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CHANGING LIVES THROUGH SHORT-TERM STUDY ABROAD: A  
TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE?

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MARIA-TERESA B. MOINETTE

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CHANGING LIVES THROUGH SHORT-TERM STUDY ABROAD: A  
TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE?

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BY

---

Dr. Irene Karpiak, Chair

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Dr. Kathleen Rager

---

Dr. T. Elon Dancy II

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Dr. Juanita Gamez-Vargas

---

Dr. E. Laurette Taylor

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological inquiry was to increase the knowledge base of how students who engage in short-term study abroad (2 to 4 weeks), particularly concerning the possibility for intellectual and education growth. This research also examined the possibility for a change of perspective of students attending a Midwestern university. Nineteen students participated in interviews. Semi-structured interviews were utilized to acquire the necessary data. The themes that emerged from the interview process demonstrated that central to the learning process for students, who are abroad, is the role of emotions, not only on their learning, but on their abilities to handle different sorts of experiences in a positive and constructive manner.

The findings suggest the importance of emotions on the results of learning while abroad. The literature on short-term study abroad has increased over the past few years. Yet, the influence of emotions on learning was deemed, by the participants, as fundamental to their experiences abroad. The sojourn produced emotions of anxiety, shame, fear, and hesitation, with ensuing positive feelings of excitement, resolve, attraction, and engagement. Furthermore, the nature of the emotions was recursive, that is to say, the similar and opposing emotions repeated themselves as a result of external stimuli.

Other themes also evolved from the data: perspective transformation and a new sense of self; the educational value of everyday learning; and a short but important sojourn. In connection with the emotional facets of studying abroad, a new sense of self emerged where the participants stated feeling more empathetic toward others as well as acknowledging a growth in self-worth. Additionally, the value of learning in a



foreign environment was both challenging and rewarding. Unique situations were experienced away from the classroom. These experiences were deemed, by the participants, as more valuable than the actual educational agenda.

As little research exists to offer enlightenment to the primacy of emotions on study abroad, this research has provided groundwork for further exploration into the role of emotions and learning in a study abroad context. Given the perceived value of study abroad programs in general, and the mounting difficulty of managing and funding long-term programs, more research is necessary to assess the value of emotions on learning.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Study abroad is a gateway for students to learn about new cultures, improve foreign language skills, or experience a different way of life while pursuing a university degree (Lewis & Niesenbaum, 2005). Over the past several hundred years, world-wide student involvement in study abroad has increased steadily (Bollag, 2005). Having an openness and eagerness to learn about other countries and their cultures has created, in many students, a desire to study abroad. Furthermore, research in the area of study abroad highlights the importance of this endeavor as a means to better employment, personal growth, and language learning (Rotabi, Gammonley, & Gamble, 2006). Articles and research papers on the benefits of study abroad suggest a number of ways a student's life changes, from learning new technology to understanding new cultures (Alred & Byram, 2002; Black & Duhon, 2006; Bruckner & Johnson, 2005; Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Christofi & Thompson, 2007; Dolby, 2004; Hadis, 2005; Kitsantas, 2004; Taillefer, 2005).

According to a publication of the Institute of International Education (IIE), *Open Doors* (2006) the number of students who studied abroad has increased by 151% in the past ten years. The increase in the number of students going abroad to fulfill part of their university curriculum is due in part to the growing number of institutions offering a wider choice of programs involving not only a variety of destinations but also time durations. The traditional time durations of study abroad consists of long-term (one full academic year), mid-length (one semester), and short-term (8 weeks or less). According to the IIE, programs that take place during the summer, January, winter

break term, or last less than eight weeks have expanded the number of students who study abroad. Since 2007 the term, short-term study abroad became the main term for those types of programs that lasted fewer than 8 weeks.

The growth in United States (U.S.) study abroad participation remains positive even though the U.S. in 2001 suffered terrorist attacks that could have deterred U.S. students from international travel. After September 11, 2001, the government of the U.S. reevaluated study abroad programs and found that the speculation that fewer students would study abroad after the terrorist attack was erroneous. In fact, an actual increase in participation of 4.4% occurred (Hoffius, 2004). More students opted to study abroad in 2002 than in any previous academic year. Since then, student participation in study abroad has continually increased. This boost in the number of students taking advantage of study abroad has been attributed to the greater opportunities for shorter-term study abroad programs (Open Doors, 2008).

