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Investing in Study Abroad and Cultural Engagement: A Win-Win for Career Development

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Abstract

This study both supports and expands the growing body of evidence that there are positive career outcomes associated study abroad and cultural engagement. Consistent with previous studies, study abroad alumni report that their interest in study abroad influenced their choice of college. This intention to study abroad before starting at university is positively related to the career benefit that alumni report deriving from their time abroad. Dependent measures include work ethic, skills development, and career choices. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of our findings for both program development and student engagement in and preparation for study abroad.

Abstract in French

Cette étude soutient et élargit le corpus croissant de preuves selon lesquelles des résultats de carrière positifs sont associés aux études à l'étranger et à l'engagement culturel. Conformément aux études précédentes, les anciens étudiants qui étudient à l'étranger indiquent que leur intérêt pour les études à l'étranger a influencé leur choix d'université. Cette intention d'étudier à l'étranger avant de commencer à l'université est positivement liée aux avantages de carrière que les diplômés déclarent tirer de leur séjour à l'étranger. Les

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variables dépendantes comprennent l'éthique de travail, le développement des compétences et les choix de carrière. Le document se termine par une discussion des implications de nos résultats pour le développement de programmes, l'engagement des étudiants et la préparation aux études à l'étranger.

Keywords:

study abroad, career, cultural engagement, mobility

Introduction

Our understanding of the impact of study abroad (SA) continues to evolve as new outcome measures are proposed, old measures reassessed, new stakeholders considered and different questions asked about the purpose, the boundaries and the critical characteristics that define a SA experience. At the same time, higher education is undergoing important disruptive changes with serious questions being asked about its overall cost, value, and contribution to the common good of society. We anticipate that the COVID crisis will only accentuate these disruptive trends. It is within this expanded arena of inquiry that we find a growing interest in assessing the impact of SA on career preparation .

Although we have known for a long time that cultural experience contributes to the success of those engaged in international business (Hall, 1959; Orahood, Kruze and Pearson, 2004), we are still in the early stages of gathering information on how SA impacts career outcomes. To this end, our paper seeks to both test and extend our understanding of the impact of SA on career development by examining how cultural engagement and the development of an early interest in study abroad moderate career related outcomes.

Career-Related Student Outcomes

One of the earliest reports documenting U.S. students' perception of the impact of study abroad on career preparation is a 1988 undergraduate program alumni study conducted by the American Institute of Foreign Study (AIFS, 1988). The study found that 86% of the respondents viewed their time abroad as a worthwhile investment in their future, with 79% acknowledging that SA contributed to their adaptability and flexibility, attributes notably found desirable by employers (Jones, 2013), and 57% stating that SA helped to inform their understanding of international markets. In 2016, the Institute of International Education (IIE) reported a study of Gilman Scholars, undergraduates who received a U.S. government merit-based grant to study abroad, finding that 73% of the students agreed that the SA experience

“broadened the geographic locations where they are willing to work,” with 67% saying the that experience “promoted desire to work in cross-cultural/international field,” and 60% saying that SA “broadened the range of employers they would consider.”

A large scale study conducted by Paige, Fry, Stallman, Josić & Jon (2009) found that 56% of the participants reported that SA influenced their career; a finding consistent with Dwyer's (2004) earlier study that reported study abroad “ignited [student] interest in a career direction that [the student] pursued after the experience.” Participation in an internship also “allowed [the students] to acquire skill sets that influenced [their] career path.”

Jones (2013) proposed that the skills included in defining intercultural competence often overlap significantly with the transferable skills valued by employers. Traits such as self-awareness, empathy, open-mindedness, and flexibility are examples of such skills. The importance of these traits is especially noteworthy for employers that are sensitive to the value of cultural awareness in the workplace. Jones (2013) observes that intercultural competence “is not about specific knowledge of a single culture but means operating effectively across cultures and challenging our own values, assumptions and stereotypes.”

Overall the skills that are of greatest value to employers when considering recent university graduates in the United States (NACE, 2018; AACU, 2006) are similar to those expressed by employers throughout the world (Molony, Sowter, & Potts, 2011). Of particular interest, given the opportunity to develop these attributes while abroad, are problem-solving skills, ability to work in teams, leadership, strong work ethic, initiative, flexibility/adaptability, interpersonal skills, and organizational ability (NACE, 2018).

