

The Long-Term Impact of Study Abroad on Honors Program Alumni

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Introduction

“Study abroad enables students to experience an interconnected world and to embrace difference rather than being threatened by it; it shows them the collective heritage of mankind” (Wolfensberger, 281). Indeed, study abroad is often thought to be one of the most effective of experiential learning opportunities, one of the so-called “High-Impact Educational Practices” or “HIPs.” These HIPs, articulated in the widely cited AAC&U-sponsored 2008 study led by George Kuh, and expanded upon with follow-up assessment data in 2013, of course, build upon the early theoretical framework of John Dewey, Clifford Geertz, Lev Vygotsky, and numerous others in the subsequent decades who recognized the value of experiential learning (Braid; Kolb; Strikwerda; and others). Not surprisingly, our assessment-driven environment, aimed at creating and sustaining the optimum educational conditions for student success within and beyond the classroom, increasingly emphasizes analysis of learning outcomes from these unconventional practices. Numerous studies have been conducted confirming the personal, professional, and societal value of study abroad for undergraduates by international educators, researchers, and major study abroad providers such as International Education of Students (IES), School for International Training (SIT), and International Student Exchange Programs (ISEP). Journal articles have also appeared documenting relatively small-scale studies on the nature and impact of study abroad. Some align with current trends in educational assessment focusing upon student learning outcomes of a specific study abroad program (see Doyle; Williams; Braskamp, Braskamp, & Merrill; Kilgo, et al); some focus on the impact of logistical differentials such as location, duration, pre-and post-prep and/or debriefing sessions (see Rexeisen, et al.; Engle; Dean & Jendzurski; Camarena); some on discussions of broadening intercultural competencies and awareness or developing attributes of global citizenry (see Kurt, Olitsky, & Geis; Shadowen, et al.; Wolfensberger); others on career impact and professional development (see Franklin; DeGraaf, et al.; Dwyer); and so forth.

There have also been several large-scale collaborative studies of the impact of study abroad such as the longitudinal GLOSSARI project of the University System of Georgia, focusing on student learning outcomes, especially on functional knowledge, knowledge of global interdependence, and knowledge of cultural relativism (Sutton and Rubin); the Georgetown Consortium Project, largely focusing on student advances in the target language, intercultural skills, and disciplinary learning (Vande Berg, et al.); and Study Abroad for Global Engagement (SAGE), a very large-scale study of study abroad alumni from 1960-2005, conducted by a research team at the University of Minnesota, heavily funded by a U.S. Department of Education grant. The SAGE project focused on identifying long-range impacts of study abroad experiences, hypothesizing and then confirming the personal and social value of study abroad for undergraduates in five domains: civic engagement, knowledge production, philanthropy, social entrepreneurship, and voluntary

simplicity (Paige, et al.). Subsequent studies expanded on SAGE, particularly, the U of Wisconsin-Madison study led by Dianna Murphy, et al. who examined the same measures of global engagement but added a control group of university alumni who had not studied abroad. DeGraaf, et al. expanded upon SAGE further, examining not only the personal impact of a semester-long study abroad experience among students at a small liberal arts Midwestern college, but also the long-term professional impacts.¹

Positive findings no doubt have influenced a growing commitment to study abroad, evidenced in the expansion of programs across colleges and universities throughout the country and in the 2014 launching of the *Generation Study Abroad* initiative. Engineered by the Institute for International Education, this five-year initiative seeks to double the number of U.S. college students studying abroad by the end of the decade in order to expand students' social and geo-political consciousness and to provide personal benefits such as increased problem-solving skills and heightened self-esteem (see McLeod, et al.). Yet, despite the concerted effort of over 400 colleges and universities across the country now pledged to this initiative as "Commitment Partners" (IIE, *Generation*), there is often minimal funding allotted within strapped higher education budgets to make this goal a reality. Currently, less than 10% of all US college students study abroad, and even of those motivated students who complete a bachelors' degree less than 15% study abroad (IIE, *Open Doors 2015 Fast Facts*).

International education expands a student's perspectives, encourages interest in cultural variations, promotes critical analysis, and strengthens observational and interpersonal skills. Yet, even more research is seemingly needed to confirm the value of study abroad, not only for the individual students involved, but for our communities and society at large, if we are to make study abroad accessible for all undergraduates of the United States. More data is needed to substantiate what many employers and international educators already suspect regarding the longer-term impacts of an international experience on college graduates of the 21st century if increased resources are to be secured.

We are specifically in need of data to determine if some of our "best and brightest," Honors Program graduates, whom we anticipate will be successful in their professional realms of choice and will function as responsible, productive citizens, are significantly impacted by study abroad experiences – enough to behave in notably different ways than their equally talented Honors Program peers who did not study abroad as undergraduates. This study begins to meet that need, examining the long-term impact of study abroad within a ten-year population of Honors Program alumni. It questions, "Does study abroad make a long range difference for Honors Program undergraduates? Or not?"; and it purports that, if it does, educational institutions of higher education, our government, and society at large must do a better job of promoting and funding it. The focus of this study most closely aligns with the SAGE study and with the Murphy, et al. subsequent study by focusing on Honors Program alumni self-reported behaviors that provide insights into the impact of study abroad over time – behaviors affecting students personally and professionally and behaviors potentially affecting society at large as well.

¹ Study abroad is increasingly valued by our graduates' employers; recent extensive research conducted by IES Abroad indicates that nearly 90% of graduates who studied overseas found jobs within the first six months of graduation (McMillan).

Methodology

Elmhurst College Honors Program alumni from the classes of 2005-2014 were surveyed. While finalizing my Institutional Review Board (IRB) proposal, I updated email addresses for the 478 names of Honors Program alumni², obtaining many through LinkedIn. Once IRB approval was secured, the survey was distributed electronically using the online survey tool, *Select Survey*, to 426 potential respondents (representing 89% of the alumni group for whom we were able to secure seemingly valid email addresses). The mailing yielded 165 completed surveys for a response rate of 39%. No compensation or incentive was offered. Of the 165 Honors Program (HP) alumni respondents, 78 indicated that they had studied abroad during their years at Elmhurst College, 87 did not.³ [Hereafter these groups will be frequently referred to as SA and NSA students, respectively.]

