Using an Internally-Developed Tool to Assess Intercultural Competence in Short-Term Study Abroad Programs

Yuliya Kartoshkina
University of North Dakota, USA
Lisa Chieffo and Tanya Kang
University of Delaware, USA

Abstract

An internally-developed tool was developed to assess the intercultural competence of students taking part in short-term study abroad programs. Four scales were built to assess possible change in students' host culture knowledge, cross-cultural awareness, cross-cultural adaptation, and self-assessed foreign language proficiency. Enrollment in a foreign language as a factor in developing intercultural competence was examined. The results of the pre and post survey as well as future research directions and implications are discussed.

Keywords: *intercultural competence, assessment, short-term study abroad, instrument development*

Short-term study abroad programs, lasting from two weeks to several months, have become very popular among U.S. students. According to the latest Open Doors Report (2012), more than a half (58%) of U.S. students who studied abroad in the 2010/2011 academic year did so for less than eight weeks or for a summer term. This popularity can be explained by the short duration, flexibility, and affordability of these programs. They are normally offered outside of regular semesters, and therefore usually do not interfere with students' required coursework or their progress towards degree completion. Short-term programs are also attractive to students because they offer a wide variety of locations and models and may have a simplified application process. (For example, unlike a traditional exchange program, official acceptance by a host institution may not be necessary.) Students participating in such programs may have lower expenses compared to those who choose semester or year-long programs, especially when lost earnings from part-time employment are considered.

As for learning outcomes, shorter programs might be comparable to long-term programs in terms of increasing students' knowledge of a host country and culture (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004), increasing their appreciation for other cultures (Pence & Macgillivray, 2008), providing exposure to different languages, contributing to a change in a student's perceptions of world view (Lewis & Niesenbaum, 2005), and developing their intercultural awareness and sensitivity (Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, & Hubbard, 2006; Black and Duhon, 2006; Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004). However, some researchers argue that longer-term study abroad yields more benefits. For

example, Medina-Lopez-Portillo (2004) found that students on a semester-long program reported more development in intercultural sensitivity than those participating in a shorter summer program. Similarly, when comparing students' learning on programs of varying length, Dwyer (2004) concluded that full academic year programs had the most effect on students' foreign language acquisition, as well as on intercultural, personal and professional development. On the other hand, she pointed out when programs lasting at least six weeks are thoughtfully planned and implemented, they "can be enormously successful in achieving important academic, personal, career and intercultural development outcomes" (p. 164). When Gullekson, Tucker, Coombs, and Wright (2011) compared students who took part in a 16-day business consulting program abroad with those who stayed on campus, they found no significant differences in the areas of ethnocentrism, intercultural communication apprehension, and international awareness between groups, suggesting that such a short trip may not have provided adequate time for change. Thus, it is still not clear how long study abroad programs must be in order to promote students' learning.

There have also been several studies that point out how enrollment in a foreign language course might not only increase students' foreign language skills, but also other cross-cultural skills and knowledge. For example, Engle and Engle (2004) reported that students who took two years of a foreign language prior to study abroad for a semester or a full year enhanced their language skills as well as their intercultural sensitivity during their time abroad, as measured by the Intercultural Development Inventory. However, it is also unclear whether these benefits are possible for students in short-term study abroad programs. Allen and Herron (2003) noticed that students in a summer study abroad program not only increased their French speaking and listening skills, but also decreased their language anxiety both inside and outside of the classroom. Additionally, Schwieter and Kunert (2012) found that students who took a culture and foreign language course before their short-term study abroad programs reported that this course had a positive influence on their interest in continuing to study the second language, personal growth, and socialization with host culture families. However, Davidson (2007), in his review of study abroad research over the last 25 years, points out that it is "extremely unlikely" in short-term study abroad programs to develop linguistic and cultural proficiency (p. 279). Therefore, more studies should be conducted to understand how enrollment in foreign language courses can benefit students in short-term study abroad programs.

Due to such inconsistency of results and diversity of outcomes, there is a need to conduct further research to assess students' growth and learning on short-term programs. Assessment is important because it can lead to the improvement of overall program quality and the enhancement of students' learning experiences, and provide administrators with valuable data to justify the resources spent on these programs. The purpose of this study is to add to the pool of existing knowledge by investigating whether participation in a short-term program abroad effects change in aspects of students' intercultural competence, and whether enrollment in a foreign language course during study abroad can be a contributing factor in such change.

Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence is known as one of the most crucial outcomes of study abroad. Although there is no common definition of this competence among researchers and practitioners, there are many important elements that align under its umbrella, as suggested by Deardorff (2006). This study will concentrate on four elements of intercultural competence: host culture knowledge, cross-cultural awareness, cross-cultural adaptation, and foreign language proficiency.

Host culture knowledge

This dimension refers to possessing knowledge about norms, values, behaviors, and issues of a host culture in order to successfully navigate in it. This kind of knowledge has been pointed out as one of the important aspects of intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006; Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Williams, 2009). Research suggests that short-term study abroad experience can assist students in developing and deepening host culture knowledge. For example, Chieffo and Griffiths (2004) found that students who engaged in short-term study abroad increased their "functional knowledge" and were able to perform tasks associated with international travel and engage in activities that facilitated learning more about their host culture. Williams (2009) reported that during summer programs students developed a better understanding of a host culture, its values, traditions, and lifestyles and were able to understand how host culture people viewed the United States. Many students were also able to articulate specific knowledge related to local political, social, environmental, and historical issues.