Sixty percent of all employers surveyed by QS Global (Molony et al., 2011) indicate that they value international study experience. The QS study went on to report, however, that “companies in Western Europe are more likely to seek international education experience regardless of whether the graduate will work in a local or international post, and the majority agree that internationally educated graduates outperform others.” Overall, the greater the international focus of the business, the greater likelihood there is that the firm will value SA (Trooboff, Vande Berg, & Rayman, 2007) and most university leaders believe that mobile students have as better chance of getting a position appropriate to their level of educational attainment compared to non-mobile students (Bracht, Engel, Janson, Over, Schomburg & Teichler, 2006). Student mobility, within this context, is broadly understood to refer to both the outward flow of domestic students and the inward flow of international students.

While the skills employers value show consistency across surveys, the findings are mixed on how employers' value international experience.

Surprisingly, the studies that report that international experience is not, in and of itself, a great influence in the recruitment process yet still find that the skills developed through SA are indeed valued by these same employers (Gardner, Gross, & Steglitz, 2008; Trooboff, Vande Berg, & Rayman, 2007). Conversely, a 2015 study commissioned by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU, 2015), found that while 78% of employers agree that college students should gain intercultural skills and an understanding of societies and cultures outside the U.S., when asked to rate specific learning outcomes, less than 40% of the employers rated awareness of and experience with diverse cultures and communities within the United States as important. Only 25% of the employers rated staying current on global developments and trends, being aware of and experienced with cultures and societies or being proficient in a language other than English as important. Even as it appears that students have a difficult time articulating how and why SA has helped to prepare them for their future careers (West, 2014), many employers also have not fully connected SA to the skills they are seeking in new employees.

It is not surprising, however, to find that that the greater the international focus of employers, the greater likelihood there is that the firm will value SA (British Council, 2013; Center for International Mobility, 2017; Molony et al., 2011; Trooboff et al., 2007). A global study on how employers value international study experience published by QS Intelligence Unit (Molony et al., 2011) claims that higher education institutions:

“need to be attuned to the needs of the global recruitment market in order to prepare graduates for future workplace demands. As a driver of economic growth, universities and colleges play an important role in understanding global trends and providing teaching and learning opportunities that will support their students in developing the skills and knowledge they need to be future leaders. International education opportunities need to be responsive to global market demand.” (Molony et al., 2011)

Davies, Fidler, & Gorbis (2016) identify ten skills needed for the future workplace and remarkably we find that four, arguably five, of the skills are related to competencies that students have an opportunity develop while studying abroad. Specifically, students must develop or improve: 1) sense-making, or the ability to determine the deeper meaning or significance of what is being expressed, 2) social intelligence, or the ability to connect to others in a deep and direct way 3) novel & adaptive thinking, or the ability to come up with solutions and responses beyond that which is rote or rule-based, 4) cross-cultural competency, or the ability to operate in different cultural settings and 5) cognitive load management, or the ability to discriminate and filter

information for importance, and to understand how to maximize cognitive functioning using a variety of tools and techniques.

In support of the idea that study abroad can provide students with career related skills, a recent Finnish CIMO report (Center for International Mobility, 2017) identified three specific factors that “form the basis of extended understanding for intercultural competences.” The factors include: 1) productivity, defined as a combination of efficiency, analytical, problem-solving ability and credibility, 2) resilience, or the capacity for an employee to be able to adapt, know limits and strengths, are confident and persistent, and 3) curiosity, expressed as possessing tolerance, interest towards new issues, intercultural knowledge, co-operation and networking ability. This extended approach still contains the traditional language skills, intercultural knowledge, and tolerance, but these three new factors “augment the traditional view and complete [the] picture of how international skills and competences fit into today’s working life.”

The need to educate employers about the benefits of study abroad remains an issue (Brooks, Waters, & Pimlott-Wilson, 2012; Jones, 2012). The Finnish CIMO report (2017) notes that employers value learning abroad yet stresses that there is room to better help them understand the benefits of the experience, as well as help students identify and speak about their skills. Trooboff, Vande Berg and Rayman (2007) implore the field to “carry out research on student learning abroad in order to collect data that will help convince employers that specific types of SA do in fact provide students with opportunities to develop or enhance desired learning outcomes — whether personal qualities or skills.” They also recommend that more attention be given to identifying desired learning outcomes in designing SA programs, and for SA and career services professionals to “collaborate in order to give students some basic training in how to present what they have learned through studying abroad, in ways that employers will appreciate.”

