

The Importance of Identifying Learning Outcomes Achieved by Graduate Students Who
Participate in Graduate Short-term Study Abroad Programs – Outline of Major Arguments

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In the globalized environment that exists today, short-term study abroad programs – lasting eight weeks or less – need to become more diverse and include more non-traditional student participation. Despite the growing popularity of short-term study abroad programs, only 14 percent of the nearly 283,000 U.S. students who studied abroad 2010-2011 were graduate students – a non-traditional student population (Institute for International Education [IIE], 2013). Many questions also still exist as to whether short-term study abroad programs result in actual learning for participants, so researchers must devote more attention to studying outcomes of short-term abroad programs. The higher education community specifically faces the challenge of demonstrating graduate student-related learning outcomes resulting from participation in short-term study abroad programs and using that information to encourage more graduate students to participate in such programs.

The typical demographics of students studying abroad have been the same for many years. During the 2001-2002 year, 65 percent of U.S. students studying abroad were female, 41 percent were juniors, and 83 percent were White (IIE, 2013). During the 2011-2012 year, 65 percent of U.S. students studying abroad were female, 36 percent were juniors, and 76 percent were White (IIE, 2013). The top five destinations for the 2011-2012 year were the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, France, and China (IIE, 2013). To expand student participation beyond the typical demographics even more, researchers have conducted studies to find out more about student motivations and for whether the students intend to study abroad or not (Kuzma, Kuzma, & Thiewes, 2012; Stroud, 2010); financing is typically included as part of such research. For example, for people who already want to study abroad, financing is not as much a deciding factor

as personality. However, for individuals who are unsure or not previously inclined to study abroad, the questions of how much and who will pay for the experience does play a role in his or her decision to apply for and participate in an abroad program (Kuzma et al., 2012; Stroud, 2010). In the current budgetary climate of offering the same or more activities and services with less and less funding, higher education institutions will need to focus on and address the specific study abroad motivators of student subgroups in order for such programs to be available to students outside the traditional demographics.

The academic community still lacks demonstrable, measurable research on the learning that results from short-term study abroad programs (Dwyer, 2004; GLEO, 2014; Dwyer & Norris, 2005), so many institutions now devote more attention to the study of "...academic, language, career, personal/social, and intercultural outcomes" (Dwyer & Norris, 2005, p. 137) of study abroad programs. For example, researchers study career development and professional growth as student learning outcomes for study abroad programs because skills related to global competency are becoming increasingly desired in career fields and businesses want globally competent employees (Cabrera & Unruh, 2012; Ghose, 2010; Hunter, 2004; Kavas, 2013; Peppas, 2005; Stearns, 2009; Stroud, 2010; Zhang, 2011). Many employers want and appreciate job candidates who have invaluable historical and cultural knowledge of an area, language, or people and use that knowledge to better understand the world around them. Research also shows that study abroad, when used as a vehicle for experiential learning, impacts global engagement and career choices (Ghose, 2010; Paige, Fry, Stallman, Josi, & Jon, 2009), and students who study abroad develop cultural awareness that extends beyond their time spent abroad (Chickering & Braskamp, 2009). Students tend to become more involved in their communities, more interested in global affairs and organizations, and more capable of communicating when faced

with barriers (Ghose, 2010; Paige et al., 2009; Zhang, 2011). The issue, however, is that the previously mentioned research has come from studies focused on undergraduate students, as they make up the majority (84 percent) of students who study abroad. Although some researchers found short-term study abroad programs to be significant tools for developing students' global views and abilities (Dwyer, 2004; Ingraham & Peterson, 2004) and adult learning outcomes and short-term study abroad literature exists, literature specific to graduate student outcomes from participation in short-term study abroad programs continues to be lacking (GLEO, 2014).

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