Cross-cultural awareness

This aspect of intercultural competence refers to a cognitive ability to recognize that each culture has its own background with unique norms, values, and behaviors with philosophical, historical, economic, religious, and social roots. By possessing this awareness, students become conscious that cultural background has impact on how people think and behave, and that cultures cannot be qualitatively compared. Cross-cultural awareness is considered one of the vital elements in intercultural competence (Black and Duhon, 2006; Kitsantas and Meyers, 2002; Deardorff, 2006), and short-term study abroad seems to facilitate its development. Black and Duhon (2006) indicated that after participating in a summer-long business program abroad, students became more culturally empathetic and tolerant. Kitsantas and Meyers (2002) reported that a study abroad program enhanced students' cross-cultural awareness when this characteristic was measured using the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory. After studying abroad, students reported a significant increase in cultural empathy and respect for the host culture.

Cross-cultural adaptation

This dimension refers to flexibility in adapting to new situations and the ability to keep an open mind when facing unfamiliar cultural values and behaviors. By possessing this skill, students are able to shift their frame of reference appropriately while communicating and adapting their behavior to a host culture context. Cross-cultural adaptation has also been noted as a critical element in intercultural competence (Anderson, et al. 2006; Deardorff, 2006; Kim,

2001; Williams, 2009). According to Deardorff (2006), the ability to adapt to different communication styles, behaviors, and new cultural environments is one of the common elements of intercultural competence cited by scholars and administrators. When developing these cross-cultural adaptation skills, people undergo dynamic processes of acculturation (learning new cultural elements) and deculturation (losing home culture elements), as asserted by Kim (2001). Research suggests that study abroad can positively influence the development of cross-cultural adaptation skills. For example, Anderson et al. (2006) reported that students who took part in a 4-week study abroad experience improved their ability to accept and adapt to cultural differences. Williams (2009) noticed that after their time abroad, students expressed pride at their ability to adapt to different lifestyles, customs, habits, and norms, and noted that study abroad had given them confidence to adapt to future situations.

Foreign language proficiency

This aspect of intercultural competence entails the ability to communicate in a foreign language. There are different levels of proficiency, ranging from possessing the most basic language skills necessary to navigate in a foreign country, to near-native fluency. Foreign language proficiency is not always included as a vital element of intercultural competence, but it is nevertheless highly valued among higher education administrators (Deardorff, 2006). There have been many studies exploring how study abroad might improve participants' foreign language skills; the results, however, have been mixed. For example, Allen and Herron (2003) reported that after summer study abroad programs students significantly improved their French speaking and listening skills. DeKeyser (2010), however, found that students who took part in a 6-week program abroad did not demonstrate measureable progress, perhaps because pre-program grammar knowledge was inadequate for the demands of real-world situations. Davidson (2007) asserts that it is unlikely that students will develop linguistic proficiency during a short-term study abroad program, but these programs can nevertheless motivate students to begin or continue studying a foreign language. Cubillos, Chieffo, and Fan (2008) reported similarly mixed findings, namely that there were no significant differences in improvement in listening comprehension skills between in-country and on-campus Spanish learners during a month-long course. However, the study abroad students possessed a higher level of confidence surrounding their linguistic skills, despite no measurable difference in actual comprehension gains.

Method

Background

As part of its regular study abroad offerings, the University of Delaware (UD) sponsors approximately 50 short-term, faculty-led programs to dozens of international destinations during the month of January. This optional mini-semester, called winter session, runs on campus from early January through early February and is the most popular study abroad term at UD, attracting approximately 1,000 students annually. During their program, students enroll in two UD courses totaling 6-7 credits which are taught by their UD faculty directors or by local instructors. Courses

are taught in English, except for foreign language courses, which are taught in the language of the host country.

Academic foci range widely, from literature and foreign language to areas considered to be less traditional for study abroad, such as mechanical engineering, nursing, fashion and apparel studies, and plant and soil sciences. Nearly as much variety exists in the structure of the programs, with some groups remaining primarily in one location and hosted by a local university, and others traveling to multiple locations. Students are housed in home stays, dormitories, hotels, apartments, and guest houses, depending on the location and design of the program as proposed by the faculty director. Not surprisingly, program objectives vary significantly as well, with some emphasizing cultural and language acquisition, while others focus on a highly specialized content area relevant to the host country.

Over the past decade, administrators at UD, like those of many U.S. institutions sending students abroad, have become more interested in the impacts of its myriad programs on student learning, particularly the impacts of short-term programs which attract such a large percentage of UD's study abroad population (about 85%). However, given the wide variety of program locations, structures, and goals, as well as the range of disciplines being studied, it is clear that the expectations for learning will vary as well. A group studying wildlife photography in Tanzania will necessarily have a very different experience than students practicing their Spanish skills in a Chilean home stay, or those studying women writers in India. At the same time, just as there are campus-wide competencies required of all UD graduates, a similar, common standard must exist for all study abroad programs, varied though they may be. The challenge, then, has been to identify a set of broad learning goals that would be relevant and achievable for all programs.

