global understanding, the most noteworthy intellectual gain takes place when the student goes abroad to specifically study a language (Armstrong, 1984; Kitsantas, 2004; Lewis & Niesenbaum, 2005). The results from Armstrong's (1984) study confirmed that immersing students into the host culture, they learned the Spanish language quicker and at a higher level of comprehension. The statistics showed that 89% of the undergraduates began at advanced levels; 87% responded that the overseas program influenced their attitudes toward foreign language study, and 73% planned to continue their study of Spanish beyond the first semester (Armstrong, 1984).

The third category is that of the students' personal perceptions and beliefs. Research has shown that there is an increase of an understanding or awareness of personal perceptions and beliefs, which include other people's values systems, their own spiritual understanding, and a compassion and understanding for social concerns while studying abroad (Armstrong, 1984; Beers, 2005; Gray et al., 2002). Tomlinson's (1991) study found that experiencing an ISAP "resulted in substantial changes in attitudes, beliefs, levels of open-mindedness, behaviors, knowledge, interests and understanding" (p. 40). Several studies have shown positive results of a student's time abroad within his or her personal development (Hadis, 2005; Kauffmann & Kuh, 1984; Savicki, 2008). Students return home having an increase in their confidence (Armstrong; Gray et al.; Hadis; Kauffmann & Kuh; Kitsantas, 2004; Sandell, 2007;), independence (Black &

Duhon, 2006; Armstrong; Kauffmann & Kuh), maturity level (Armstrong; Gray et al.), critical thinking (Kauffmann & Kuh; Savicki, 2008), appreciation for other cultures (Armstrong; Kauffmann & Kuh), and interpersonal skills (Kauffmann & Kuh; Kitsantas). “About 53% felt that they had gained in self confidence and personal well-being; 37% said they became more self reliant and better able to make decisions on their own” (Kauffmann & Kuh, p. 12). Students attribute each of these improvements to their immersion within the host culture (Kauffmann & Kuh).

Not only did Armstrong’s (1984) results confirm that study abroad programs affect the language proficiency while in college, but sometimes they impact the student’s choice of major and career. Callister (2006), King & Young (1994), Sandell (2007) and Gray et al. (2002) also noticed the increase of students’ self-reported beliefs that their ISAP experience will be beneficial when applying for jobs. Sandell found that over 67% said that their ISAP experience had a high impact on their future career choice. Gray et al. (2002) noted in student reflection papers from their qualitative study that “students who wish to begin careers in other countries, indicate a belief that a study abroad experience will provide them with career advantages in the future” (p. 50).

Lastly, studies confirm that the ISAP will give students more tolerance for others (Black & Duhon, 2006; Kauffmann & Kuh, 1984; Gray et al., 2002), appreciation of the humanities (Kauffmann & Kuh; Kitsantas, 2007), and help change their attitudes and behavior in general (Armstrong, 1984; Kauffmann & Kuh). In addition, students have said that once returning from their ISAP experience, they are more likely to travel again, both nationally and internationally (Hadis, 2005; Kitsantas, 2007). As one can see, college students attribute many short-term benefits to their ISAP experience. However,

the question remains whether these attributed changes of an ISAP college student have recognizable long-term influence.

Summary

In general, the findings in these studies confirm that there are numerous short-term benefits for students who study abroad. This section has explored the many types of ISAP experiences, the current need for more ISAP experiences within higher education that will allow more opportunities for students to gain a holistic education, and the role in which educators can play during the ISAP experience. Research has shown that if a student participates in ISAPs, then he or she will have a better understanding and appreciation for the world around them (Armstrong, 1984; Gary, 2002; Kauffmann & Kuh, 1984; Sandell, 2007; Thomlison, 1991). However, this raises the question: can ISAPs have long-lasting effects on college graduates? Current research does not provide the answer to this important question. The purpose of this study is to pave the way for future research about the lasting benefits of ISAPs.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

The ISAP experience pushes students out of their comfort zones, gives them a better global understanding, and forces them to interact with people who are different from themselves. All of these things contribute to the students' holistic development. The information gathered will allow one to see firsthand accounts of the impact that the sending college alumni had in their personal development during their time abroad. The purpose of this study is to establish that the ISAPs coordinated through the sending college do have long-lasting influence on their students.

Problem Statement

Due to the lack of research that is currently available, the purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate and understand the personal development of college graduates that occurred during their undergraduate study abroad experience. The results indicate that there is a perceived relationship between a student's ISAP experience and their individual holistic development. Analysis of this development was done by recording their motivations, influences, and experiences of the student's semester overseas.

A series of questions for this study were created by focusing on two previous quantitative study questionnaires. The first study was used at Point Loma Nazarene

University (Strawn & Archer, 2004), and the second study (Snyder, 2008) was conducted at the sending college--both used to assess off-campus study programs. Students who were involved in any type of study abroad program at the time were the participants for that study. These programs included short-term mission trips, spring break trips, and summer experiences. After looking over both questionnaires, five different areas of interest were chosen to use as this study's focus: career choice, personal values and behavior changes, relationships, spiritual growth, and intellectual knowledge. Hearing firsthand from the participants, the research will be able to find and explain the connection of the long-lasting perceptions of personal development to their study abroad experience if there is any. The results found can help guide the creation of ISAPs that will foster the most personal development for a student. In addition, with little found research on this particular topic, the results will encourage further future research.