Despite the popularity of study abroad, the total number of students going abroad in relation to the whole student population of higher education remains low (Open Doors, 2008). The possible reasons for the lack of participation include, but are not limited to, financial factors, time constraints, and family responsibilities (Bollag, 2004). However, short-term study abroad is one section of study abroad that is opening doors to the outside world for typical U.S. students who, otherwise, do not have the benefit of money or time for a longer sojourn (Open Doors, 2005). Spending six months to a year studying abroad is particularly infeasible for an ever-increasing non-traditional college population (Open Doors, 2005).

Conversely, as more students discover that alternatives to long-term study abroad programs exist, the numbers will likely increase. Recent data shows a steady increase in the number of students opting for short terms abroad. For example, the IIE found that, for the academic year of 2005/06, short-term programs made up 52.8% of the population of students studying abroad, long-term 5.5% and mid-length 41.7%. (<http://Opendoors.iienetwork.org>). The overall number of students studying abroad increased 8.5% from the previous 2007/2008 academic year. The numbers indicate that short-term programs are consistently gaining in popularity with study abroad participants (Open Doors, 2005).

Increasing the number of study abroad participants is the goal of higher education and governmental committees (Bollag, 2005). According to the Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program (2004), financial incentives can also contribute to enhancing the number of students who decide to study abroad. Scholarships are available for students who wish to study in non-English speaking countries and Non-western European countries. Some of these scholarships are the David L. Boren Award for International Study that provide up to \$20,000 to U.S. undergraduate students and \$30,000 to U.S. graduate students going to areas deemed important and critical by the U.S. government and the Benjamin A Gilman International Scholarship Program, funded by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State. Despite travelers to locations previously underrepresented (i.e. Arab countries, Africa) and the phenomenal increase in new short-term study abroad programs, little research has been carried out that would address the value of such programs (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004).

Although preparing citizens for a global world is at the heart of many university mission statements, many universities lack programs that give classroom credit to short-term study abroad participants (Farrell, 2007). While short-term study abroad allows students some experience of other cultures, questions remain as to the overall value in terms of educational benefit (Lewis & Niesenbaum, 2005). Furthermore, issues such as credit value and work load, related to duration of stay, may create confusion for faculty and administration in schools that desire to offer credit. While the notion of sending students abroad is the goal for many institutions of higher education, validating short-term programs remains problematic as a result of the scant research base.

### **A Brief History of International Study Abroad.**

The story of students crossing borders, supported and encouraged by their governments to learn and share, dates back to the ancient world. The University of Jundishapur, under King Noshirwan the Just (531B. C.-579 B. C.), was a leading intellectual center where Greek, Jewish, Christian, Hindu, and Persian thinkers shared ideas. At this university, Byzantine scientists and philosophers expelled from Constantinople worked and exchanged philosophies and ideas. Alexander the Great (356 BC - 323 BC), understanding the importance of knowing as much as possible about other cultures and civilizations, sent scholars throughout his vast kingdom to study the peoples he had conquered in order to acquire a better understanding of their cultures for his purposes (Brickman, 1964).

Emperor Asoka the Great, of India, utilized a form of study abroad, in sending his missionaries throughout West Asia, East Europe, and North Africa to spread the word of Buddhism. Under Asoka, the University of Takshashila boasted a distinguished

faculty made up of scholars from around the world, and students were required to study abroad in order to graduate (Brickman, 1964).

In the Far East, the T'ang Dynasty (620-907) fostered international educational relationships and invited scholars from abroad to study their culture to gain a better understanding of Buddhism. Although the dynasty did not last politically, its cultural achievements were impressive. Poetry and the visual arts from this era are considered superlative contributions to the cultural development of China (Brickman, 1964).

In the Common Era, the early Roman emperors also understood the utility of having scholars venture forth into unknown kingdoms to gain a better understanding of the world around them. In Medieval Times, Alfonso X (1252-1284), the Wise, of Spain was one such king who brought together Muslim, Jewish, and Christian scholars to translate and exchange ideas related not only to religion but history, politics, law, and medicine. Spain's pivotal role in the transmission of knowledge of the ancients to the modern world and the importance of this information to the Renaissance stems from this international exchange of students and teachers.