Following (or "consistent with") Deardorff (2006), the researchers at UD decided that four elements related to intercultural competency were worthy of investigation across all programs: host culture knowledge, cross-cultural awareness, cross-cultural adaptation, and foreign language proficiency. Regardless of the program in which they participate, it is reasonable to expect that students learn something about the country or region where they are studying, including cultural norms and expectations. They should be able to adapt their behavior to these cultural norms as appropriate, and understand that their worldview is not universal. Also, those who travel to a non-English speaking country should be able to communicate at least to a minimal extent with host culture people. These general objectives were deemed applicable to all programs and worthy of investigation.

After clarifying the learning objectives, researchers began surveying the available assessment options. While some consideration was given to using a commercial instrument to measure how UD programs addressed these areas of intercultural competence, none available at the time measured all of the areas of interest to UD researchers in a way that would be relevant to all programs. In addition, commercial instruments generally do not allow items to be altered, and they must often be administered via a specified portal or other pre-set means. Ultimately the decision was made to develop a self-assessment instrument internally, thereby allowing for

complete flexibility in design and administration. This meant that the items could be embedded into UD's existing online study abroad database infrastructure, both for pre- and post-program assessment. Prior to departure, all students participating in UD study abroad programs are required to complete a set of orientation quizzes, the final one of which is the assessment itself. Likewise, at the end of their time abroad, students are required to complete an online program evaluation. Linking the assessment to existing, required pre- and post-program forms results in a response rate of more than 99%, as well as ease of data capture and ongoing data collection from year to year.

Participant Profile

Participants in this study totaled 967 and took part in 46 UD faculty-led programs abroad in January, 2012. The group's gender breakdown was 71% female (N=691) and 29% male (N=276), with the vast majority being traditional college age (18-22 years old). They studied in 25 countries on 47 different programs, and their undergraduate majors represented 37 academic disciplines.

Instrumentation

The survey instrument contained thirty-one multiple-choice items related to intercultural competence (Likert scale and frequency), as well as several open-ended, short-answer items that were not included in this analysis. The primary purpose of the questionnaire was to explore how students change during their one-month study abroad program, according to their own pre- and post-sojourn self-assessments. (See Appendix for the complete instrument.)

Scales. The survey items represented four constructs related to intercultural competence: host culture knowledge, cross-cultural awareness, cross-cultural adaptation, and foreign language proficiency. *Host culture knowledge* (items 2, 5, 6, 8, 12, 13, 14, 21, 25, 26) was defined as the self-reported ability to demonstrate specific knowledge related to the host culture (for example, "I feel comfortable knowing when to laugh at a joke in my host culture"). *Cross-cultural awareness* (items 1, 9, 10, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 27) was identified as the self-reported ability to demonstrate awareness of aspects of the host culture and the skills related to such awareness (for example, "I am aware of how my typical behavior or appearance is accepted [or not] at my host site[s]"). *Cross-cultural adaptation* (items 3, 4, 11, 15) was characterized as the self-reported ability to demonstrate physical and psychological adaptation to a new environment (for example, "I feel comfortable functioning in a situation where things are not always clear, and where I have to learn and adapt as I go"). Finally, f*oreign language proficiency* (items 28, 29, 30, 31) was defined as the self-reported ability to speak or understand a foreign language in a host culture and to navigate the host site linguistically (for example, "I know how to greet, thank, and bid farewell to inhabitants of my host country in their local language").

To test the quality of the scales, a factor analysis was conducted. It was run for pre- and post-scales to ensure their reliability and consistency (same question loading for both pre and post items). The following items were identified: questions 8, 12, 13, 14 for "host culture knowledge"; questions 1, 9, 10, 17 for "cross-cultural awareness"; questions 3, 4, 11, 15 for "cross-cultural adaptation"; and questions 28, 29, 30, 31 for "foreign language proficiency".

Internal reliability was found to be sufficient for all four scales. Cronbach alpha for each scale ranged from $\alpha = .55$ to $\alpha = .78$. Thus, the factor analysis showed that the chosen constructs were appropriate for the tests that followed.

Results

Short-term study abroad impact

The paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare students' self-reported knowledge of the host culture, cross-cultural awareness and adaptation, and their self-reported foreign language proficiency before they left and after they returned from study abroad. This test compared the means of two scores for the entire group of students: pre (before study abroad) and post (after study abroad).

It is important to note that the number of respondents is significantly lower for items comprising the foreign language scale. Students who traveled to a primarily English-speaking environment (for example Australia and the United Kingdom) were instructed not to respond to any of these items, resulting in a smaller N for this factor.

As shown in Table 1, the data yielded statistically significant increases ($p<.001$) in all four areas, with the greatest gain in the area of host culture knowledge ($t(926)= -36.61$, $p=.000$). The findings of this test suggest that the study abroad experience contributed to an increase in host culture knowledge, cross-cultural awareness, cross-cultural adaptation, and foreign language proficiency for all participants.