Research Design

A qualitative design was chosen for this study helped describe and better understand the relationship of the ISAPs and the holistic impact they had on college graduates. It was hoped that the information sought would lead to a description and understanding of these personal developmental changes. Knowing that many studies focus on the short-term impact that ISAPs have on current college students, this research fills a void by seeking to investigate the impact that ISAPs had, and continues to have, on their lives. This qualitative method was used to "fill in the missing holes" by confirming and adding to the existing quantitative and qualitative studies done on the short-term impact.

Before conducting the official interviews, the researcher conducted a pilot study on one individual who studied abroad at an institution other than the sending college. This allowed the researcher to alter her questions and research protocol for the formal interviews. For the purposes of this study, a convenience sample was used. A convenience sample's participants are "selected on the basis of just that, convenience" (Ferber, 1977, p.57). Of the eight participants selected to participate in semi-structured interviews, six agreed to participate. The interview was administered over the phone or through face-to-face interviews depending on the participants' geographical location. The participants included college graduates who had participated in a study abroad experience through the sending college between the years of 2002-2006. Though this study only considers four different ISAP locations, the sending college does utilize 11 other international locations at which students receive academic credit ("Off-Campus Semester Programs", 2009). The research included a semi-structured interview administered with the purpose of encouraging and guiding discussions between an interviewer and the participants.

Research Context

The interviews were conducted in a variety of locations. One interview took place over the phone. Five face-to-face interviews were conducted in the homes of the participants and in public locations including the sending college's Student Union and a local coffee shop. Although the locations and experiences for each participant are different, they each had one thing in common: they are graduates of the same small, mid-western, 4-year, Christian liberal arts institution that enrolls roughly 1,800 students a

year. The entire study was conducted over a four-week timeframe during the months of March and April 2009.

Participants

Participants were selected based on the flexible parameters of convenience sampling, the researcher's personal knowledge and trust in the candor of the participants, and the ability of being able to contact each of them. Each of the participants contacted had graduated from the sending college within the past five years. This group of six individuals included three men and three women, selected with a conscious effort to avoid two duplicates of a study abroad location. The purpose of this was to get a diverse perspective of the sending college's study abroad programs. The locations of these study abroad locations included Lithuania, Ireland, England, and Spain.

Procedure

After receiving permission to conduct this study from the university's Institutional Review Board, the researcher contacted the six participants. Because two of the participants backed out from the study, the researcher contacted two additional participants. Therefore, eight graduates were contacted, only six of whom participated in this study. Depending on the contact information available for the participants, they were either contacted by phone or by email. The researcher explained the intentions of the study and asked for their voluntary participation. During the initial interaction, each participant was asked for several dates and times that they were available to be interviewed. This entire process of lining up and scheduling interviews took two weeks.

The interviews were structured around themes from two quantitative studies that focused on off-campus study abroad programs. Specifically looking at the study

conducted at the sending college (Synder, 2008), the researcher identified categories that current students of the same institution mentioned as being short-term effects from their study abroad experience. These abroad experiences did include short-term mission trips and January Interterm trips, which are not included in this particular study. Recognizing five areas of identified short-term impacts, the semi-structured interview questions and prompting questions were created. These questions can be found in Appendix A.

During each of the interviews, the researcher handed-out, emailed or read a copy of the thesis consent form that can be found in Appendix B. It was anticipated that any ill-related effects or risks would be minimal to none. After receiving the respondents' consent, the semi-structured interviews were conducted. As mentioned, one of the six interviews was conducted over the phone and the other five were done face-to-face.

Audio recordings were made of each interview and notes were taken both from the interviews and from the recordings. The purposes of the audio recordings were intended for the researcher to go back and observe, analyze and organize the thoughts shared. The interviews were transcribed and then coded by the researcher. Coding started by identifying the five focus categories that were previously defined in Chapter 2. During the coding process, the researcher incorporated two stages used in the constant comparative method that Glaser (1965) described in *The Constant Comparative Method of Qualitative Analysis*. The first stage used is "comparing incidents applicable to each category" (p. 439) which means, "While coding an incident for a category, compare it with the previous incidents coded in the same category," (p. 439). The second stage described is "integrating categories and their properties" (p. 439) which means "as the coding continues the constant comparative units change from comparison of incident

with incident to incident with properties of the categories which resulted from initial comparison of incidents” (Glaser, p. 440).

Also during the coding process, every effort was taken to ensure that no harm was done to anyone who participated in this study. Each recorded interview was kept in a secure location, not allowing any public access. In addition, pseudonyms were used in identifying individual participants. In order to maintain confidentiality, each quote used was edited to remove any personal identifiable references. This process of interviewing, transcribing, and coding each participant took three weeks to complete. Once the data was recorded and presented in a written and oral format, the researcher destroyed the original records.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

Findings from this study are organized under major themes that were found after analyzing the six interviews. Participants, who are introduced in this section, represent multiple ISAP locations, motivations for participation, experiences remembered, and lasting changes recognized. The bases for these lasting impacts were explored through self-perceptions about the participants' study abroad classroom experience, their interactions with the indigenous people, and their participation in the new culture outside of the classroom. In order to determine whether significant changes that took place while the participants were abroad had made a lasting impact, the questions asked were directed towards the participants' lives today.