Thus, the idea of sending scholars out into the world to bring back new information on other cultures is not a new concept. Later, in the Middle Ages in Western Europe, the university, or *studiageneralia*, rose to prominence in the thirteenth century. The governmental practice of granting the *ius ubique docendi* (right of teaching anywhere in Christendom) provided an international dimension to higher education. Students often followed their professors from one university to another, and the universality of Latin made it easier for students to study abroad, that is, away from their home or province (Brickman, 1964).

### **The United States and Study Abroad.**

In the late 1800's and early 1900's, women from the U.S. who chose to study medicine and pursue scientific research travelled to Germany or Switzerland (Singer, 2003). Some people in the U.S. in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century hesitated to send students abroad due to fear that they would become corrupt in their thinking. This attitude is exemplified in a statement made by Noah Webster (1758-1843), a prominent U.S. schoolteacher and philologist, that young people between the ages of twelve and twenty travelling abroad would be exposed to subversive political ideas and moral corruption (Brickman, 1964). This idea was echoed in the voices of other leading intellectuals and politicians such as Thomas Jefferson, Professor Benjamin Waterhouse of the Harvard Medical School, and President George Washington (Brickman, 1964). Eventually, the attitude changed, and beginning in 1815, the U.S. experienced an exodus of many students who went to study in German universities because research in medicine and law were advancing far beyond what was transpiring in U.S. universities (Brickman, 1965).

In the United States, prior to World War I, those who studied abroad were generally graduate students in search of scholarly or professional training in Europe (Walton, 2005). Germany was particularly popular for those who chose to take advantage of the advances in the field of medicine. Not only Germany, but also France and Great Britain, were accepting students from the United States to study with the specialized professors, thus enriching the experiences and intellectual mindset of all involved (Walton, 2005).

The founding of the IIE indicated the importance that study abroad was becoming in U.S. higher education. Theodore Roosevelt's administration acknowledged the importance of an understanding of other nations and cultures, and began the effort to internationalize U.S. higher education (Klinger, 1964).

International education as part of the United States higher education curriculum began in 1936 at the Conference for the Maintenance of Peace in Buenos Aires, Argentina (Davis, 1964). The government of the United States, under the auspices of the 1938 Act for Cooperation, developed cultural programs that dealt specifically with inter-American affairs. During the Second World War, these governmentally supported programs expanded to include other countries around the world. From 1964 to the present, the Fulbright and Smith-Mundt acts have promoted foreign exchanges throughout the world to benefit U.S. students (Open Doors, 2008).

**Study abroad today (Fields of study and destinations).** The Institute for International Education (IIE), which is funded by the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, stated in its annual report, *Open Doors* that study abroad programs have significantly increased over the past fifteen years (1993 to 2008). For the academic year of 2002/03, 191,321 U.S. students studied abroad, an 8.5% increase from the previous year (Open Doors, 2004, p.19) while in 2006/2007 participation rose to 241,791 sojourners (Open Doors 2008 p.18). Students who studied in short-term programs (eight weeks or less) experienced the most growth, while year-long programs demonstrated the largest decline (58.1%) from academic year 1993/94 to 2008. The students choosing a mid-term (one semester) program remained relatively constant, showing only a slight decline (7.9%) from 1993/1994 to 2008 (Open Doors,



2008, p.21). For the academic year of 2006/2007, 241,791 U.S. students went abroad showing an increase of 62.7% from the 90,000 students who studied abroad during academic year 1995/1996 (Open Doors, 2008, p.18).

In 2006/2007, 93% of U.S. students studying abroad chose a program shorter than one term, it is noteworthy that, while mid-term study abroad generated much scholarly attention (Anderson, et al., 2006), less research was devoted to short-term study abroad. Furthermore, the interest in study abroad research examines cultural understanding, language immersion, social work, international business, and personal growth primarily related to mid and long-term periods of time (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004). Additionally, areas of study have received more consideration than time abroad.