Table 1
Two-tailed paired-sample t-test ($p<.05$)

Scales	Group	N	M	SD	t	p
Host culture knowledge	Pretest	926	16.83	4.00	-36.61	.000
	Posttest	926	21.09	2.38		
Cross-cultural awareness	Pretest	930	16.21	2.02	-17.24	.000
	Posttest	930	17.41	1.82		
Cross-cultural adaptation	Pretest	933	15.34	2.37	-13.76	.000
	Posttest	933	16.49	2.21		
Foreign language proficiency	Pretest	563	14.76	3.38	-16.42	.000
	Posttest	563	16.62	2.74		

n=number of students, M=mean, SD= standard deviation

Impact of Foreign Language Enrollment on Intercultural Competence

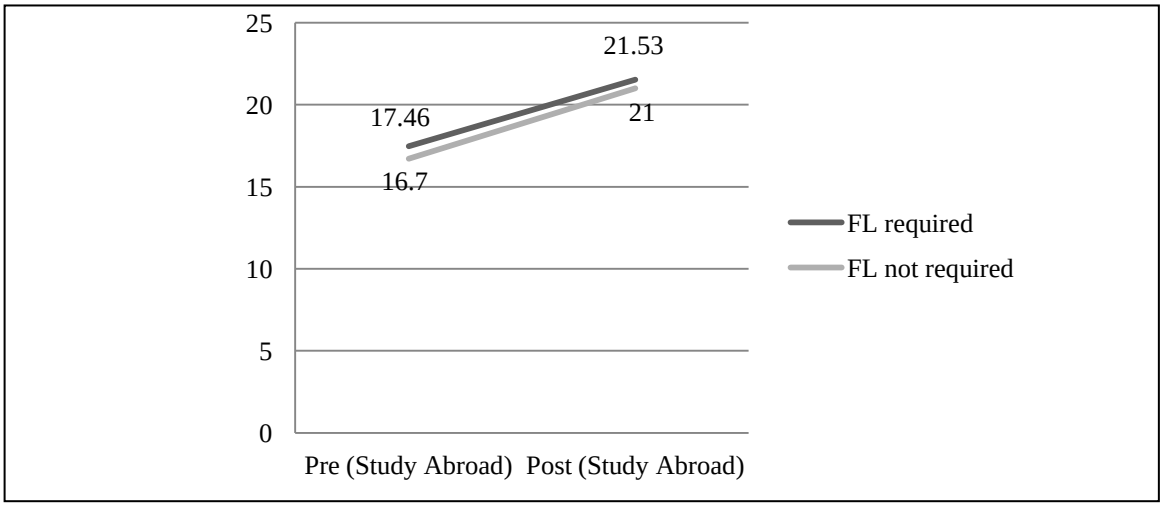
Nine programs with 203 total participants required that students enroll in a foreign language course as part of their experience abroad. These courses had varying prerequisites, ranging from one to several semesters of college-level study (or equivalent). Therefore all participants in these nine programs had some background in the target language. The independent variable *foreign language course requirement* (FL required, FL not required) was

used to split the respondents into two subgroups and assess the change during study abroad on all four scales (host culture knowledge, cross-cultural awareness, cross-cultural adaptation, and self-assessed foreign language capabilities). An independent sample t-test was used to compare the means of scores reported by each group before and after their sojourn.

Host Culture Knowledge. A significant difference was found between the foreign language and non-foreign language groups, both pre- and post-sojourn. (See Figure 1). Before departure, FL students (M= 17.47, SD=3.98) reported higher host culture knowledge than non-FL students (M=16.72, SD=4), t (958)=-2.188, p=.029). Similarly, after studying abroad the students enrolled in a language course (M=21.53, SD=2.38) reported higher host culture knowledge than those who did not take such a course (M=21; SD=2.37), t(924)=-2.567, p=.010). It is not surprising that FL students would begin their study abroad experience with significantly higher host culture knowledge, since language courses typically include such content. And certainly one would expect students in foreign language courses to continue to increase this knowledge while enrolled in such a course abroad. Less predictable, by contrast, are the post-sojourn responses of the non-foreign language group, which followed a positive trajectory similar to that of the students in foreign language courses. This suggests that the study abroad experience itself (and/or the content of other, non-FL courses in which students were enrolled) contributed to significant growth in this area.