Cultural Engagement and Prior Interest in Studying Abroad

Derman-Sparks (1993) called into question the difference between meaningful interaction with others in a multicultural context and what she coined “cultural tourism,” or a focus on superficial cultural artifacts (e.g., food, clothing, etc.). She believed that the latter, which ironically could appear to be an opportunity for cultural enrichment, could actually result in further stereotyping. The view that proximity equates to cultural proficiency has, of course, been refuted by many other researchers (e.g., Lemmons 2015; Woolf 2001). Taking up this cause, Engle and Engle (2003) proposed a cultural immersion classification scheme that identifies seven program features (e.g., program length, housing alternatives, opportunities for meaningful cultural

interaction) across five levels of intensity. The Georgetown Consortium Study (Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, & Paige, 2009) adopted the Engle et al.'s (2003) but found little support for immersion except when students received cultural mentoring and/or guided self-reflection; as measured by Hammer and Bennet's (1998) IDI and the Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview (Stansfield, 1996). Our experience working with alumni, however, suggests that with time, and opportunities for further conversation and reflection, alumni's interpretation of their cross-cultural experiences matures and provides participants with valuable insights (Allen, 2004) about their experiences.

Vande Berg et al.'s (2009) finding that cultural mentoring or guided self-reflect can surface benefits associated with cultural engagement begs the question as to what extent student involvement, or level of participation, will also contribute to the value of a cross-cultural experience. Astin (1984) and Tinto (1997) among others hold that student involvement is directly related to how much time and energy students will invest in learning and this, in turn, is related to the quality of outcomes that students eventually achieve. Although we recognize that involvement is a complex construct (Astin 1984; Zaichkowsky 1985), for our purposes we propose to use the degree to which alumni report that study abroad influenced their choice of college as an indirect measure of student involvement and further hypothesize that this measure will be positively related to career related outcomes resulting from the SA experience.

Student investment in SA must, however, be supported by comparable investments by institutions of higher education to create opportunities for students. The unsustainable growth in the cost of higher education (The Economist, 2012) has contributed to calls for greater accountability in higher education (Report to the Secretary of Education, 2012; Eaton, 2010). In response, colleges are devoting more attention, and resources, to measuring learning outcomes, and in particular, how they can help prepare students for future employment (Carlson, 2017). Closely following core academic quality, anticipated career outcomes are cited as the second most important factor students use when deciding which college to attend (Reid, 2017).

We understand that it is within this context that there is a heightened interest in examining, and potentially promoting, the relationship between career development and SA. To the extent that SA can be linked to career development, the benefits of mobility can be more favorably weighed against the personal and/or institutional costs associated with study abroad programming.

In addition to highlighting the career benefits of SA for students, DesJardins, Dunbar and Hendel (1999) observed that there is a relationship between a student's decision to apply to a particular college and their interest in SA. They found that students who expressed an interest in studying abroad

were 18% more likely to attend a particular institution based on the availability of mobility opportunities compared to those that were not interested. Building on this observation, Rexeisen and Sathe (2005) proposed a methodology to calculate the expected monetary value (ROI) of a college investing in SA opportunities. They demonstrated how a relatively small increase in student matriculation can more than offset associated international programming costs.

Method

Two email surveys were conducted by a major study abroad provider in an effort to examine alumni perceptions of the impact of study abroad on career development. The two surveys resulted in 2629 usable alumni surveys spanning a period of 25 years, representing more than 550 different US academic institutions. The second survey added three specific job interviewing questions, a measure of the degree to which an interest in SA influenced college choice and a measure of the degree to which co-curricular activities (volunteering, internships or student clubs) moderated alumni perceptions of the impact of the SA experience on career related outcomes. The overall response rate for the two surveys was 8%.

The dependent measures in the study focused on the impact of SA on 1) career choices, 2) work ethic and skill development and 3) subsequent interviewing and career related opportunities. The impact of SA on their career choices, work ethic and skill development were assessed using twelve, 5-point Likert scales (Table 1). The independent variables included program length, housing arrangement (homestays, apartments, dorm with other US students or dorm with foreign students) and co-curricular activities (volunteering, internships, or student clubs). Results were analyzed using SPSS, version 22.