The largest amount of research on study abroad participants is in the social sciences, followed by business and management (Open Doors, 2008). While business and management majors have increased by 10% in the past decade foreign language participation has dropped by 3%. The decline in students majoring in a foreign language has been influenced by the decline of year-long study abroad programs. On the other hand, the need for students of many fields to have some international experience to become better prospects for the growing global marketplace has been recognized as important. Those in foreign language studies find other avenues to strengthen their language abilities.

#### **Leading U.S. destinations.**

The leading destination for students from the United States abroad is the United Kingdom (18.2%), followed by Italy and Spain, (10.8%) each, while France receives 7.5 % of U.S. students and Australia 6.1% (Open Doors, 2008). English-speaking

destinations account for 28.2% of the total population of U.S. students study abroad and Spanish-speaking destinations account for 20.3% of the top 20 destinations. These proportions have not changed in the past ten years. Overall, Western Europe still attracts 47% of students who study abroad. Many American universities have established ongoing successful programs at universities in Western Europe and have had maintained them for decades.

### **Limited Research in Short-Term Study Abroad Programs and Education**

The lack of literature in relation to short-term study abroad, despite the increase in availability and acceptance of this kind of program, suggests the need for further inquiries into the phenomenon of short-term study abroad (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004). To be academically sound, new short-term programs would profit from a research base to offer guidance as to the best practices of design and execution. As numbers have increased every year in short-term participation, the investments of schools and students in these programs necessitate some investigation into their worth (Gillespie, 2002). The assumption that study abroad has educational value has yet to be tested through systematic educational research.

### **Autobiographical details**

As a participant in three study abroad experiences, I have reflected on the sense of enhanced maturity that I experienced from them. Although only one of my sojourns was for less than four weeks, I interacted with students with various lengths of stay. Studying abroad undoubtedly changed me. In every way, I grew with each new journey. Through my own lenses, I have some understanding of the impact that study abroad can have on an individual, especially a young adult.

As economic pressures have increased and students look to finish their university careers in record times, it has become apparent to me that providing short-term study abroad programs may allow global competencies to become accessible to broad numbers of students. As a researcher in study abroad, I became interested in how the trend of short-term study abroad can continue to not only grow, but to become more widely accepted by faculty and administration or decision-makers and what the varied impact of short-term study abroad could have on individuals. In this regard, I conducted a pilot study on short-term study abroad that led me to pursue the endeavor on a larger scale.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Study abroad continues to occupy a position in the educational field as a positive venue to traverse borders and learn to live with individuals in a society that is not one's own (Michelson, 1999). The desire to create more opportunities for students to study abroad has led to a shift in higher education for programs that can accommodate the needs of students of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. One option is to offer shorter stays abroad in order to allow for the international experience in an academic setting, while enabling students to graduate in four or five years. The growing number of short-term participants in study abroad suggests that the trend will continue. Yet, the research into this arena remains scarce. Whereas research demonstrates that long and mid-term study abroad have educational, personal, and academic value, the impact of short-term study abroad and the educational value of such a sojourn remains, largely, a mystery.

## **Purpose of the Study**

This study sought to redress the lack of current knowledge concerning short-term study abroad, including its possible educational significance with a variety of potential results. Given the perceived value of study abroad programs, in general (Fraser, 1964, Gray, et al., 2002), and the mounting difficulty with managing and funding long-term programs, in an unfavorable economic climate, to exploring the value of short-term study abroad as an educational program and a learning experience is most timely.

## **Research Questions**

The following research questions were used to inquire into the phenomenon of short-term study abroad:

1. How do students who engage in short-term study abroad experience these opportunities?
2. What kinds of learning occur for students who engage in short-term study abroad?
3. What features of short-term study abroad contribute most to students learning?
4. What opportunities for deeper sorts of learning (i.e., “transformative” learning) arise?
5. Did participants in recent short-term study abroad encounter situations that resulted in a questioning of prior beliefs and worldviews? If so, what types of experiences were they?

## **Significance of the Study**

The learning that occurs for students in short-term study abroad includes 1) growth in cultural awareness, 2) a new global perspectives and competencies, 3)

enhanced knowledge of other people's perception of the U.S., and 4) increased personal growth and maturity, in part because the students are separated from the comfort and boundaries of home. The experiences that are realized through study abroad cannot be replicated in a classroom or on a college or university campus (Engle & Engle, 2004).