Figure 1

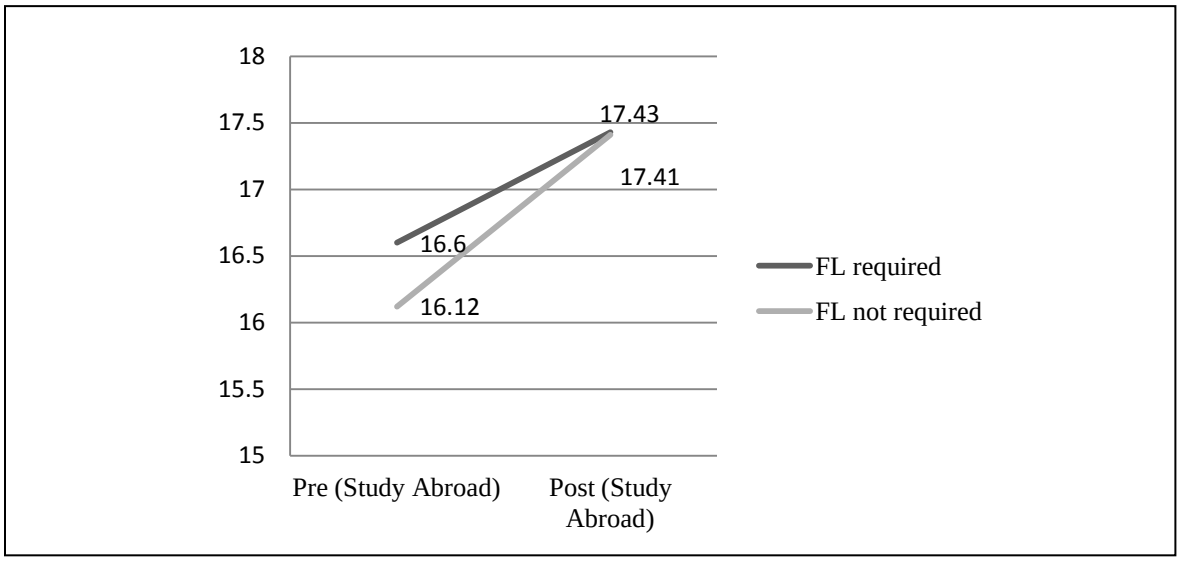
Host culture knowledge and foreign language requirement



Cross-cultural awareness. In terms of cross-cultural awareness, results yielded a significant difference between the two groups only before study abroad (See Figure 2). Initially, those students enrolled in foreign language courses indicated higher cross-cultural awareness (M=16.6, SD=1.87) than their peers (M=16.12, SD=2.04), t (965) =-2.796, p=.005). However, after studying abroad no significant difference between the groups was found, t(928)= -.136, p>.05. This suggests a curious "catch up" effect among those students not enrolled in foreign language

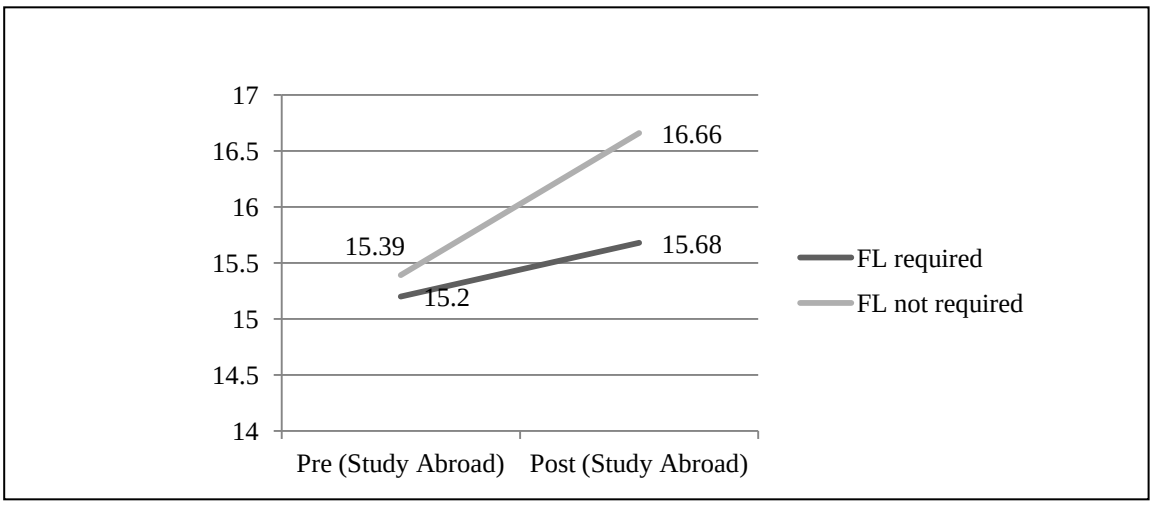
courses which can only be attributed to the study abroad experience itself (or to the content of non-FL courses, which is less likely).

Figure 2
Cross-cultural awareness and foreign language requirement



Cross-cultural adaptation. In terms of cross-cultural adaptation, no significant difference between the two groups was found before studying abroad. (See Figure 3.) However, the there was a statistically significant difference between groups after studying abroad. Surprisingly, students who were not enrolled in a language course (M= 16.66, SD= 2.1) reported higher post-program scores in cross-cultural adaptation than their peers who took such a course (M=15.68, SD=2.54), t (209)= 4.597, p=.000). This result suggests that the foreign language course, or perhaps some other programmatic or environmental factor differentiating the two groups, highly influenced how students perceived their adaptation.