Table 1. My participation in a program abroad contributed to:

Career Choices	
1	my choice of work sector (e.g., non-profit, private, or public)
2	my choice of field of employment
3	helping me to clarify my professional goals
4	the importance I place on having personal fulfillment in my work
5	my seeking a job with an international/intercultural aspect
6	broadening the geographic area/location where I am willing to work
Work Ethic & Skills	
7	the importance I place on developing my skills and talents

8	my willingness to work hard and sacrifice in order to do well in school or in my job
9	developing my ability to understand an organization's culture
10	my ability to adapt to a diverse workplace
11	my acceptance of difference in people
12	developing skills and intercultural competencies which contributed to obtaining 1st job after graduation

Results

Sixty-six percent (66%) of the respondents reported that they had been asked about their study abroad experience during an interview and 40% stated that they had been told that the interview set them apart from other candidates in being selected for a job (Table 2). Of the alumni that were asked about their experience during an interview, 56% stated that it contributed towards their being offered a job and of those 45% said that they were given a job assignment based on the relevancy of their SA experience. Overall, 24% of the alumni reported that they had been given at least one job assignment due to the relevance of their SA experience. Women reported that they were more likely to be asked about their SA experience than men (67.4% vs 59.9%, $\alpha = .023$).

Table 2. Employment Related Outcomes

Interviewing and Career Opportunities	Y/N	N	%
I have been asked about my study abroad experience in a job interview	Yes	750	66.0%
	No	386	34.0%
I have been told that my study abroad experience set me apart from other candidates in being selected for a job	Yes	402	40.2%
	No	498	59.8%
I have been given an assignment by my past or current employer due the relevance of my study abroad experience	Yes	238	24.3%
	No	741	75.7%

Except for choice of work sector, alumni agreed that SA had a significant impact on their career choices, work ethic and skill development (Table 3). Mean scores for the group were compared for each measure using a one-sample t-test where the hypothesized null test was that study broad had no impact on career choices, work ethic or skill development. For all measures, alpha was less than .001. It is noteworthy, however, to observe that the impact of SA on both choice of work sector and field of employment was very small.

Table 3. My participation in a program abroad contributed to:

Career Choices	N	Mean¹	Std. Dev	2-tailed Sig.
my choice of work sector (e.g., non-profit, private, or public)	2623	3.10	1.06	.000
my choice of field of employment	2622	2.90	1.8	.000
helping me to clarify my professional goals	2626	2.56	1.05	.000
the importance I place on having personal fulfillment in my work	2627	2.01	0.98	.000
my seeking a job with an international/intercultural aspect	1459	2.59	1.18	.000
broadening the geographic area/location where I am willing to work	1459	2.03	1.06	.000

Work Ethic & Skills	N	Mean *	Std. Dev	2-tailed Sig.
the importance I place on developing my skills and talents	2621	1.97	0.89	.000
my willingness to work hard and sacrifice in order to do well in school or in my job	2621	2.01	0.93	.000
developing my ability to understand an organization's culture	2623	2.13	0.93	.000
my ability to adapt to a diverse workplace	2625	1.88	0.88	.000
my acceptance of difference in people	2525	1.62	0.74	.000
developing skills and intercultural competencies which contributed to obtaining 1st job after graduation	2623	2.40	1.08	.000
1. Where 1 = strongly agree and 5 = strongly disagree; Null hypothesis: $\bar{X} = 3$, neither agree nor disagree & the resulting $\alpha < .001$ for all measures.				

As illustrated in Table 4, nearly 50% of alumni report that their interest in studying abroad had some influence in their choice of which college to attend and as many as 35% reported that their interest in studying abroad had a moderate to large influence. Of those students where SA played a moderate to large role in their choice of an undergraduate program, the influence on college choice was greater for women than for men ($\bar{X} = 3.80$ vs 3.64; $\alpha = .02$); where 1 is no influence, 3 is moderate influence and 5 is very strong influence. Student involvement in SA also had a significant impact on 8 of 12 measures of career choice, work ethic and skill development and, as expected, when involvement

had an impact, increasing levels of involvement resulted in better career outcomes (Table 5).