Introduction to Participants and Their ISAP Locations

Before addressing the self-perceived long-lasting impacts that ISAPs have on college graduates, it is important to introduce the participants and their unique experiences. As will become evident later in this section, not all participants were engaged in the same activities or environments.

Sara Montana studied in Klaipeda, Lithuania during the spring semester of her sophomore year. She had indicated that her reasoning for studying abroad was because “it fit within my social work degree...and I wanted to understand what life was like in an

Eastern Europe country.” Currently, she is living and working in Chicago, Illinois and has plans to pursue a Masters of Social Work degree next fall.

Adam York also studied in Klaipeda, Lithuania but during a different academic year than Montana. York studied abroad during the fall of his sophomore year and had several motivations for going. Being an adventurous young man, he enjoyed trying new things. Originally, York narrowed the ISAPs down to four different locations, but for various reasons chose Lithuania. Lithuania was the “one I knew the least about and that was kind of exciting. I knew that I could speak English there, but I could also really dive into the culture there because I was going to be living with non-American students.” Today, York is living in Indiana, completing graduate school, and looking for a job overseas.

Montana and York both mentioned their living conditions while studying in Lithuania. LCC International University, the school where they both studied for four months, is a liberal arts school in Eastern Europe. The residence hall is multiple stories high and is about a 25-minute walk away from campus. Each room contains three to four student roommates from all over Eastern Europe. The student population is quite diverse, representing about 20 different countries. The majority of the employees at LCC International University are American or Canadian. All of the staff and faculty members are Christians, but the school itself does not require students to have a Christian commitment. This setup is necessary to keep in mind when gauging their lasting impact of their holistic development.

Gretchen Dakota participated in the sending college’s Irish Studies Program (ISP) during the fall semester of her sophomore year. Having an Irish heritage and the

experience of living there when she was younger, Dakota only saw it fit to study abroad in Ireland when the opportunity arose. Today, Dakota lives in Indianapolis, Indiana and uses her undergraduate Biology degree to work with an educational program teaching about exotic animals. This fall, she anticipates going to Kenya to pursue full-time missions work.

Frankie Rhode also studied during the fall semester of his sophomore year at the ISP, but again, during a different academic year. He went over as a Resident Assistant (RA). Rhode hoped that if he studied abroad, it would give him additional maturity and leadership experience that would be valuable when he returned home. Currently, Rhode is pursuing his Masters degree in Business Administration and working at a college in the area of Student Affairs.

Though both Dakota and Rhode studied for three and a half months during different years, their living conditions were very similar. There were roughly 30 students from the sending college studying in Greystones, Ireland, and about one third were men. Students lived in the “man house” and the “girl’s dormitory”. The ISP leaders lived nearby, which gave the students a little more freedom than if they were living in a residence hall on their home campus in the United States.

Kate Jersey left during spring of her junior year to spend four months in London, England studying at Huron University. Her main motivation for studying abroad was influenced by her academic major, business marketing. In order to be marketable within the business profession, Jersey alluded to the importance of having a global understanding because of how global the business market is. On top of that, Jersey had a personal desire to travel outside of North America. Her living conditions were unique as

she shared a large flat with 11 other American students. There were few rules or guidelines while living there, so Jersey experienced a lifestyle that was completely opposite of her upbringing and what she had experienced at the sending college which has a fairly strict lifestyle code. Today, she is living in Nebraska and working in public relations.

Benjamin Maine had one of the most unique ISAP experiences in part because he traveled alone and had no prior connections with anyone in his host country. During the fall semester of his junior year, Maine studied in Seville, Spain and lived with a host family for four months. “It was a woman and her two daughters. I also had a roommate who was also from the program...and she (the host mother) also had hosted students from another school that was only European students.” His focus for studying abroad was connected to adding a double major of Spanish Language to his academic studies and gaining a better understanding of the culture. Today he lives in Indiana and will attend Indiana University this fall to pursue graduate studies.

With these unique experiences noted, each of the participants confirmed the educational experiences and personal development that took place in each ISAP location and helps shape their lives today. In order to understand this in a more defined way, the following sections will recount major themes that became evident during the individual semi-structured interviews.

Perceived Intellectual Knowledge

As in most American educational settings, the goal for a student is to gain knowledge on a variety of subjects. The ISAPs have the same academic learning

objective. In particular, language students will have an advantage when living in a culture that speaks the foreign language they are studying.

B. Maine: As a language student and someone who is pursuing languages, it was a great opportunity to practice constantly...I would say that studying abroad is a crucial part in higher education, especially language students. I don't think that any language student should go through college without studying in their target language culture because there is no such comparison. You can never learn that much. I learned more in that semester in language and culture than I did in the four years of studying I did at [the sending college].

Though the other participants did not study abroad for language purposes, their stories confirm that they did gain knowledge and retain that knowledge years later. Through a variety of academic courses taught, students who participate in ISAPs also gather knowledge.

Both graduates who participated in the Irish Studies Program spoke highly of the information that they still recall from their classroom experience years ago.