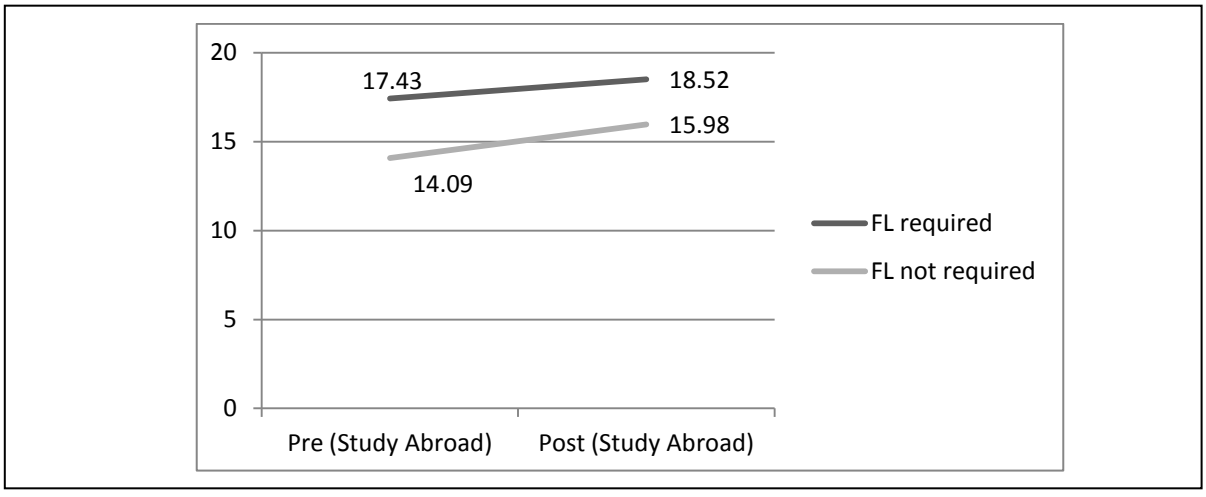
Figure 3
Cross-cultural adaptation and foreign language requirement



In order to explain these unexpected results, it can be posited that students in English-speaking countries may have perceived their adaptation as more successful due to the lack of a language barrier. This group represents approximately 40% of the population of students not enrolled in foreign language courses and is therefore large enough to meaningfully impact the results. Therefore another analysis was conducted in which all students in English-speaking countries were removed, leaving only those in non-English-speaking countries. Remarkably, the results were the same. Prior to studying abroad there was no significant difference between the FL-required and non-FL-required groups. However, post-sojourn the students not enrolled in foreign language courses (M= 16.48, SD= 2.14) had significantly higher adaptation scores than those taking such courses (M=15.68, SD=2.54), t (247)= 3.57, p=.000). Again, the results indicate that either the language courses themselves, or other programmatic or environmental factors, influenced students' perceived adaptation such that the language students were less successful in this area.

Foreign Language Proficiency. Note that this test compares two subgroups of students in non-English-speaking countries: those who were required to enroll in a foreign language course and those whose coursework was conducted in English. Not surprisingly, a significant difference was found both pre- and post-sojourn between the FL subgroups with regard to perceived communicative ability. (See Figure 4.). Before departure, students enrolled in a language course (M= 17.43, SD=1.93) reported higher foreign language proficiency than those whose coursework was in English (M=14.09, SD=3.31), t (419)=-16.552, p=.000). Similarly, after their program, responses from the FL students (M=18.52, SD=1.57) indicated higher perceived proficiency levels than their peers (M=15.98; SD=2.78), t(445)=-13.751, p=.000). However, similar to the results in the area of host culture knowledge described above, the non-FL group followed a positive trajectory similar to that of the FL-group. These results suggest that the experience of spending one month in a non-English-speaking environment, even without formal foreign language instruction, has an impact on perceived foreign language proficiency.

Figure 4.
Foreign language proficiency and foreign language requirement



Discussion

This study was undertaken to investigate whether short-term faculty-led study abroad programs led to changes in intercultural competence, specifically in the areas of host-culture knowledge, cross-cultural awareness, cross-cultural adaptation, and foreign language proficiency. It also examined whether enrollment in a foreign language course during study abroad is an influential factor in developing intercultural competence.

Intercultural Competence

The results have demonstrated that short-term programs abroad can indeed significantly increase all measured learning outcomes examined in this study: host culture knowledge, cross-cultural awareness, cross-cultural adaptation, and foreign language proficiency. Specifically, an increase in host culture knowledge indicates that after studying abroad, students felt that they knew more about their host site, its geographical landmarks, historical events, traditions, and current issues. This finding is consistent with previous studies (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Williams, 2009), suggesting that even a short program abroad can effect positive change in this area of intercultural competence.

Positive development in the area of cross-cultural awareness demonstrates that after studying abroad, students were able to better interpret people's behavior in the context of their culture, tried to understand why people behave a certain way before judging their actions, and knew how to diminish stereotypes that people in the host culture had about U.S. Americans. Such growth is consistent with the findings of previous studies (Anderson, 2006; Black and Duhon, 2006; Kitsantas and Meyers, 2002) that also suggested that study abroad might lead to an increase in this cognitive ability to understand the unique foundations of each culture.

An increase in cross-cultural adaptation suggests that students felt more comfortable dealing with unknown situations in their host culture and adapting to new circumstances as they arose. This finding supports the results of previous studies (Anderson, 2006; Williams, 2009) which imply that study abroad might lead to increased adaptability to unfamiliar contexts and people, flexibility in finding solutions, and keeping an open mind.