The survey included basic identifiers such as gender, academic major, number of years since graduation, and most importantly, inquiring whether or not the student studied abroad while studying as an undergraduate at Elmhurst College. If respondents indicated “yes” to studying abroad further questions were triggered to determine the general location and the length of study. This initial demographic data was followed by four main sections that solicited information on: 1) educational and career path, 2) civic engagement, both domestic and international, 3) internationally oriented leisure interests and activities, and 4) institutional loyalty. Though a few additional survey items were included, the sections on civic engagement and leisure activities largely drew upon the previous research and survey instrument of Murphy, et al., which queried indicators of student priorities and behaviors as a valuable lens for analyzing the long-term impact of study abroad. (See Appendix 1 for a copy of the complete survey entitled “Honors Program Alumni Interests and Pursuits.”)

Results and Discussion

Demographics

The basic demographic section revealed no surprises. Of the 165 respondents, 116 identified as female. This 70% is only slightly higher than that within Elmhurst College's general student body which is approximately 65% female; it is also consistent with the fact that the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) reports female students comprise 65% of nationally recognized Honors Programs and Colleges (“NCHC”). Among the survey respondents, of the 78 alumni who studied abroad, 58 or 74% were female. This aligns with the national trends; many more female students than male students study abroad (IIE, *Open Doors*). The majority (59%) of the study abroad students surveyed had completed short-term programs, 2-6 weeks in length. Regarding study abroad location choices, not surprisingly, the vast majority (74%) indicated Europe as their place of study; this was followed by a significant group (25%) studying in Central or South America. Only single-digit groups studied in Asia, Africa, and Australia. These latter sites are becoming more accessible and

² Honors Program alumni are defined here as those students who successfully completed the Honors Program requirements and graduated with the designation on their official transcripts and diplomas, as opposed to some students who may have participated in the Program for some period of their undergraduate years but never completed/graduated from the Program.

³ Note: the early years of the program that I inherited included a very small number of graduates; then the program grew considerably, so there are a larger number of respondents from the years 2009-2014. Eighty-one percent of the respondents had graduated six years or less prior to completing the survey. Fifty-nine percent of the respondents had graduated in the three to six year range.

popular, yet, US residents continue to select Europe as their predominant choice for foreign travel and study (IIE, *Open Doors*).

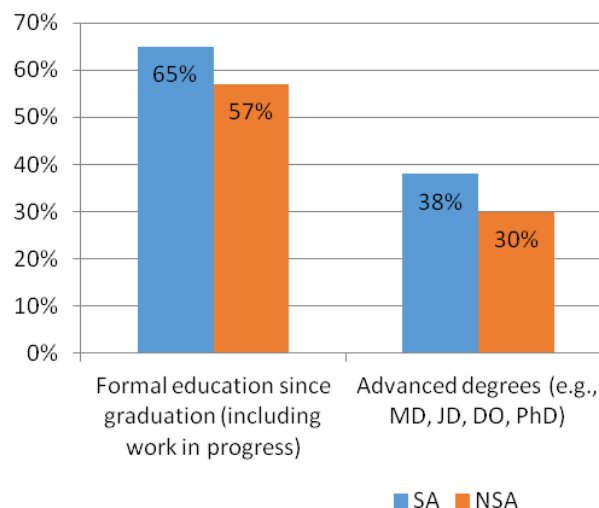
Educational and Career Path

Ninety-one percent of the respondents indicated they are currently employed, distributed across a variety of fields. Six specific fields were identified on the survey: Education, Business, Law, Health Professions, Retail, Trades; the category of Other was listed as a seventh field. Within those parameters, Education, Other, and Business were the largest fields represented with 35%, 26%, and 22% of all respondents, respectively. The option of Health Professions was selected by 15%, Law and Retail each by 4%, and Trades 2%. Students who studied abroad indicated their current employment in the field of education as 34 of the 78, or 44%; while only 24 of 87 students, or 27%, of non-study abroad students reported education as their most recent field of employment. Thus, there is a 17 percentage point rise between study abroad students and non-study abroad students working in the field of education or a 63% higher likelihood of educators among the study abroad group. Arguably, this bodes well for society's future, as these educators who possess personal global experience are directly influencing today's youth. While nearly 50% of the respondents indicated their current employment has global connections, only 5% indicated they currently travel internationally for employment purposes. So, career-wise within this group, global contacts are rather limited.

A significant number of the Honors Program alumni, 101 of the 165 respondents, pursued formal education since completing their bachelor's degree at Elmhurst: in graduate school, professional school, certificate programs, etc. This 61% positive response seems consistent with both the demands of the rapidly changing marketplace of our technological world and with Honors Program students' heightened motivation. Most interesting, relative to this study, is the seeming connection between pursuing formal education and/or earning advanced academic degrees and the experience of studying abroad. Of those alumni who studied abroad, [hereafter referred to as SA students] 51 of the 78, or 65%, pursued (or are currently pursuing) some form of formal education beyond undergraduate study, compared with 50 of 87, or 57%, of those who did not study abroad [hereafter referred to as NSA students]. And, of the students who studied abroad, 30 of 78, or 38%, completed advanced degrees compared to 26 of 87, or 30%, of those students who did not study abroad. (See Figure 1.)

More SA students may have pursued advanced education for various reasons including a need to complete employment-related curriculum requirements not available to them because of time spent overseas; or the pursuit may be reflective of an already self-identified, highly motivated population who sought expanding experiences even as undergraduates. But, arguably, study abroad had an impact in raising student curiosity, stimulating intellectual growth, and encouraging pursuits beyond a traditional four-year diploma. This study confirms students who studied abroad earned advanced degrees at a rate of eight percentage points higher than students who did not study abroad or in other words, there is a 27% higher likelihood of earning an advanced degree if an undergraduate studies abroad.

Figure 1. Percentage comparison of SA and NSA alumni post-baccalaureate educational paths.