Table 4. Influenced Choice of College

Study Abroad Influenced My Choice of College		Frequency	Percent
My desire to study abroad influenced my selection of an undergraduate college	Not at all	1316	50.1
	Slightly	394	15.0
	Moderately	409	15.6
	Very Much	304	11.6
	Extremely	204	7.8
	Total	2629	100

Table 5. Perceived Impact of Study Abroad Experience By Overall Interest in Study Abroad¹

Career Choices						
My participation in a program abroad contributed to:	Interest in Study Abroad Influenced My Choice of College	N	Mean ²	Std. Dev.	F	Sig.
My choice of work sector (e.g., non-profit, private, or public)	Not at all	1312	3.31	1.05	36.15	0
	slightly	393	3.11	0.96		
	Moderately	409	2.85	1.01		
	Very much	304	2.76	0.98		
	Extremely	204	2.7	1.16		
My choice of field of employment	Not at all	1311	3.15	1.17	38.34	0
	slightly	394	2.88	1.07		
	Moderately	408	2.69	1.11		
	Very much	304	2.45	1.08		
	Extremely	204	2.46	1.27		
Study Abroad Helped Clarify Prof Goals	Not at all	1313	2.76	1.1	28.96	0
	slightly	394	2.52	0.96		
	Moderately	409	2.36	0.95		

	Very much	304	2.26	0.9		
	Extremely	204	2.18	1.06		
The importance I place on having personal fulfillment in my work	Not at all	1314	2.19	1.056	24.72	0
	slightly	394	1.94	0.827		
	Moderately	409	1.83	0.884		
	Very much	304	1.74	0.775		
	Extremely	204	1.77	0.921		
<p>*1. Where "overall interest in study abroad" is defined as the degree to which a student's interest in study abroad influenced their choice of college to attend.</p> <p>*2. Where 1 = strongly agree and 5 = strongly disagree.</p>						

Table 5 (continued). Perceived Impact of Study Abroad Experience By Overall Interest in Study Abroad¹

Work Ethic & Skills						
My participation in a program abroad contributed to:	Interest in Study Abroad Influenced My Choice of College	N	Mean ²	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
The importance I put on developing my skills and talents	Not at all	1313	2.11	0.94	21.35	0
	slightly	393	2	0.83		
	Moderately	408	1.84	0.84		
	Very much	304	1.73	0.74		
	Extremely	201	1.69	0.82		
My willingness to work hard and sacrifice in order to do well in school or in my job	Not at all	1313	2.15	0.97	20.13	0
	slightly	393	2.01	0.86		
	Moderately	408	1.86	0.86		
	Very much	304	1.76	0.81		
	Extremely	201	1.75	0.88		
Developing my ability to understand an organization's culture	Not at all	1312	2.32	1	32.18	0
	slightly	394	2.05	0.79		
	Moderately	409	1.93	0.81		

	Very much	303	1.84	0.77		
	Extremely	204	1.87	0.92		
My ability to adapt to a diverse workplace	Not at all	1313	2.04	0.96	24.95	0
	slightly	394	1.81	0.73		
	Moderately	409	1.7	0.76		
	Very much	304	1.63	0.7		
	Extremely	204	1.69	0.85		
*1. Where "overall interest in study abroad" is defined as the degree to which a student's interest in study abroad influenced their choice of college to attend.						
*2. Where 1 = strongly agree and 5 = strongly disagree						

Twenty-eight percent (27.8%) of the respondents reported that they participated in at least one co-curricular activity while studying abroad. Compared to students that did not participate in any co-curricular activity, students that were involved in at least one co-curricular activity (volunteering, student club or internship) reported that their SA experience had a significantly bigger impact on all career related questions. In a more limited number of cases, being involved in two or more activities resulted in a significantly higher impact score (Table 6). In no case did involvement in co-curricular activity decrease the impact score. A separate analysis of whether any one type of activity (volunteering, student club or internship) was better than another did not reveal any significant differences.