G. Dakota: The way we learned it was great and helped us to really learn and remember it, because you're learning the same thing in every class but from a different perspective. So you're learning it from a linguistic perspective, you're learning it from a literature perspective. You're learning the poetry and what writers wrote at what times and how did their poetry line up with what was going on culturally. So all of the education was very much ingrained in us.

F. Rhode: It is so hard to remember where I learned everything because the classes were so integrated. We would go see a historical sight and while we were

there, they'd reference something that we had already learned. It was hard to be able to know whether that came from Irish geography or biology, Irish literature or poetry. It was so integrated that you couldn't remember where you learned it, but you knew the information...I can definitely recall those things today.

Historical dates and literature are not the only things that these ISAP students experienced. For Kate Jersey, it allowed her to get firsthand and practical knowledge of the business world.

K. Jersey: I was taking classes in marketing and consumer behavior, international relations and history of London...I also had an internship for a public relations agency that was there...Public relations and marketing are so international now, even though it was in London, there was still a lot of examples to see and things that I could relate to public relations in the states.

Jersey, York, and Montana all gained a better global perspective from their classroom experience while being one of the few American students within their classrooms. These graduates were able to recall lessons that they learned from their European peers.

A. York: I also took a class that was another business class that was on organizational development and communication. I was the only American in that class too, so that was really interesting. Especially when thinking about business and ethics and those sorts of things in a different context.

For Montana, her social work major was able to take her education outside of the classroom walls. "I spent times in the trash heaps working with people and those images don't leave your mind" said Montana. She continued

That experience helped shape me and my passion to wrap my brain around poverty. It helped me a lot with my social work because here's a country that doesn't have health care. How did Lithuania interact with their poor and how can I do that here – how do I translate that?

All six of the participants were able to share from their classroom experiences and the facts and lessons that they learned. The classroom setting is only one arena that these college graduates were able to gain a historical context about the host culture. Living with non-American students allowed each participant to gain a better understanding about the world around them. In other words, these graduates confirmed that as a result of an ISAP experience, they now think differently about the world.

Globally Minded and Engaged

By the time that each respondent spent three and a half months or more living and learning in another country, their stated answers about whether they consider themselves globally minded or globally engaged were all positive. For some, they continue to read about or travel to those host countries. For others, their understanding about how or why their host cultures create government policies or understand what is socially acceptable increased. Due to their ISAP experience, they claim to act and think differently.

B. Maine: The interesting thing culturally there, things happen later in life there. A lot of people don't get married until their upper twenties and mid thirties...They don't get married until they're financially stable and have their own place. And so until they've worked a job for a while and can get out and buy their own place and live there, then they'll get married.

Other differences that Maine was able to recall during the interview included Spain's time schedule for eating meals, having no official state religion, and understanding how the Spanish culture really influences their language. Lastly, Maine mentioned how he still reads the Spanish newspaper online not only to keep up with the Spanish dialect of the language, but to also keep up to date about events that are happening in a place that he once called home.

When Montana first arrived in Lithuania, she noticed how "cold" the people were towards her. "At first it was pretty difficult for me...they are a lot more reserved people," she commented. She quickly added that she had learned that their "interaction with people and developing relationships, though it seemed reserved, was very honest." She also noticed how the Lithuanian history of being controlled by the Soviet Union played into the people's lifestyle.

S. Montana: To me, I saw within the government a country that is trying to come out of a devastating time in history. The Soviet Union is trying to really get their feet back on the ground, but by doing that it compromised a lot of their culture and how they would thrive.

Both Jersey through her internship experience and Rhode through casual conversations quickly learned how others viewed America and how American's speak about themselves.

K. Jersey: People would be annoyed when people would refer to America just as the United States, they'd say that 'you're not the only united states!' ...or if you say you're from America, they'd say 'there are other America's out there!'

F. Rhode: I think it was when the 9/11 anniversary just happened and we just started the war in Iraq...an interesting perspective to see what the Irish people felt. The European Union had just formed and Ireland started receiving huge benefits from them...to be able to talk to people and engage in conversation about how they thought of American culture and what they thought of Irish culture and seeing that balance...You can't close your mind off to those things anymore.

Lastly, York's comment captured all six of the participant's responses, confirming the positive impact that ISAPs can have on an individual when developing their own global understanding.

A. York: I'm still developing my cross cultural understanding and identity...I think that when I understand a diverse group of people and a diverse culture, just as I get to know somebody who has lived a different life than me, my life is enriched inevitably because of that. I value that.

Responses suggest that graduates do rely on the culture's social influences for clarification of intellectual knowledge and becoming globally minded. Expectedly, participants commented on the impact that their ISAP culture had on them in their spiritual development.

Spiritual Development

The majority of participants mentioned having an increase in spiritual awareness of their host culture, a clearer understanding of their relationship with God, and a greater appreciation for the church at large. All of these things the participants attributed to their time studying abroad.

For some participants, this perceived personal spiritual growth was associated with their time away from an environment that fed them their faith on a regular basis. By being alone, participants had to learn to make their faith their own. Dakota mentioned, “I think my relationship with God was the strongest it’s ever been. We didn’t have regular chapels. It was based on our personal interactions with each other and being proactive.”

For other participants, their time abroad forced them to wrestle with their own faith and beliefs. For Rhode, he admitted that his spiritual growth improved from his time in Ireland when he struggled to grasp the idea of what it means to have identity in Christ.