Civic Awareness and Engagement

This section seeks insights into the alumni’s civic engagement and awareness by querying the frequency of specific behaviors. It draws heavily (and gratefully) upon the survey instrument of researchers Diane Murphy, et al., which is an acknowledged expansion of the SAGE study instrument with the addition of a control group of non-study abroad students (Murphy, et al., 4). Admittedly, these behaviors offer a limited lens into one’s civic engagement and/or awareness; and, of course, numerous factors no doubt contribute to the performance of these behaviors, but arguably they can provide an insight into some of the values and priorities of these young adults since all of the behaviors reflect optional, independent choices. This survey analyzes the frequency of these behaviors as potential indicators of the impact of study abroad both personally and socially.

Respondents were asked the frequency of their participation in specific behaviors on a Likert-type scale of "frequently, sometimes, rarely, and never." For discussion purposes, “frequently” and “sometimes” were considered to be positive responses, while “rarely” and “never” were viewed as negative responses. These items were repeated in two sections: one asking for respondents to "indicate [their] degree of civic awareness and engagement regarding *domestic* issues as reflected in the specific activities" and a second section asking them to indicate it regarding *international* issues. Nine behaviors were selected as potential indicators of civic awareness and/or engagement: 1) voted in an election; 2) organized or signed petitions; 3) written letters to an editor; 4) been involved in protests/demonstrations; 5) used the Internet to raise awareness about social and political issues; 6) made a purchasing decision because of the social or political values of a company; 7) contacted or visited a public official; 8) attended a formal talk or activity concerning (domestic/international) issues; and 9) given formal talks on (domestic /international) civic issues.

Perhaps most interesting are the items that solicited the largest percentage of overall response, either positively or negatively. The three activities in both the domestic and international sections receiving the greatest percentage of positive responses were: 1) voted in an election; 2) made a purchasing decision because of the social or political values of a company; and 3) used the Internet

to raise awareness about social and political issues. The two activities in *both* the domestic and international sections soliciting the highest percentage of negative responses (i.e., rarely or never) among all respondents were: 1) written letters to an editor and 2) given formal talks on civic issues. These positive and negative results are discussed immediately below.

The items with the highest levels of positive response provide valuable data. These percentages were high for all respondents, both SA and NSA, especially for the first two activities: 81% of all respondents voted frequently or sometimes in elections, relative to domestic issues; and 65% made a purchasing decision because of the values of a corporation, domestically. (The high response for these two activities echoes the Murphy, et al. study findings.) Both of these results indicate a relatively high degree of civic awareness and engagement that might be anticipated within a population of Honors Program alumni.⁴ As stated above, these two items solicited the highest level of positive response in the international section as well, though overall the percentages were lower, 50% and 48%, respectively. The lower levels indicate, not surprisingly, a greater concern for domestic issues than international ones, consistent with Paige, et al.

The behaviors reporting very high negative responses – writing letters to editors (96% for domestic issues and 98% for international) and delivering formal talks (88% domestic and 95% international) – are most likely reflective of contemporary culture and of the age of the survey respondents. Fewer and fewer people are reading print media or writing letters in the traditional sense, particularly young people under age 35. In any future research this item would most likely be discarded and instead a question regarding editorial response in the form of a blog post or Tweet or other popular digital path would be queried. The high negative response to the formal talk item may well be a reflection of the young age of the respondents, as most would not have yet acquired the experience and/or distinction necessary to merit guest speaker invitations.

For the purposes of this research, the breakdown of these responses to all nine behaviors by students who studied abroad v. students who did not is the most relevant (see Figures 2 and 3 below). In the two highest positive response categories for domestic issues, SA students indicated higher percentages than NSA: voting, SA 85% and NSA 77%; purchasing decision, SA 68% and NSA 63%. (See Figure 2.)

The highest yielding positive responses for international issues also indicated higher percentages for SA students than NSA: voting, SA 50% and NSA 49%; purchasing, SA 53% and NSA 45%. (See Figure 3.)

Thus, to the degree that these two activities provide a lens into civic awareness and engagement, students who studied abroad exhibit a higher level of that awareness and engagement, suggesting study abroad is indeed a high-impact practice with long-term social ramifications.

⁴ Note, by contrast to these respondents, the national voter turnout for the 2012 US presidential election was only 58% according to http://www.fairvote.org/voter_turnout#voter_turnout_101

Figure 2. Percentage comparison of SA and NSA alumni civic engagement regarding domestic issues.