Finally, positive change in perceived foreign language proficiency indicates that students believed that by the end of their sojourn they had developed basic foreign language skills enabling them to communicate with people in the host culture, and that they became more motivated to study a foreign language. These results support the limited literature that demonstrates how study abroad can be beneficial for increasing foreign language skills (Allen & Herron, 2003) and enhancing students' motivation to learn or continue learning a foreign language (Davidson, 2007). Even if students did not demonstrate actual improvement in proficiency, an increase in perceived ability and interest was nevertheless evident.

Foreign language Course in Developing Intercultural Competence

Enrollment (or absence thereof) in a foreign language course was used as an independent variable to measure differences between the FL and non-FL subgroups. Students who took a language course during their program reported higher host culture knowledge and foreign

language proficiency both before and after studying abroad, as compared to their peers who did not take an FL course. This finding was expected and is supported by earlier research (Schwieter & Kunert, 2010). Students who took the FL course had an opportunity to learn about the host culture and develop foreign language skills in a formal classroom setting, both prior to, and during, the sojourn abroad. Perhaps even more interesting are the responses of students in the non-FL group, which followed the same upward trajectories of those of the foreign language students in the areas of host culture knowledge and language proficiency. Even without formal classroom instruction in foreign language, students in the non-FL group reported significant increases in these areas, implying that other factors contributed to their growth, for example out-of-classroom experiences during their time abroad.

In terms of cross-cultural awareness, a significant difference between FL and non-FL groups was found only before studying abroad, with the FL group yielding higher scores. It is not surprising that students with some FL background, and who chose a study abroad program with a foreign language component, were more prepared for differences between cultures and were able to understand the origins of those differences, compared to students who did not have such background and interest. After studying abroad, however, the groups reported the same level of cross-cultural awareness. Findings show that during the month abroad, the non-FL students caught up to their language-studying peers in this area, indicating that, for these students, factors other than language study must have contributed to the changes in their cross-cultural awareness. It remains unclear whether, and to what extent, the language course influenced growth in cross-cultural awareness among FL students.

Regarding cross-cultural adaptation, no significant difference was found between the FL and non-FL groups prior to study abroad. However, after their programs, the students who did not take a foreign language course reported developing higher cross-cultural adaptation skills than those enrolled in an FL course. This was also the case for the smaller sub-group of students who traveled to non-English-speaking countries. One possible explanation for these surprising results may be that programs with FL courses almost always have home stay housing arrangements, which require an additional level of adaptability, while those without required FL courses more typically have hotel housing, or other accommodations in which students are not living together with individuals from the host culture. It is reasonable to think that students whose living arrangements required more flexibility and attentiveness to the lifestyles of their hosts would be more challenged to adapt and less likely to rate their success in this area highly. In that same vein, due both to their coursework and their accommodations, those students were more likely to be compelled to speak the local language, which, as any language learner knows, can quickly lead to uncertainty when one realizes how inadequate one's skills are. In short, the FL students, living in home stays, may have been more challenged to adapt, and at the same time more aware of their communicative shortcomings, than their peers whose courses were taught in English. This may have led them to rate their post-sojourn adaptation higher than when their program began, but still lower than that of those who did not take a language course and who lived more removed from the host population.

Cross-cultural adaptation theory developed by Kim (2001) might also shed the light on this unexpected and surprising finding. When adapting to a new culture, people experience stress – the default response that occurs when the capabilities of an individual cannot meet the demands of the environment. This stress is temporary, and it challenges people to put aside mental patterns and behaviors from the home culture and acquire new ones to successfully navigate a host culture. Students who were not enrolled in a foreign language course might have been working harder to develop adaptation skills because they were not as linguistically prepared for various cross-cultural situations as their peers who studied the host culture language. They therefore may have experienced more cycles of stress than the language learners, which, according to Kim, leads to change and personal growth, and hence a greater degree of perceived adaptation.

Future Directions

No study can be completely comprehensive, and therefore this study, like all others, has its limitations. First, it is based on indirect measures (students' self-reported scores) and, thus, only presents students' perceptions of how they changed due to study abroad experiences. Even though it is important to know what students think about their growth in various areas comprising intercultural competence, it would be advisable in future studies to also examine qualitative data provided by students to better understand the depth of their changes. Direct measures would yield more accurate responses, but such instruments are difficult to design and administer in a study of this scale.

The diversity of study abroad programs represented in this study is vast and can be seen as both enriching and at the same time problematic. The results present a broad picture of how students changed, but upon examination this view may be too simplistic. The wide array of program models necessarily attracts students with varying backgrounds and experiences. Thus, to some extent, these differences are concealed when pre- and post-data are compared for the entire, monolithic group. Conversely, examining subsets (for example the FLversus non-FL groups) reveals that diverse categories of students often already have significantly different results in the pre-program phase, which can lead to "apples to oranges" comparisons. Thus, future studies can take this into consideration and examine more background factors and student experiences that might influence students' learning outcomes.