This work provides universities, faculty, and students with information helpful in planning, promoting, and gauging outcomes of short-term study abroad. The increased understanding of the possibilities of a two to four-week educational journey out of the country may encourage students to go abroad and educators to support shorter sojourns. In addition, practitioners in the field may gain insight into how effective short-term study abroad programs can be created or modified to adjust to an increasing number of participants.

Understanding what happens to students mentally, emotionally, socially, and intellectually during a short-term study abroad can provide the academic community with information that will aid in the development of pre-departure support, stay assistance, and reentry de-briefing of the sojourner.

This study sought to understand short-term study abroad of sojourners who stayed one month or less at a foreign university. At present, limited research addresses personal growth and maturation or learning during short-term study abroad. Viewing these issues through the lenses of transformative learning theory and experiential learning theory has provided insight into short-term study abroad while enhancing this sector of the study abroad literature

## **Assumptions Underlying the Study**

Assumptions as to the issue of short-term study abroad and higher education must be clarified. Therefore, this study assumes the following:

1. That participants will openly and honestly provide useful information regarding their experiences of a short-term sojourn.
2. That the aim of education is to provide opportunities for students to grow intellectually, mentally, emotionally, and socially.
3. That a study of students' recounting of experiences and outcomes of study abroad will provide valuable information regarding a phenomenon that is currently under-researched.

## **Definitions**

While the term "study abroad" may seem self-explanatory, there exist various means of this goal, such as year abroad, semester abroad and short-term abroad. Exchange programs and study tours conducted by faculty members, during which students spend two to four weeks traveling and studying, are not included in this project.

### **Other terms / definitions of study abroad**

**Sojourner:** a student who engages in a study abroad journey for any length of time.

**Sojourn:** synonym for the act of living and studying abroad.

**Study abroad:** for the purpose of this study, the act of engaging in scholarly activities at an institution of higher education located in a foreign country.

**International education:** a term used synonymously with study abroad, an agreement for scholarly activity between a student or instructor and an institution in a country

other than the one of origin (Hansen, 2002). **Exchange program:** This type of program, as a rule, is a direct agreement between two universities according to which each university sends students to the other for a prescribed amount of time, generally one to two semesters. **Duration of stay /**

**Length of stay:** refer to specific terms such as summer, semester, and year abroad (Open Doors, 2006). “Short-term study abroad” denotes duration in a foreign country of two to four weeks with students generally enrolled in language institutes sometimes affiliated with a larger university, yet often run by independent language institutes/schools (Engle & Engle, 2004; Gray, Murdock, & Stebbins, 2002). In addition, students might take advantage of Christmas break or summer break to spend two to four weeks abroad (Gray et al., 2002). **Year**

**abroad:** In this study, “year abroad” indicates that students spend an academic year at an institution in a foreign country.

**Semester abroad or mid-term abroad:** One semester, fall or spring is spent in an institution of higher learning in a foreign country.

**Short-term:** This term represents duration of 8 weeks or less. For the purpose of this study, 4-6 week sojourns are the norm.

**Transformative learning:** Transformational learning theory, by definition, has come to describe a process by which previously assimilated assumptions and beliefs are questioned critically (Mezirow, 1991, Cranton, 1994).

**Experiential Learning:** Experiential learning occurs when the learner engages in self-initiated learning due to a threat to the self (Rogers, 1969) and personal growth ensues. Learning experientially has significant value in the learning process because the learner

is personally involved because “ideas are not fixed and immutable elements of thought but are formed and re-formed through experience” (Kolb, 1984, p.27).

### **Summary**

Increased numbers of study abroad opportunities have been found to foster greater cultural understanding for students leaving the college campus and entering the work force. These educational opportunities provide venues for not only intellectual growth but also individual growth. As the student enters the world she is no longer an “I” but now a part of the “we”. A global society recognizes the importance of understanding different cultures in order to adapt to a less homogeneous society than a college campus. Kaufman and Johnson (2005) noted the need for “international knowledge, language abilities and intercultural skills, for America’s economic well-being” (p.9). As our global climate continues to change, those with international experience will be better suited after leaving higher education to prosper in the work force (Falk & Kanach, 2000). Thomas S. Johnson, a leader in promoting student exchanges and executive director of North American Association of Foreign Student Advisors (NAFSA), expresses the hope that “by 2015, every college graduate will have studied abroad or had significant international experience” (p. 4 in *Recruitment & Retention in Higher Ed.*). Short-term study abroad can provide a means to an end in order to achieve the goal that “every” college graduate will study abroad because financial or time restraints can be overcome.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Given the perceived value of study abroad programs in general (Fraser, 1964; Gray, Mudock, & Stebbins, 2002), and the mounting difficulty of managing and funding long-term programs, (compared with shorter-term ones), more research is necessary to assess the value of the latter. This inquiry explored the potential impact of short-term study abroad on the development of student knowledge, skills, and attitudes in relation to themselves and their world.