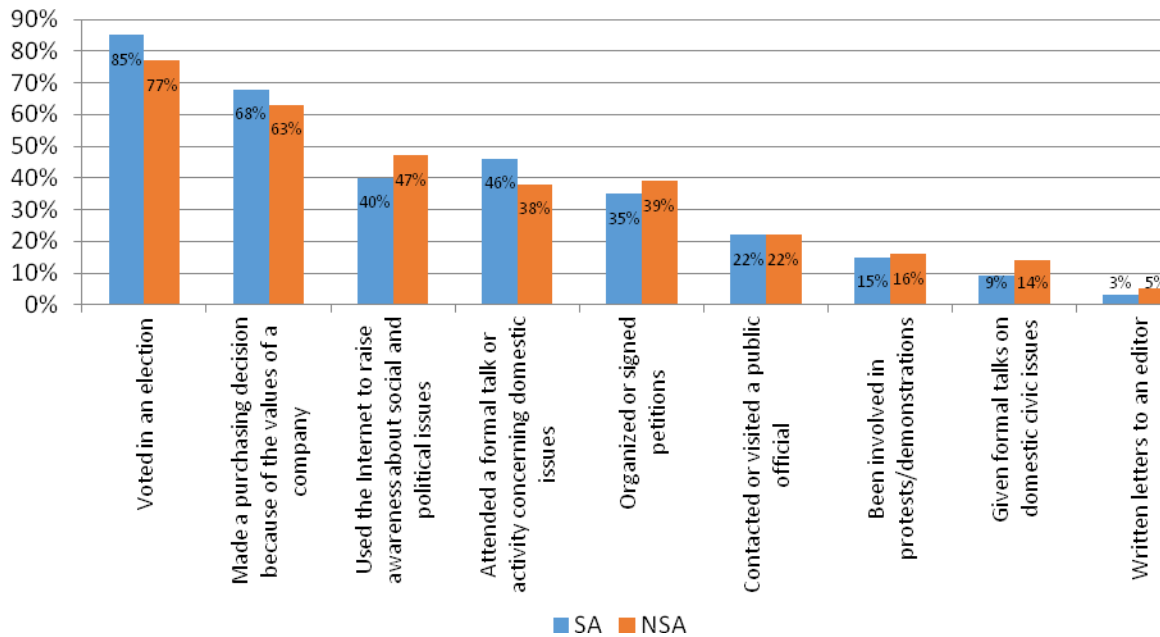
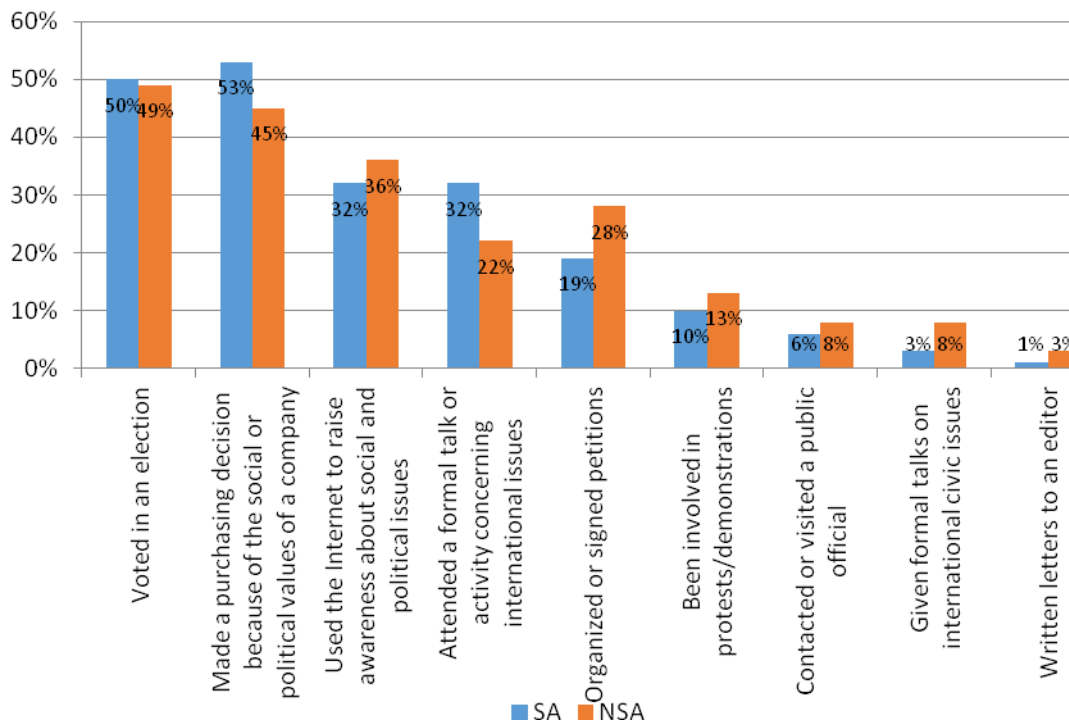


Figure 3. Percentage comparison of SA and NSA alumni civic engagement regarding international issues.

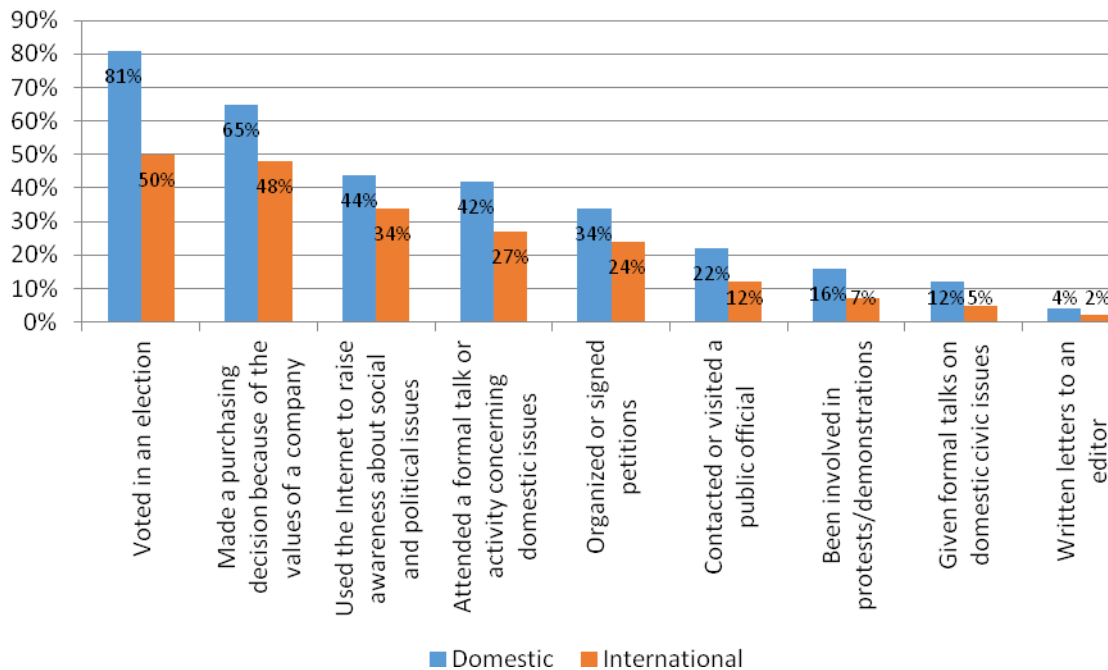


However, there appears a limited civic awareness and engagement among all of these alumni, at least as reflected in these behaviors, since seven of the nine activities regarding both domestic and international issues revealed an overall positive response rate among all respondents of less than

45%, shown in Figure 4. These findings are consistent with the Murphy, et al. study; six of the behaviors they surveyed, all quite similar to this study, revealed less than 46% positive responses on the domestic behaviors and seven of the international behaviors indicated less than 35% positive responses (8-9). Thus, given limited civic engagement overall, study abroad is arguably more necessary than ever to our society as a whole. Admittedly, SA positive responses surpass NSA responses in only four of the nine indicators; however, since the overall raw numbers are quite low, further research is needed before a valid conclusion can be drawn.