F. Rhode: I felt like my identity was wrapped up in my accomplishments and what I did, what leadership position I held, what status I had with my friends, or how I was viewed by others. ...not much of it came from or related to what Christ did for me and how Christ looked at me... I began to really wrestle with the identity resting on Christ and not what leadership positions I have...It really began to shape the big concept of or just the big spiritual concept of is learning my identity in who Christ is.

Maine struggled during his time in Spain to trust God and the plans He had for him. “I think one of the biggest ways that I grew spiritually during that semester was learning to trust the Lord and knowing that he had plans that were better than mine,” said Maine. Not having close friends with him in Spain was very difficult for him, being the relational person that he is. During his ISAP experience, Maine also mentioned, “I became much more comfortable in who the Lord was making me to be, not because of my parents, but because of having such a unique experience that really shaped me.”

Both Jersey and York mentioned how during their time abroad, they were challenged to make their faith beliefs more concrete. During their ISAP experiences, both participants attributed much of their spiritual growth to living with many non-Christians.

K. Jersey: I'm trying to or realizing that I was one of the only people whose faith is really significant part of their life in this environment and then figuring out how to present that without being this person who's like talking down to others or coming across as 'holier than thou'... I just really wish more people at [the sending college] could have that experience because it was so good that we lived in the space where it has brought us to a place, recognize our faith, understand it, and become comfortable in it.

A. York: I was in a class talking about the history of Christianity and most or at least half of the students weren't Christians...I was already at a time in my life where I was starting to ask these questions about my faith and wondering 'okay, I've been able to learn all these things in a place that's not really hard to live and now when a lot of people disagree with me, am I really going to do this? Am I going to commit to this?' I was really wrestling with, 'am I going to stick to what I said I believed?'

Because of Jersey and York's unique experience with living amongst non-Christians, both reported that their outlook on ministry now looks different.

K. Jersey: It gave me more ability to be confident in my faith...It is possible to still relate to people who do not believe anything that you believe. That through relationships, it gave me a better perspective of how relational ministry is, especially when you meet people who aren't Christians or practicing their faith in

the same way that you are. It made me recognize so much more that it's through relationships, trust, and honesty that you even begin to build credibility with another person. So when people talk about evangelism or practiced it in very quick ways, it's harder for me to understand that because I saw how much trust that needed to be built in the relationships I had that semester before anyone would come to church with me or engage in that kind of conversation, there had to be trust built.

A. York: I wanted to connect with my roommate on a deeper level more than just wanting to get along but I wanted my faith to mean something to them, so I spent time with them and tried to see how what I was living could be of value to them. I think I was always wrestling with that because I wanted in a sense to have an evangelical focus. Sometimes that word sounds overly aggressive and forced, but it was living amongst them and wanting them to know who I was whether they believed it or not. I wanted them to see who I was.

To York's delight, he received a letter at the end of his semester in Lithuania from his Irish roommate. In the letter, he said, "you made me reconsider my faith again." Even years later, York said that he still receives letters from this particular roommate saying that he is "a person that continues to challenge his life." As far as York can tell, his former roommate is living his life differently because of the example that York lived out during his time there.

The participants not only identified or confirmed their spiritual growth blossomed from their ISAP experience, but in several of the responses, participants acknowledged their appreciation of different church traditions.

A. York: Learning in the context, it made me consider Catholicism...I visited a lot of orthodox churches. I was at a church who was led by an Anglican woman minister and so going through the sacraments more formally and the liturgy of that made me think ‘wow, I value some things in this that I didn’t even know and I probably would have just criticized before really understanding.’

K. Jersey: The church I went to while I was in London was called Holy Trinity of Brompton and it was one of the best churches that I’ve ever attended. It was an Anglican tradition...I felt like it was one of the first churches that I’ve been to where I really felt the Holy Spirit move in a way that I hadn’t before in a church. Since then, it has given me perspective of other churches that I’ve gone to, especially since I’ve moved to Omaha. Looking at churches and I’ve seen what I like in a church...It has been something that I compare and gives me different perspectives on different churches that I attend now.

The comments of these participants suggest that church involvement and personal ownership of their faith are critical factors in the positive developmental process. This involvement and ownership not only influences the participants’ understanding of their own faith, but it allowed them to connect with people outside of their ISAPs. The participants claimed that these relationships not only played an important role in their developmental process, but it allowed them to connect with people with whom they continue to form relationships.

Relationships: Perceptions, Communication, and Continued Friendships

During five of the six interviews, participants mentioned that they learned to appreciate or value relationships in a completely new way.

S. Montana: I soon quickly learned that their interaction with people and developing relationships was though it seemed reserved, was very honest. That helped me see how sometimes the way I interact with people seemed awfully fake and always happy when I would even have a bad day. That dynamic hit me hardest right away...The one thing that I learned is once you are in that circle of friends, you're friends for good.

When asked if those interactions with Lithuanians influenced her own relationships and perceptions of people once being back in America, she answered with a resounding "yes."

S. Montana: It definitely did affect me. I remember the first time being back home and going to a grocery store and watching people and being overwhelmed how loud they were and how expressive they were. It took me the entire summer home; I struggled being in that environment...Now that I'm in the Chicago area, I'm surrounded by people of very diverse cultures and I have found that I have become more aware. When I am around those who are of different cultures, I'm more aware of how I present myself especially in that environment.