The following literature review describes current themes of cross-cultural growth, (including empathy and knowledge that contribute to reflection and possible change in values), assessment of study abroad programs in various contexts, and duration of programs abroad. The chapter begins with a discussion of the learning theories used in this research: the constructivist approach to learning, encompassing transformative and experiential learning theories.

#### **Theoretical Perspectives**

Theories and philosophical perspectives of constructivism and transformative learning, self-directed learning and experiential learning guided this analysis. Dirks's (1997; 2001; 2006) endeavor to bring forward the relationship of learning and emotion in conjunction with Denzin, (1984) who approaches emotionality as a form of understanding and interpretation that has feeling, provided this research with guidance. This study incorporated a constructivist approach to examine how individuals reflected on their experiences and then constructed a personal understanding of the world around them. Bruner (1986) noted that individuals comprehend the world in different ways as a result of language and symbolic systems created specifically by the culture in which

that individual lives. Therefore, the research took into consideration this important point of reference, and the participants transformed their memories into the words that shaped this study. Denzin&Guba (2000) argue that constructivism is active in that the mind takes “grasp of the empirical world and that knowledge (i.e. the mind) simply reflects or mirrors what is “out there” (p.197). Because each of us creates our world from within, this study compelled me to use the experiences and the words of the participants to add to the knowledge base of short-term study abroad.

Dirkx’s study yielded a method to take the words shared by the participants and construct meaning. Navigating through the memories of the participants, I uncovered a rich source of data that was grounded in the students’ emotions, which were used as a catalyst for the findings. A clear connection between memorable occasions and reflection resulted in a new perspective of themselves in their own world. To further this concept, Dirkx (1997) suggested that “transformative learning also involves very personal and imaginative ways of knowing, grounded in a more intuitive and emotional sense of our experiences” (p.80). These moments provided opportunities for growth by providing feelings, such as sad, happy, or indifferent. The thoughts turned into deeper experiences because they were felt more profoundly within the human body.

Participants experienced visceral reactions at various points throughout their sojourns, and these feelings continued to play a role in the lives abroad and, later, at home. These individuals revealed that, although they did “learn” in class, what gave them most pleasure and/or pain were their journeys beyond the four safe walls of the classroom. Independent movement away from the organized structures provided more meaningful learning because the experiences were unique to them at that point in time,

at a place to which they may never return. The sense of “once in a lifetime” permeated the recollections of many of these sojourners.

Denzin (1984), similarly, provided this study with an understanding of emotion in the role of an embodied experience that comes to define the individual. These phenomena, according to Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner (2007) “engage us physically, mentally, and emotionally in the moment and learning as a result of the reliving a past experience” (p.159). Additionally, Merriam, et al. suggested that “People have concrete experiences; they reflect on them and construct new knowledge as a result of these reflections” (p. 161). Denzin, building on the thoughts of Heidegger (1927/1962) states that “people are their emotions” (pg.1). Therefore, the individual is a phenomenon that should be explored through the embodied emotions that pulse through the mind and soul. Emotionality, according to Denzin, is “the process of being emotional, locates the person in the world of social interaction” (p.3). Utilizing the notion of emotionality, this study demonstrates that the core aspect of being in a social surrounding, specifically one that is not home, required the participants to find a deeper level of understanding to cope and to be able to construct a new meaning. These emotions appear as anxiety, surprise, fear, grief, and shyness, among many others.