The final two questions in this section on civic awareness and engagement asked only the study abroad (SA) students to what degree study abroad "contributed to [their] civic engagement regarding domestic and international issues." A significant majority of the SA students indicated the positive impact of their study abroad experience. Of these SA students, 62% replied that study abroad contributed to their civic engagement regarding domestic issues "to a large or some degree"; 69% replied that study abroad contributed to their civic engagement regarding international issues "to a large or some degree." Study abroad is clearly perceived by participants as contributing significantly to long-term civic engagement and particularly, to global engagement – no doubt a benefit for our society as a whole.

Figure 4. Total percentages of positive responses to civic engagement indicators, both domestic and international.



Leisure Activities

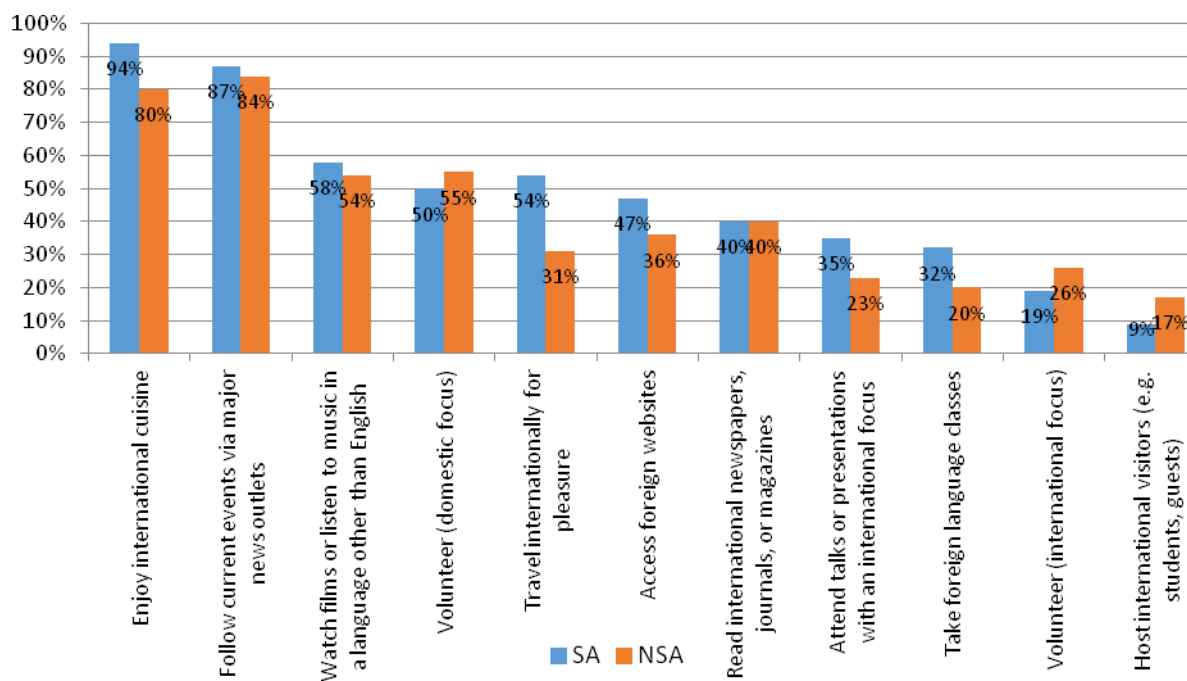
Again adapting the survey instrument of researchers Diane Murphy, et al., this segment explores the Honors Program alumni’s largely internationally focused leisure time choices. Respondents, both SA and NSA, were asked to indicate the degree of frequency of their participation in eleven different leisure activities: 1) volunteer or participate in organizations with a domestic focus; 2) follow current events via major news outlets; 3) watch films or listen to music in

languages other than English; 4) host international visitors; 5) read international newspapers or journals or magazines; 6) access foreign websites; 7) volunteer or participate in organizations with an international focus; 8) attend talks or presentations with an international focus; 9) enjoy international cuisine; 10) take foreign language classes; and 11) travel internationally for pleasure. Significantly, for seven of the eleven activities, the SA alumni reported a higher percentage of positive responses; one reported an equal response rate, and only three of the eleven activities queried solicited a higher percentage rate of positive responses versus negative responses among the NSA group than the SA group. (See Figure 5.)

The five activities with a greater than ten percentage points spread between SA and NSA students (indicating significant variance) were:

- Access foreign websites,
- Attend talks or presentations with an international focus,
- Enjoy international cuisine,
- Take foreign language classes, and
- Travel internationally for pleasure.

Figure 5. Percentage comparison of SA and NSA alumni choices of internationally oriented leisure activities.



The last item, exhibited a 23 percentage point spread, with 54% of the SA students indicating they currently travel internationally for pleasure and only 31% of the NSA group. In other words, the SA alums are 74% more likely to travel internationally than their NSA peer alums. While arguably, the SA had a greater propensity to continue to travel internationally, given their initial undergraduate choice to study abroad, the wide variance remains significant. Presumably, through their travel, the SA group continues to expand their global citizenry skills and perspectives and potentially broaden

their intercultural competence; all goals currently widely supported by educators as well as by employers.

The other four most popular activities (as listed above) exhibited an eleven to 14 percentage point spread between the two groups. Not surprisingly, “enjoy international cuisine,” while predictably even more popular with SA students than NSA (94% to 80%, respectively), was indeed the most popular leisure activity across all 165 respondents. No doubt this is a result of numerous factors including the increasing popularity and widespread accessibility of varied types of cuisine across contemporary America. This finding again closely mirrors that of the Murphy, et al. study (12).

The two activities with the next greater likelihood for the SA students in which to participate were: “take foreign language classes” and “attend talks/presentations with an international focus.” These two activities displayed a 60% and a 52% greater likelihood of participation among the SA group. Numerous factors dictate involvement in leisure activities: an individual’s amount of free time, economic resources, peer group interests, geographical accessibility, and so forth. It appears, nevertheless, that the SA experience is a significant contributor to subsequent choices of specific leisure activities. And, importantly, both of these particular activities (language classes and international lectures) would definitely enhance an individual’s intercultural awareness and broaden global perspectives.