The influence of foreign language study while abroad remains unclear. It seems counter-intuitive that students progress at the same pace on some measures of intercultural competence regardless of whether their time abroad is accompanied by formal foreign language study. Yet the study's results appear to suggest just this. The "catch-up" effect experienced by non-foreign-language students in the area of cross-cultural awareness supports this premise, implying that aspects of the experience abroad other than formal classroom study are contributing to this significant growth. However, it is not yet known what these aspects might be; further investigation is necessary. Likewise, it seems counter-intuitive that students participating in language-based programs with coursework focusing on the host culture would mark less progress

in the area of adaptation than those taking coursework in English. It is unclear whether self-deception is at play among the non-language students, or whether program design (home stay versus hotel) is a factor, or whether adaptation is influenced by other, yet unexamined aspects. Thus, more studies are encouraged to learn more about the influence of foreign language study on students' learning, especially on short-term study abroad programs.

Lastly, while developing an assessment instrument internally was advantageous in this case and aligned with institutional goals and practices, such a large-scale project brings with it challenges as well. The survey used for this study was not subject to the rigorous testing of commercially available instruments. Thus, reliability of some scales was a bit lower than expected but was still acceptable for the purposes of the study. In addition, the unique instrument precludes direct comparison of findings with those of other studies at other institutions. More education abroad research is encouraged using internally-developed instruments. This would stimulate the evolution of best practices among those institutions that find the available commercial instruments either too costly or cumbersome, or not designed to measure the specific learning outcomes of their programs.

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About the Authors

Yuliya Kartoshkina, PhD student, is in the Educational Foundation and Research department at the University of North Dakota. She has conducted several research studies with international and study abroad students related to their retention, learning and changes in cultural identity due to cross-cultural experiences.

Lisa Chieffo, EdD, is Associate Director for Study Abroad in the Institute for Global Studies at the University of Delaware. With 20 years' experience in education abroad, Lisa has published and presented on the assessment of short-term programs, first-year students abroad, foreign language acquisition abroad, and training faculty to serve as program leaders.

Tanya Kang, MA, was received in Intercultural Communication from the University of Delaware. Her thesis focused on study abroad students' cross-cultural adaptation and she has a continued interest in study abroad and international education research.

Appendix

Answer Key - Hardly Ever / Occasionally / Sometimes/ Frequently / Almost Always

1. When I meet people who are different from me, I interpret their behavior in the context of their culture.
2. I feel comfortable knowing when to laugh at a joke in my host culture.
3. When challenged to adapt to a new situation on my program, I have relied heavily on family, friends, or peers to get me through.
4. Having to learn how things work in a new environment this term has stressed me out.
5. I am able to ascertain whether a member of my host culture is annoyed with me.
6. During this term I have consciously withheld judgment on a controversial international event or issue until I learned more facts.
7. Being in an environment where I don't understand the local language makes me nervous or anxious. **(Skip this item if you have never been in this situation.)**

Answer Key - Strongly Disagree / Disagree / Neither / Agree / Strongly Agree

8. I am able to give examples of at least two cultural taboos at my host site(s).
9. When observing or interacting with individuals from another culture, I try to understand their perspectives before judging their actions.
10. I am aware of how my typical behavior or appearance is accepted (or not) at my host site(s).
11. I have been able to adapt at my program site with less access to a cell phone and/or e-mail than I am used to at home.
12. I have sufficient knowledge of my host location(s) to explain a current issue there to a friend or family member who has never been there.
13. I can discuss with confidence at least two historic events that are important to the population of my host sites.
14. I can name at least three significant geographic landmarks of my host site(s) such as rivers, mountains, or lakes.
15. I feel comfortable functioning in a situation where things are not always clear, and where I have to learn and adapt as I go.
16. One should not have to adjust one's actions and/or appearance in order to assimilate into another culture(s).
17. I know what I can do to diminish some of the stereotypes that people at my host site(s) might have about someone like me.
18. I see value in talking with people who think differently than I do.
19. One primary reason for traveling is to compare a foreign culture with one's home culture and determine which is better.
20. I will return home with some stereotypes of people from my host site.
21. I have a developed appreciation for the arts (in the form of buildings, crafts, paintings, music, literary works, and other human artifacts) of my host site.

22. When visiting another culture, it is important to be exposed to some of its art forms (music, painting, theatre, and other forms of creative expression).
23. It is acceptable to travel to another region and not know any basic expressions in the local language (greetings, thanks, farewell).
24. One cannot be educated about a country without understanding its historical, philosophical and/or religious foundations.
25. **Skip this item if you are PRIMARILY studying in the U.S.** I understand why people in my host country may have a different perspective than Americans on global issues such as free trade or climate change.
26. **Skip this item if you are PRIMARILY studying in the U.S.** I can easily estimate the price in U.S. dollars of items for sale in the currency of my host country.
27. **Skip this item if you are PRIMARILY studying in the U.S.** I do not understand why some people in other countries express anti-American sentiment.
28. **Skip this item if you are studying in a country where English is the primary language.** I know how to greet, thank, and bid farewell to inhabitants of my host country in their local language.
29. **Skip this item if you are studying in a country where English is the primary language.** I am able to communicate on at least a basic level with inhabitants of my host country who don't speak English.
30. **Skip this item if you are studying in a country where English is the primary language.** I am able to recognize and clear up a misunderstanding in the language of my host site(s).
31. **Skip this item if you are studying in a country where English is the primary language.** Frequently hearing a language other than English has made me curious about that language and motivated to learn at least some words.