Two of the participants spoke directly about their changed attitudes and the greater appreciation they now have towards their family since returning home from their ISAP. Maine attributed this change to his interactions at church. "It's a small church about 60-80 people, most of them from the same family. A lot of cousins, aunts, and uncles," said Maine. Not only attending services that had a close-knit church family, but also living with a host family who valued family interactions, Maine returned to America with a greater appreciation for his own family. "I wanted to rely less on my family for my

identity but to love them more and appreciate them more,” said York. Living so far away from home and not having easy access with them, York learned not to take his family for granted. Today, York is intentional with his relationships both with his family and friends because of the lessons learned in Lithuania.

A .York: I think that I loved that the people you were with weren't always on a schedule. Once you were with them, you were important to them. I think that this is something that I have tried to apply in my own life. Even though I'm busy...when I'm with someone for an hour, I don't want them to feel that this is just a scheduled out hour. I want them to feel that they matter.

These respondents did not focus only on the lessons that they learned from observing their personal relationships while participating in an ISAP, but they also developed lifelong friendships.

Five participants indicated that they keep in touch with the indigenous people who were from their ISAP locations on at least a monthly basis through emails, social networks, or hand-written letters. Three respondents have returned to their ISAP host country to visit people since graduating from college to visit with those people that they made connections with during their time abroad. All six of the participants responded that even years later they continue to stay in touch with fellow ISAP friends. This includes roommates, host families, or professors and advisors. Two of the participants eventually married other ISAP student participants who traveled overseas with them. For obvious reasons, both respondents said that this relationship in particular was the most significant connection that they made while studying abroad.

Career Influence

The ISAP experience appears to play a very important role in the career path. All six participants attributed their time abroad to their choice of current or future careers. Some participants discovered a change of career interest while studying abroad. Others were able to get firsthand experience in their already anticipated career choice. Some saw that their ISAP experience opened up new doors for their career. No matter what it was, all six participants confirmed that their ISAP experience in one way or another affected their career decisions. Maine mentioned that he wants to pursue Hispanic linguistics and teach college Spanish courses after he receives his Master's degree.

K. Jersey: I worked three days a week... That was one thing that was valuable in later internships that I had. I was able to look back and see the differences between the two. When I go on job interviews now after graduating college, one of the biggest things that people will ask me about is my experience abroad.

S. Montana wants to pursue her Master's degree, too. After spending a semester in Lithuania and having the chance to understand their social system, poverty, the educational system, and through her time working with orphans, she made up her mind about what she wanted to do after graduating from college. "I'm going to psychological social work because the mind of man is very interesting. It really helped me to stimulate different ways of thinking and it has always reminded me that there are a lot of needs elsewhere," Montana added. As for York, he attributes his ISAP experience to his pursuit of a career within international education. York admits to actively seeking jobs overseas. "There's a good chance that I'll be working overseas a part of my life," York said.

Dakota and Rhode were directly influenced in their career choices through relationships that they had made while studying abroad. Due to a connection with a new friend named Kelly that now has a connection at a ministry in Kenya. “Kelly helped convince us that Kenya is the place for us,” stated Dakota. Rhode’s career choice was also impacted because of a strong relationship made while overseas. He learned a lot in his leadership position serving as an RA in Ireland and through his relationship with his supervisor. This helped lead him to pursue a career in Student Affairs.

F. Rhode: Professionally I’d say this gave me an experience because that was my first time working in Residence Life or student development. I had gotten the RA position and I worked really closely with the program director who was over there. He was great in helping me see the importance in being actively involved and group dynamics... Really taking care of the flock in a way, helping them grow and be stretched.

Personal Values and Changed Behaviors

Living in a new culture and developing close relationships influenced the six participants in numerous ways, but the greatest influence observed was in the area of their personal development. The remaining theme that was found in all six interviews were the respondents’ self-identified personal values and changed behaviors. These positive self-reported results include areas such as having an increased independence, self-confidence, maturity level, tolerance for others’ differences, their appreciation for another culture and more.

All six participants believe that they have become more tolerant of other people's differences and therefore know how to be more flexible since their time studying in a new culture.

B. Maine: My cultural awareness definitely improved over there. When you're there for an extended period of time, it starts to sink in and you start to get it and understand how the culture is different than what you're used to and you learn to adapt to the culture...I had to learn to be flexible.

K. Jersey: It was really good to live in that kind of environment. I still think about it when I interact with my co-workers now. It is just is not so much of a culture shock once leaving [the sending college]...I don't think that my tolerance has changed, but it gave me a different understanding of when people make those kind of decisions like drinking, doing drugs or having sex, it gave me more perspective of why they make those decisions.

F. Rhode: I definitely began to see a change in my tolerance and independence. One of the greatest changes in my life was to even begin to see the gender differences in other people...I think that one of the lessons that I'm continuing to learn...I think I began to learn that you know that there is a reason that we feel and act certain ways.

Learning to tolerate others differences was only one aspect of personal development the participants mentioned. An increase in confidence and independence came up in all six interviews as self-reported positive personal changes since returning from studying abroad.