Responses to the choice of “Access foreign websites” also suggest a broader sense of global awareness among the SA alumni. That item yielded the following results: 37 of the 78 SA respondents or 47% access foreign sites frequently or sometimes, while only 31 of 87 or 36% of the NSA respondents do so. This nine percentage point spread represents a 31% greater likelihood for SA alumni to access foreign websites than NSA. This propensity may be indicating greater curiosity about international affairs and/or it may be tied to the SA group’s higher percentage of international travel or to other reasons not obvious from this data collection. However, it would appear that once again the SA group has a greater likelihood to possess a higher level of intercultural awareness, hopefully, reflective of citizens with a broader global consciousness.

It is encouraging that for *both* SA and NSA respondents the second most popular leisure activity of those queried was “follow current events via major news outlets.” The two groups aligned closely at 87% and 84%; the three percentage points between them indicating only a 4% greater likelihood for SA than NSA to follow current events. This high rate in both groups may well be attributed to the fact that this audience of all former Honors Program members continues to be motivated and intellectually curious even after graduation.

Among the eleven leisure activities surveyed there were only three where the SA group had a lower number of positive responses than the NSA group. “Host international visitors” elicited the lowest response of any item across *both* groups of respondents. Indeed, only 22 of all 165 alumni (13%) indicated that they frequently or sometimes host foreign guests and, unexpectedly, the SA group was lower than the NSA group at (9% and 17% positive responses, respectively). No doubt there are a variety of explanations for the overall low response to this activity. For example, as noted, the majority of the students surveyed participated in a short-term study abroad experience that may not have included enough time in one place to make local friends who subsequently visited; some

students participated in service-type programs in developing nations where most commonly the local individuals involved would not have the economic resources to reciprocate travel; and/or the alumni and any international peer connections may not yet have secured the time or financial resources enabling international travel. Speculating that the international visitors may have been extended family members of our alumni might explain the higher response among the NSA alumni, since many of our first generation students at Elmhurst have international connections, but fewer of them have the resources and/or inclination to study abroad. Furthermore, there is also no way of knowing if the positive responses came from individuals hosting international visitors by virtue of career assignments. The very low overall raw numbers and the lack of specifics render it impossible to offer valid conclusions as to why this activity seems so unpopular. Further research is needed to determine the value of this survey item as a useful indicator of the impact of study abroad on subsequent leisure activity choices.

Two other leisure activities yielded interesting results meriting discussion: “volunteer or participate in an organization with a domestic focus” and “volunteer or participate in an organization with an international focus.” It is perhaps predictable, that 56% of the 165 total respondents indicated that they volunteer or participate in either domestically or internationally focused groups since, during undergraduate years in the Honors Program, these young adults tended to be quite involved in service activities on campus and off.⁵ As alumni, they continue that trend when selecting leisure activities. Not surprisingly, overall, all of the respondents indicated considerably lower participation in groups with an international focus, 19% of the SA students and 26% of the NSA participating in such a group, compared with 50% and 55% participation, respectively, for groups with a domestic focus. Presumably, the sheer availability of domestically focused groups versus the international ones accounts for the higher percentages within both groups, though more targeted questioning in any future survey would be warranted to explain the considerably larger interest (more than double) in domestic groups.

Notably for this study, volunteering overall received higher percentage of positive response from the NSA group than the SA group (see Figure 5). Fifty-two of the 87 NSA alumni, or 60%, indicated that they frequently or sometimes volunteer in some type of organization, compared to 41 of the 78, or 53%, of the SA respondents. It is impossible to know the reason(s) for the higher percentage of participation among the NSA group without further research. The disparity might be attributed to demographic differentials between the groups, which the survey did not cover, for example, a variance in current family obligations. That is, NSA participants’ slightly greater propensity for volunteer work may be linked to their having young children being involved in local organizations such as Girl or Boy Scouts or attending elementary schools that request volunteers; perhaps the SA group has delayed child-rearing to allow for greater travel time or has time commitments relative to the pursuit of advanced degrees (recall the survey yielded results of significantly greater percentage of international travel and a higher rate of advanced degrees among the SA group). Also, personality variables (not surveyed) may underlie the differential in volunteer rate. For example, perhaps SA students are more adventurous by nature or nurture and more inclined to spend leisure time in new environments. In other words, it may be that the NSA students are more focused on community area leisure activities than ones that take them away from their local

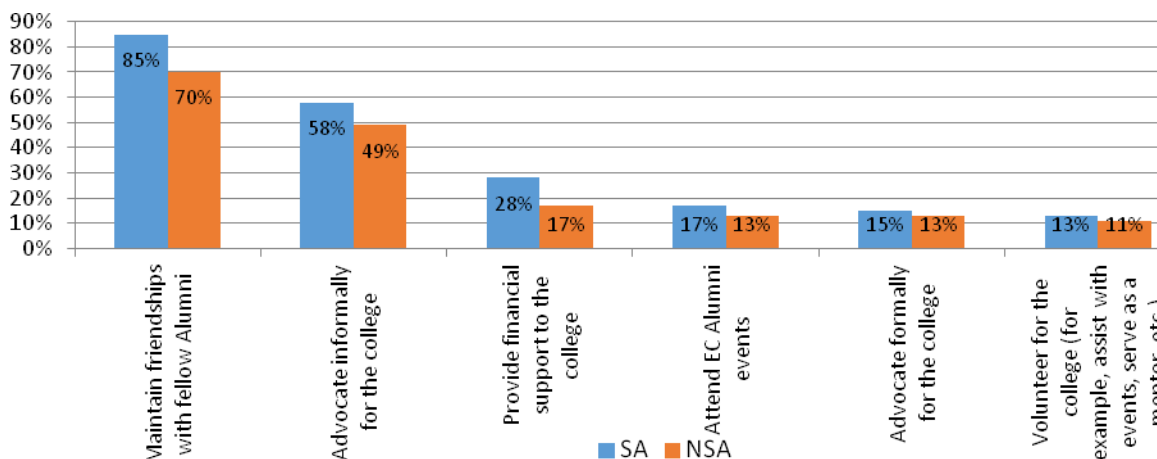
⁵ Internal programmatic assessments track this information.

environments, which would seem consistent with their undergraduate choice to not study abroad.⁶ Volunteer work may also be tied to the participants' current employment situation, but that connection was not surveyed. Clearly, further research is warranted in order to draw specific conclusions regarding possible relationships between a study abroad experience and subsequent selection of volunteering as a leisure activity, but nonetheless, the survey results do indicate 12% less likely involvement in volunteering or organizational participation overall among the SA students compared with the NSA students. This constitutes an unexpected finding not in accordance with the Murphy, et al. research findings.