Table 6. Relationship of Number of Activities to Career Choices

Career Choices							
Impact of Activities		N	Mean*	Std. Dev.	Std. Error	F	Sig.
My choice of field of employment	1	584	2.61	1.16	0.05	5.777	0.016
	2	145	2.35	1.13	0.09		
	Total	729	2.56	1.16	0.04		
My choice of work sector (e.g., non-profit, private, or public)	1	585	2.85	1.05	0.04	14.75	0.000
	2	144	2.47	1.13	0.09		
	Total	729	2.77	1.08	0.04		
	1	585	2.39	1.03	0.04	5.191	0.023

Study Abroad Helped Clarify Prof Goals	2	145	2.17	0.98	0.08		
	Total	730	2.35	1.02	0.04		
The importance I place on having personal fulfillment in my work	1	585	1.89	0.92	0.04	6.662	0.01
	2	145	1.67	0.89	0.07		
	Total	730	1.84	0.92	0.03		
*Where 1 = strongly agree and 5 = strongly disagree							

The length of the SA program was found to be unrelated to how alumni view the impact of their SA experience on their professional life. The impact of short-term programs (less than 8 weeks) was the same as intermediate (8 – 16 weeks) or long-term (greater than 16 week) programs. A separate analysis of the two tails of the distribution; very short programs (less than 4 weeks) or very long programs (greater than 18 weeks), also did not reveal any differences. Living in a homestay situation or with foreign students in a residence hall were reported as significantly more impactful than living in an apartment or with other US students in a residence hall in terms of contributing to getting the students first job or for its impact on the choice of field of employment or work sector (Table 7). Housing arrangements did not have an observable impact on alumni's future work ethic or skill development.

Table 7. Impact of Housing

Career Choices							
		N	Mean	Std. Dev	Std. Error	F	Sig.
Influenced choice of field of employment	Homestay	686	2.82	1.170	0.045	4.629	0.003
	Res w/US	775	2.99	1.208	0.043		
	Res w/Int Students	368	2.76	1.215	0.063		
	Apt	678	2.93	1.127	0.043		
	Total	2507	2.89	1.180	0.024		
Influenced choice of work sector	Homestay	685	3.09	1.013	0.039	5.355	0.001
	Res w/US	775	3.18	1.08	0.039		
	Res w/Int Students	368	2.91	1.152	0.060		
	Apt	678	3.10	1.037	0.040		
	Total	2506	3.09	1.063	0.021		
Obtaining First Job After School	Homestay	686	2.32	1.073	0.041	2.785	0.039
	Res w/US	775	2.47	1.086	0.039		
	Res w/Int Students	368	2.34	1.115	0.058		
	Apt	678	2.41	1.046	0.040		
	Total	2507	2.39	1.077	0.022		

Research Limitations

Our results are based on the self-reported perceptions and memories of alumni. The large sample size and low variability of responses due to the overwhelmingly positive attributions of alumni tend to make it easier overall to conclude that differences are statistically significant, resulting in the need to be cautious of concluding meaningfulness or managerial relevance. The overall response rate was 8%, which may raise questions about the generalizability of the results.

Discussion

We find strong support for the general proposition that participation in SA results in positive career development outcomes for most students. Our study also finds evidence that colleges can benefit from investing in and promoting SA activities. It is important, however, that colleges understand the return-on-investment calculation from both the perspective of recruiting, retention, and subsequently making a positive contribution towards career outcomes. Our findings also raise new questions and suggest strategies that we believe will help improve outcomes for both students and for those that are responsible for providing institutional support for study abroad.

From the perspective of the student, our data provides strong evidence that SA can increase opportunities for employment and create conditions or predispositions that will contribute to long-term career development. Consistent with Paige et al.'s (2009) finding that 36% of SA alumni report that their study abroad experience helped their career to a large degree, 40% of our sample were told the experience helped them to stand out during an interview and 24% reported that they were given a job assignment as a consequence of their SA experiences. A total of 57% of our sample reported that their study abroad experience contributed to their getting their first job. As encouraging as these findings are, we hasten to observe that our study did not provide any insight into how well prepared the students were in identifying or communicating the skills that they acquired while abroad. We believe, however, based on our collective experience of working with SA students over many decades, that students are generally unprepared to translate and then communicate what they learned abroad into high value, transferrable skills that are of interest to employers. A study abroad line item on a resume may contribute to 2/3 of alumni reporting that they were asked about their SA experience, but it falls far short of helping the students to take advantage of the interviewing opportunity.