B. Maine: I would say that I definitely changed for the better. Not only did my Spanish improve immensely, but I came back being more confident and competent in who I was, both in myself but also in my relationship with (his wife). Not only has my love of other people and different cultures grown, but so has my love for the Lord and my wife. I think I really grew up and matured and became my own person...I think I grew a lot in personal responsibility. Taking ownership of things, whether it be relationships or school work.

S. Montana: Studying abroad definitely boosted my confidence a lot in myself and who I am...It's even given me more confidence when moving to Chicago... I had confidence to move there by myself, not knowing anyone. Indirectly, Lithuania helped give me that push. I think that it's given me confidence when interacting with people from different countries. I have some understanding of what it is like. I don't feel like I have a mentality thinking that the U.S. does have all the right ways.

When asked about stewardship, Maine was the only participant who spoke about how his view or practice of being a good steward has changed because of his ISAP experience.

B. Maine: I think I became more aware of lots of environmental issues. At the time, there was a pretty severe drought happening there and there were a lot of conservation efforts going on regarding water usage...That was the first time that I've been in a drought situation...It's been good to start thinking about those things. We've taken on those things in our marriage and thinking about conservation and the environment and how to be green.

Though stewardship was not a value that was instilled in the majority of participants who studied abroad, other beneficial activities and tasks were adapted. For four participants, journaling became a regularly practiced discipline during their time abroad. Journaling was said to be used as a method to reflect, to vent frustrations, and it serve as a place to record their prayers said or lessons learned. Today, three of those respondents claim to continue journaling.

Two participants expressed having a greater appreciation for public transportation. Since returning, York commented, “I’ve also try to create a lot more margin in my life. I walk more places and I do those things because they make me reflect, they make me slow down and it makes me appreciate people.” As a result from her time in Lithuania, Montana mentioned how she prefers to use Chicago’s public transportation. The last common factor in their increase in personal development was the ability to take on more responsibility. Three participants claimed to have personally taken on more responsibility during their ISAP, and they connect this responsibility to their increase of maturity level that they developed while studying abroad.

These six accounts of the ISAP experience demonstrate elements of self-identified increase of personal development, spiritual understanding, global awareness, career influences, and continued international relationships as enduring changes that resulted from their time abroad. All six participants claimed that their ISAP experiences in college have helped shape them into the people that they are today. Rhode said, “I am the man, the better man that I am today because of this experience, rather than me just staying on campus with a four year classroom program.” York mentioned something very similar when he said, “My experience in Lithuania, studying abroad, is the most influential four

and a half months in my life at this point.” The six participants were asked one final question that affirmed ISAPs value to an individual’s educational experience and personal growth. During each interview, the participants were asked, “Should current college students study abroad? If so, why? If not, why not?” Not surprisingly, all six participants responded with an enthusiastic “yes!” and shared in their opinion the reasons why. With such strong statements, it seems apparent that ISAPs continue to have positive lasting impacts on college graduates.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

Research Limitations

The implications of this study support several long-term benefits of ISAPs; however, there are limitations of the study that need to be addressed. The limitations include the primary researcher having a bias towards ISAPs. The focus categories were too broad and the research itself had a narrow scope. The participants who gave self-reported answers were fairly homogenous and small in number. It would have been beneficial for the researcher to “triangulate, that is, to use multiple methods, data resources, and researchers to enhance the validity of the research findings” (Mathison, 1988, p.13). Each participant knew the primary investigator in some way, and the researcher did not study a participant who had a negative ISAP experience, which was also a limitation. Recognizing the study’s limitations, one needs to now look at the positive implications and recommendations that could improve this study.

Implications

These results tend to validate the value of ISAPs. Throughout this study, one can see the lasting positive perceptions that studying abroad continues to have on an individual. This study’s findings support the importance ISAPs have within higher education. All six participants were able to recall specific information learned while

studying abroad years ago. As an example of intellectual gain, language acquisition is enhanced through ISAPs. As Armstrong (1984) recognized, students who are immersed in a culture that uses a language other than English will learn the foreign language quicker and at a higher level of comprehension. A respondent in this study confirmed that in his ISAP experience language benefits were still perceived after his time abroad.

Several researchers also have noted, when an individual interacts with a foreign culture and experiences everyday life there, they come to have a better understanding of world affairs, cultural diversity, globalization, and an increased knowledge about that host culture (Gray et al., 2002; Kauffmann & Kuh, 1984; Lewis & Niesenbaum, 2005; Savick, 2008; Snyder, 2008). Recollecting those memories from their study abroad experience of three and a half months or longer, the participants were reminded how they were challenged by other people's worldview, their behaviors, and even religious beliefs. All six participants reported that they were positively impacted by ISAPs and as a result, they are now more independent and confident in themselves, their faith, and their ability to take on a new task today just as Black & Duhon (2006), Armstrong (1984), and Kauffmann & Kuh (1984) found in their studies. The six participants' self-reported answers even confirmed that their self-perceived understanding about the world around them is greater because of their time studying abroad.

This study may prove valuable to instructors who live and serve abroad and for ISAP directors who organize the details behind the scenes, providing the knowledge of what to plan so students' experiences contribute most to their holistic development during their time abroad. The results of this study add insights to what students retain post-ISAP and post-graduation. These results allow administrators of ISAPs to plan accordingly to

these focus areas to maximize the student's development. In the case of these six participants, the results show the ISAP experience has had lasting implications in the following areas: career choice, personal values and behavior changes, relationships, spiritual growth and intellectual knowledge.