Institutional Loyalty

The final segment of the survey focused on the alumni's institutional loyalty. In examining long-term impacts of study abroad, college and university providers of international opportunities may well question the potential impact of the experiences on institutional alumni support. It is important to validate the "give back worth" of investing in study abroad programs, not only for the potential positive impact on the individual students, personally and professionally, and on the society, at large, but also for the potential impact on the institutional providers. Increased loyalty and long-term support can reap benefits for future students, faculty, and institutional priorities. In recognition of this, the survey questioned the alumni about six potential indicators of institutional loyalty: 1) provide financial support to the College; 2) attend alumni events of the College; 3) maintain friendships with alumni; 4) advocate formally for the College; 5) advocate informally for the College; and 6) volunteer for the College.

Figure 6. Percentage comparison of SA and NSA alumni measures of institutional loyalty.



Not surprisingly, the category eliciting the strongest positive response across the entire group of respondents was "maintain friendships with alumni" (85% of the SA group and 70% of the NSA group). Certainly, previous studies have explored the powerful bonding that occurs while students travel overseas together, facing unfamiliar territory and sharing new (*and often daunting*) experiences within close proximity of peers. (See for example Doyle; Williams; Stebleton, Soria, and Cherney; Sutton and Rubin; and others.) Personal quotes from alumni such as those on the IES "The

⁶ Regardless of whether the organization has a domestic or international focus, it is presumed that more than likely the volunteer work is being performed locally.

Benefits of Study Abroad” website exemplify this power of study abroad; “the shared experience of living fully immersed in another culture made these friendships [those formed during a study abroad experience ten years prior] particularly poignant and enduring” (Dwyer and Peters). These experiences create the sort of affinity groups educational institutions now commonly promote. Many alumni associations, including that of Elmhurst College, capitalize on such affinity group connections, bringing together students who shared an academic major or living community or programmatic element such as the Honors Program; those who shared an international study experience are also logical candidates for such activities. The five percentage point spread between the SA and NSA groups represent a 21% greater likelihood of SA students to maintain friendships than NSA students. These connections may well translate into support for the College.

The second highest potential indicator of institutional loyalty was “advocate informally,” at 58% and 49%, SA and NSA, respectively. This strong advocacy within both of these particular groups may partially reflect a certain level of satisfaction with the College thanks to the students’ Honors Program experience.⁷ However, it is notable that the nine percentage point rise between SA to NSA groups, indicates an 18% greater likelihood for SA students to advocate informally for the College; if fostered, this factor could well lead to an expansion of donor support or new student recruitment. Indicators of institutional loyalty eliciting the lowest positive response, (though still slightly higher for SA than NSA alumni), are: alumni event attendance, formal advocacy, and volunteering for the College (15%, 14%, and 12%, respectively, across all respondents). Additional research is needed to determine ways to expand these measures of support.

Perhaps most significant of the findings in this Institutional Loyalty section of the survey relates to the respondents “provid[ing] financial support to the College.” Indeed, alumni associations and development offices would do well to recognize the significant difference between alumni giving within the SA population of this study. The percentage point variance between SA and NSA indicate that SA alumni are 64% more likely to lend financial support to the College. It is also notable that participation of the Honors Program alumni is definitely higher than the College average. Twenty-two percent of these former Honors Program respondents, across both SA and NSA groups, indicate that they frequently or sometimes financially support the College at some level, while currently Elmhurst College achieves just under 10% alumni giving, in line with the national average as reported in *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* (Will). That alone, may well indicate a reason for Development Offices to seek greater support for Honors Programs (and perhaps other types of impressionable experiences that emphasize active and collaborative learning, undergraduate research and other high-impact practices).⁸ But, as noted above, the giving factor comparison between SA and NSA alumni is particularly significant. Of respondents who studied abroad, 28% indicate they financially support the College frequently or sometimes while only 17% of the NSA alumni do. This considerable difference (a 64% greater likelihood of SA to give back) may well encourage administrators and potential donors to expand study abroad programming and funding,

⁷ The survey, while answered anonymously, of course, was solicited under the Director’s name. The Director develops and maintains a close, mentoring relationship with many of the Honors Program students, then alumni.

⁸ See the Noel Levitz study, *2015 Student Retention and College Completion Practices Benchmark Report* that articulates the “Top 10 Most Effective Strategies and Tactics for Student Retention and College Completion, by Institution Type.” The high-impact practices, (internships, volunteer work, experiential learning [study abroad], service-learning, etc.) as well as Honors Programs are among the top four indicators at both private and public universities.

as it would seem the benefits go well beyond providing enhancement of an individual student's personal and professional development.

Conclusion

The analysis of this Honors Program alumni survey clearly identifies a positive long-term impact for students who study abroad as undergraduates, especially in three of the four areas examined: career and educational pursuits; internationally oriented leisure activities; and institutional loyalty. The fourth area, civic engagement and awareness, yielded somewhat mixed results.

Regarding that civic engagement and awareness, the two indicators surveyed that elicited the most positive responses (i.e. voting and making a purchasing decision based upon values of the company) did report a greater percentage of study abroad students than non-study abroad students; and arguably, these two citizen behaviors hold significant potential social impact. However, NSA positive responses did surpass SA responses in five of the nine behaviors surveyed, in contrast with some of the findings of the SAGE project follow-up study by Murphy, et al. This unanticipated result merits further research, particularly since the overall percentages of positive responses across both groups were strikingly low, suggesting minimal civic engagement appears evident within this group of Honors Program alumni, at least as far as these survey items provide insight into that.

By contrast, the other three lenses employed to investigate long-term personal, professional and/or social impact of study abroad yielded significant positive results. Notably, the findings evidenced a 27% greater likelihood for the SA students to earn advanced degrees, thus, contributing to a more educated populous. Another significant finding relative to the impact of study abroad on educational and career path is the fact that SA students were 63% more likely to serve as educators of future citizens, potentially expanding their students' global awareness and consciousness and again contributing not only their personal and professional development but also to the advancement of modern society. In other words, study abroad seemingly provides a positive personal and professional impact as well as a potential positive social impact.