Sixty-eight percent (68%) of the employers that participated in the 2018 NACE (National Association of Colleges and Employers) job outlook survey stated that they wanted interview candidates to demonstrate a strong work

ethic. Our data (Table 2) clearly supports the proposition that alumni feel that their SA experience contributed to their willingness to work hard and to their placing greater importance on their future skill and talent development. The NACE study also found flexibility and relating well to others were highly desirable employee attributes and our study found that SA alumni's willingness to adapt to diverse workplaces and accept differences in people were among some of the strongest benefits they derived from the SA experience.

We used the degree to which a student's interest in study abroad influenced their choice of college as a measure of student involvement in study abroad and as expected found that for most career outcome measures, there was a significant, positive relationship between involvement and subsequent career outcomes (Table 5). Future research, of course, will want to investigate this finding in greater detail collecting, ideally, multiple measures of involvement. Future research will also want to evaluate whether students that plan early for a study abroad experience are somehow different, e.g., more motivated or open to the SA experience, or whether the act of early preparation leads to greater involvement in the SA experience and therefore results in better career development outcomes. For now, our findings are intuitively appealing and supports the idea of getting students engaged as early as possible in planning their study abroad experience.

With regard to cultural engagement, one of our most compelling findings is the importance of students being involved in at least one outside co-curricular activity (volunteering, student club or internship) while studying abroad. Given that our focus was on career related outcomes we were somewhat surprised that it made no differences as to what kind of activity the student was engaged in while abroad. Previous research (e.g., Norris & Gillespie, 2008) highlighted the importance of internships on career development but these studies did not explicitly examine or compare involvement other types of cross-cultural activities. We found only limited evidence that being engaged in 2 or more activities (Table 6) improved career development outcomes. Program length did not have an impact on career development and housing alternatives only had a limited impact. It is noteworthy, and not too surprising, that where differences were observed in housing alternatives, homestays and housing with different international students had the biggest positive impact.

But is it valuable for institutions of higher education to invest in study abroad programming? Although we believe our study adds to the growing body of evidence (Carlson, 2017; DesJardins et al. 1999; Dwyer 2004; Rexeisen et al. 2005) that study abroad provides a positive return for institutions of higher education, we find ourselves questioning whether colleges are doing everything they can to maximize the potential benefits from these opportunities. Within the context of this paper, we are focusing only on implications of outward

mobility or students going abroad as opposed to recruiting international students. Dwyer (2004), adding to the findings of DesJardins et al (1999), reported that student interest in study abroad was having an increasing influence on their choice of college, growing from 11% in the 50's & 60's to 28% in the 90's. Our research provides further evidence that the impact of an interest in study abroad on college choice is continuing to grow. Our study, which spans SA alumni from 1990 to 2016 found that 35% of the respondents reported a moderate to strong influence on college choice. Moreover, when we compared results from our 2017 study (alumni from 1990 – 2011) with that of the 2012 (alumni from 1912 – 2016) we found the influence growing from 32% to 40%.

Whether it is in response to calls for greater accountability in higher education (Report to the Secretary of Education, 2012; Eaton, 2010) or student interest career outcomes being cited as the second most frequently decision factor by students when selecting a school to attend (Reid, 2017), colleges are beginning to devote more time and resources in how they can help prepare students for future employment (Carlson, 2017). Our study adds to the emerging literature on the positive relationship between study abroad and career development and broadly reinforces the call or recommendation for colleges to increase their investment in and promotion of their SA programs to both prospective students and, as early as possible, current students (Hubbard, Rexeisen, Watson, 2018)..

Conclusions

Further research on the relationship between study abroad participation and career related outcomes is clearly in order. One priority should be conducting additional research into, and promoting conversation about, how we can improve student's awareness of and ability to articulate high value transferrable skills acquired while studying abroad. Promoting employer education about the benefits of prospective employees studying abroad we believe will also be of value. Although the 2018 NACE study finds valuable parallels between specific attributes employers are seeking and the skills that students acquire while abroad, the same study ironically reports that the importance of students studying abroad is not of much influence when hiring. We therefore find that connecting more of the dots for employers, students and university administrators will prove to be beneficial for all stakeholders. Given the number and position of so many SA alumni, we encourage colleges to target their SA alumni for promoting the benefits of study abroad for career development to the rest of the market. Finally, we encourage ongoing conversation between admissions, career development and study broad offices to explore how to synergistically leverage their respective resources for the benefit of this common good.

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