Recommendations

Based on the implications, recommendations include the following.

1. Strongly consider making ISAPs a requirement for all undergraduate college students. This study's participants confirmed that being outside of their academic institution's environment and culture allowed them to gain more independence and confidence in themselves and in their ability to share their faith.
2. Have students interact directly with the country's indigenous people on a regular basis. The participants who lived with a host family, took classes with non-Americans, or had an internship reported having a greater tolerance of people's differences and a greater appreciation and understanding about the world around them.
3. Be intentional when planning the entire ISAP experience. None of the participants indicated a structured time for debriefing, but two participants reported the desire to have a formal debriefing process after their time abroad. Looking at one perspective of learning theories, Kolb (as cited in Evans et. al, 1998) points out the importance reflection has on an individual's ability to learn and retain a concept after experiencing it.

4. Another suggestion is to create a strong relationship between career services and ISAP participants. As several of the participants reported, the ISAP experience influenced their career choices. If the career service professionals know these needs and solutions of the world that the participants discovered while abroad, they may be able to make international connections through ISAPs. In return, this could then serve as a potential job or internship connection for other individuals who do not study abroad but do have a desire to work internationally.

The experience of studying abroad has a very positive impact on people and as shown in this study, participants returned home and continue to attribute some of their beliefs, actions, and attitudes to this particular experience years later. This study also emphasized the value that ISAPs have on an individual's life, and on society at large. This study has only started to skim the surface of what future researchers can continue to explore in measuring the long-term benefits and that in and of itself is the value of this study.

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APPENDIX A: GUIDED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Lasting Effects of an ISAP on College Graduates Interview Questions Used by the Researcher

1. Can you tell me briefly about your study abroad experience? How did you see yourself change once returning to America?
 - a. Where did you go?
 - b. What semester and year were you there?
 - c. What were your living conditions? (Home stay, on-campus dormitory, off-campus apt.)
 - d. What was your purpose/motivation of going?
 - e. When you returned, did you do any debriefing?
2. Would you consider that your intellectual knowledge increased while studying abroad? If so, how? (Can you still recall those things today?)
 - a. What did you learn about the culture you were living in?
 - i. Customs, values, language, traditions, country's history, etc.
 - b. How has your perspective of global issues been altered since studying abroad?
 - i. Awareness of world politics, social class systems, etc.
3. How did your ISAP experience change your view of God and your faith? What are you doing differently today because of your ISAP experience?
 - a. Your worship style?
 - b. Increase in mission trip experiences?
 - c. Volunteer more?
 - d. Views of stewardship?
 - e. Awareness of Christian persecution?
 - f. Spiritual disciplines? Reverence for God? Understanding of Scripture?
4. How has your ISAP experience changed your perspective about relationships? What's that look like today?
 - a. Did your stereotypes of other people or other countries change?
 - b. Do you have more tolerance of other's differences?
 - c. Your view of what community is.
 - d. Do you continue relationships that you made while abroad? How?
5. How has your study abroad experience changed your behaviors? What are you doing differently today as a result of your ISAP experience?
 - a. Greater confidence when approaching new situations?
 - b. Thinking critically when solving problems?
 - c. Do you find yourself coping or being more flexible in new/challenging situations?
 - d. Gained more of a personal independence?

- e. Changed the way you spend your money? (Charities?)
 - f. Do you keep up to date with global news? How & Why?
6. Did you have the chance to gain practical experience through a field service opportunity?
 - a. Did you ISAP experience help guide you in choosing a career?
 7. How did you see yourself change once returning to America? What was the greatest impact while abroad?
 - To see if they can reword anything that I have already asked or to bring forth new information!
 8. Would you recommend current college students to study abroad? Why?

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

The Residual Effects of International Study Abroad Programs on College Graduates

The purpose of this research project is to examine how International Study Abroad Programs (ISAP) has influenced a postgraduate student's life. For this project, you will be asked a series of questions about your time overseas, about your opinions and reflections regarding your time abroad and how that time has influenced your life post-college. It will take you approximately one hour to complete the interview questions.

All data will be recorded in two forms: audibly and manually, as well as be maintained confidential. The audio interview will be erased once it has been coded and recorded. The information will remain in the researcher's personal possession or locked at all times.

The anticipated risks or ill effects from participating in this study are minimal to none. However, at anytime you do feel that answering the questions during the interview stir up feelings of anxiety or regret you are free to withdraw.

One benefit you may gain from your participation in this study may be a better understanding of how your ISAP experience has made a difference in your life.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Anytime during the interview, feel free to withdraw without any penalty. You are encouraged to ask the investigator any questions you have before signing the Informed Consent form as well as throughout the entire study process.

If you have any questions about this study and your rights as a research subject, please contact the following person: Director of the Institutional Review Board, Office of Academic Research, Taylor University, Upland, IN 46989, IRB@taylor.edu .

I, _____ , agree to participate in this research project entitled, "The Residual Effects of International Study Abroad Programs on College Graduates." I have had the study explained to me and my questions have been answered. After reading the projects description, I give my consent to participate.

Participant's Signature

Date