### **Self-directed Learning**

In “*The Inquiring Mind*” Cyril O. Houle (1961-1998) began by acknowledging that “the desire to learn, like every other human characteristic, is not shared equally by everyone” (p.3). Although study abroad provides a new means to learning, not everyone will partake in this endeavor. Houle further states “...some men and women seek the reward of knowledge-and do so to marked degree” (p.4). Houle focuses on the

“inquiring mind” of the adult learner. While the participants in this study ranged in ages 18-25, these adult learners made an active decision to broaden their horizons as self-directed learners.

Self-directed learning, a non-traditional learning concept, evolved through the works of Allen Tough (1936), based on the previous work of Houle, who initiated research into what drives adult learners to continue learning. Not surprisingly, though, the basic theory of self-directed learning can be traced back to Socrates (469BC-399 BC), Plato (428/7 BC – 348/7 BC), Aristotle (384 BC -322 BC), Alexander the Great (356 BC-323 B. C.), and Desiderius Erasmus Rotterdam (1466-1536). Countless individuals throughout history have chosen to seek something greater and accomplished this venture by taking initiative in their lives.

Tough (1979) gauged time on task and motivation to “gain and retain certain fairly clear knowledge and skill, or to produce some other lasting change” (p.7). The responsibility to take control of learning is demonstrated by signing the paper to study abroad. While 95% of high school seniors want to study abroad, only one percent realizes the dream; one percent actually do study abroad. They took the initiative and realized that the world is a much bigger place and that studying abroad can give them an opportunity to learn something new, in and out of the classroom.

Unlike what Knowles (1975) terms “teacher-directed learning,” where the teacher sets goals and diagnosis needs assuming that “the learner’s experience is of less value than that of the teacher” (p. 20), the self-directed learner takes the initiative to seek out learning by diagnosing their own needs and finding ways of overcoming any problems. Additionally, a curiosity for knowing what to do to “fit in” persuaded many of the

participants to search for meanings to the local customs. Learning to be a global citizen required the participants to take it upon themselves to determine how to fit in.

For the purpose of this study, self-directed learning became even more apparent when a number of the participants mentioned using books or searching the internet to help them uncover new information about their location and its peoples and cultures. All the participants (100%) acknowledged that they lacked “real” information in regards to their target culture, such as tangible facts to navigate and understand the customs, gestures, dos and don’ts, greetings, farewells, and eating. These seemingly normal practices are anything but that when abroad because each culture has its own custom. For many, pre-departure meetings were not that helpful, especially for those going to non-western cultures.

While some pre-departure classes were mandatory, the participants stated that not enough “real” information was shared, and the shock of being in a foreign land urged them to search for facts and minutiae about the new culture on their own to better understand their new home. Additionally, many continued this learning upon return to the U.S. by reading biographies, histories, folk tales, and other writings about their host country.

### **Transformative Learning Theory**

Encouraged by John Dewey’s (1859-1952) definition of reflective thought as “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it” (1933, p. 9) and the possibility of using this ability to solve problems, Mezirow posited that transformative learning theory provided a modern perspective where critically reflective thinking was the

fundamental factor for a change in meaning schemes and perspectives. Additionally, while Dewey (1963) noted the importance of emotions tied to experiences that become an individual “unity” (p.152), Mezirow (1991) combined the same properties to interpret the feelings in relation to others and to the self. He indicated that these factors dictated the depth of the remembrance of a certain experience. Once processed, this unique experience yields unity.

Critical reflection, according to Mezirow (1991), is essential to transformative learning, which makes one question prior assumptions, generating a new frame of reference. Frame of reference includes the manner in which one views the world, be it through religious doctrine, family values, peer group attitudes, political standing, and economic status, social or even racial attitudes. A meaning perspective (habit of mind) is a set of assumptions that are broad and help one determine how to deal with an occurrence in day-to-day life. Expressing a point of view verbalizes an attitude. The reaction is not conscious, but rather a consequence of indoctrination due to one’s surroundings.

Encountering new, emotional, or strange situations that do not fit expectations and lack meaning are a part of the process of transformation, when one begins to reflect critically on existing habits of mind. Transformational learning can be sudden or gradual. Self-reflective change helps us see the world and ourselves through a different lens, not inherited but critically created.