Leisure activities may also contribute to personal, professional, and societal growth. Though numerous factors (amount of free time, economic resources, physical prowess, peer group interests, geographical accessibility, and so forth) may determine leisure-time choices, it appears that an undergraduate study abroad experience contributes to subsequent choices of internationally oriented leisure activities. For eight of the eleven behaviors surveyed (in other words, 73% of the time) SA alumni yielded a higher percentage of positive responses for their participation in internationally oriented leisure activities. Specifically, they were 74% more likely to travel internationally than their NSA peers and the SA group displayed a 60% and a 52% greater likelihood of taking foreign language classes or attending internationally focused talks, respectively. Arguably, the SA greater propensity to continue to travel internationally, study other languages, and follow international issues is predictable given their initial undergraduate choice to study abroad. However, acting upon that propensity, the SA group continues to expand their global citizenry skills and perspectives and potentially broaden their intercultural competence; all goals widely supported by educators as well as by employers.

There was one unexpected finding within the leisure activity section of the survey; SA alumni reported 12% less likely involvement in volunteering or organizational participation overall compared with the non-study abroad students. Further research is warranted to understand possible relationships between a study abroad experience and subsequent selection of volunteering as a leisure activity.⁹

The final category surveyed, institutional support, yielded unequivocal results. Across all six indicators queried, SA respondents outperformed NSA alumni in percentage of positive responses, clearly supporting the hypothesis that study abroad provides personal, professional, and social long-term impacts. The three indicators with the highest overall percentage of positive responses were: maintaining friendships, advocating informally for the College, and contributing financially to the institution. The five percentage point spread between the SA and NSA groups represent a 21% greater likelihood of SA students to maintain friendships than NSA students. And most importantly, the survey indicates that SA alumni are 64% more likely to lend financial support to the College than are NSA alumni; a finding Alumni Associations and Development Offices would do well to exploit.

Further research is nearly always warranted; a wider sample, a comparison to non-Honors Program alumni, more detailed lifestyle questions, detailed descriptions of study abroad variables such as duration, location, experiential focus (i.e. service, internship, etc.), living arrangements, and so forth, would no doubt valuably expand the findings of this research. Yet, clearly, these findings are sufficient to assert numerous positive long-term personal, professional, institutional, and societal impacts subsequent to an undergraduate study abroad experience; and, most importantly, to justify encouraging Honors Programs, higher education administrators, and policy makers to fund broader access to quality study abroad experiences for all of our nation's undergraduates and future societal leaders.

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⁹ In any future survey, volunteering may be more appropriately placed in a civic engagement section.

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Appendix. Survey Questions

Honors Program Alumni Interests and Pursuits

Part I: Demographics

Sex:

Male Female Transgender Prefer not to answer

How many years has it been since you graduated from Elmhurst College?

1-2 years 3-4 years 5-6 years 7-8 years 9 years or more

What was your major at Elmhurst College?

Did you study abroad while attending Elmhurst College?

Yes No

Where did you study abroad? (Check all that apply)

Europe
 Asia
 Africa
 Australia
 Central or South America

What was your longest single study abroad experience?

2-3 weeks 3-6 weeks Full semester Full academic year
 Other, please specify: _____

Would you be willing to participate in an hour long focus group about your study abroad experience(s)?

Yes No

Part II: Career/Educational Path

Are you currently employed?

Yes No

Which of the following fields most closely describes your most recent employment?

- Education
- Business
- Law
- Health Professions
- Trades
- Retail
- Other

Does/did your most recent source of employment (corporation, educational institution, etc.) have global connections?

- Yes No

Do you travel internationally in your current or your most recent employment?

- Yes No

Have you pursued formal education since Elmhurst College?

- Yes No

Which type of education have you pursued?

- Graduate School Professional School Certificate Program Other,
please specify: _____

Have you earned a degree beyond Bachelor's level?

- Yes No

Part III: Civic Awareness and Engagement

This section is largely adapted from Murphy, et al., *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad* 24 (2014).

Please indicate your degree of civic awareness and engagement regarding domestic (local, state, national) issues as reflected in the activities listed below.

	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Voted in an election	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Organized or signed petitions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Written letters to an editor	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Been involved in protests/demonstrations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Used the Internet to raise awareness about social and political issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Made a purchasing decision because of the social or political values of a company	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Contacted or visited a public official	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Attended a formal talk or activity concerning domestic issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Given formal talks on domestic civic issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please indicate your degree of civic awareness and engagement regarding international issues as reflected in the activities listed below.

	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Voted in an election	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Organized or signed petitions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Written letters to an editor	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Been involved in protests/demonstrations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Used the Internet to raise awareness about social and political issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Made a purchasing decision because of the social or political values of a company	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Contacted or visited a public official	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Attended a formal talk or activity concerning international issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Given formal talks on international civic issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

To what degree do you feel study abroad contributes(d) to your civic engagement regarding domestic issues?

To a large degree To some degree Very little Not at all

To what degree do you feel study abroad contributed to your civic engagement regarding international issues?

To a large degree To some degree Very little Not at all

Part IV: Leisure Activities

This section is partially adapted from Murphy, et al. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad* 24 (2014).

How often do you engage in the following activities?

	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Volunteer or participate in organizations with domestic ties or focus	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Follow current events via major news outlets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Watch films or listen to music in a language other than English	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Host international visitors (e.g. students, guests)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Read international newspapers, journals, or magazines	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Access foreign websites	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Volunteer or participate in organizations with international ties or focus	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Attend talks or presentations with an international focus	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enjoy international cuisine of varied types	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Take foreign language classes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Travel internationally for pleasure

To what degree do you feel study abroad contributed to developing your interest in internationally oriented activities?

To a large degree To some degree Very little Not at all

Part V: Institutional Loyalty

In what ways and to what degree have you stayed connected to Elmhurst College since graduation?

	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Provide financial support to the college	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Attend EC Alumni events	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Maintain friendships with fellow Alumni	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advocate formally for the college	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advocate informally for the college	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Volunteer for the college (for example, assist with events, serve as a mentor, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>