Jack Mezirow’s work on perspective transformation in adult learning evolved from his reading of Jürgen Habermas (1929), a German social thinker and philosopher (Mezirow, 2000). Although Mezirow did not reiterate Habermas’s connection to

Marxist ideals, he did further the notion of a humanistic ideology in relation to learning (Brookfield, 2005). Transformation, according to Mezirow, in the sense that adults undergo ten phases of learning that are not sequential and certain phases may or may not be experienced. In addition “learning new frames of reference, transforming habits of mind and the transforming of points of view” may be altered (Mezirow, 2000, pg. 19). Through these courses of action adults transform. Mezirow analyzes the philosophy of learning and argued that ideological critique is imperative for critical reflection and fosters a better notion of transformation.

As an emancipatory process, transformative learning alters preconceptions of the world according to one’s psycho-cultural assumptions. Although not as boldly stated as Paolo Freire’s (1921-1997) *conscientization* (a process by which the learner advances towards critical consciousness), transformative learning is a step toward bringing about change in the world. Vital components of Mezirow’s transformative learning are inclusive and discriminating, involving open rational thought and reflection, not just social transformation as Freire reported.

To understand the development of transformative learning theory, Mezirow referred to Habermas, who proposed three kinds of knowledge: instrumental, communicative, and emancipatory. Mezirow took much from this theory, including the idea of communicative knowledge as a significant component of perspective transformation. For Mezirow, dialogue functions as a method to engage in perspective change. In addition, Mezirow agrees with Habermas’s notion of Western society as the dominant culture, but most important for Mezirow is the need to combat this dominance of thought through experiences that change or influence perspective transformation.

Like Freire's *conscientization*, Habermas seeks emancipatory education, whereas, Mezirow expands his domain into the institutions of education. Whereas Mezirow focuses on the individual as an autonomous actor, Habermas places emphasis on structure and sociological critical theory. Mezirow is more atheoretical in his approach to perspective change than Habermas.

The process of increasing awareness to the cultural practices of a foreign country encompasses new lenses for looking at one's own world. Mezirow's (1991) meaning perspectives encapsulate the idea that coming into contact with a new civilization can influence many prior beliefs ingrained in that individual.

As businesses becomes more global, employers look for recruits with cross-cultural knowledge and the ability to understand other nations (Kaufman & Johnson, 2005). Knowledge and experience with other cultures can facilitate cooperation. Therefore, cross-cultural growth and understanding often come from direct interaction that occurs while studying abroad (Rotabi, Gammonley, & Gamble, 2005).

Americans who study abroad are experiencing life directly as the other. In an attempt to understand the new and unfamiliar, students in a foreign setting may begin critical reflection and set into motion self-awareness, which, in turn, can lead to what Habermas, termed emancipatory learning (Mezirow, 1991), that which disconnects the constraints of ignorance born out of social traditions and values, allowing for rational thought to overcome the norm. In other words, one is freed from intolerance and ignorance by knowledge.

### **Forms of Transformative Learning Theory.**



Various theorists hypothesize that aspects of transformative learning theory based on Mezirow's perspective-- locus of learning (individual or sociocultural), cultural-spiritual, psycho-critical, psychoanalytic, social-emancipatory, race-centric, and planetary have evolved the basic ideas of the theory (Taylor, 2005; Kegan, 2000; and Dirkx, 2000). Each used some part of Mezirow's ideas to launch their own.

Transformative learning requires a new perspective, as suggested by Taylor (2005) when he observed that various perspectives have evolved from Mezirow's original study of transformative learning, such as locus of learning (individual or sociocultural), cultural-spiritual, psycho-critical, psychoanalytic, social-emancipatory, race-centric, and planetary exist, yet research related to longevity of transformation is absent.

Kegan (2000), takes a different position, noting that transformative learning can be an epistemological (referring to a specific belief that people hold about the nature of knowledge) change and not necessarily a variance in habits or even an acquisition of new knowledge. From this position, increasing cognitive capabilities is not the primary goal of transformative learning. Epistemologically, the concept of transformative learning must evolve from being connected not only to adulthood but the entire life span of the learner. During the duration of life, individuals increase their knowledge; transformational learning, on the other hand, changes how we know.

Spirituality and learning are connected in Dirkx's (2000) interpretation of transformative learning. He argues that learning through the soul is crucial for transformation because only by reaching down into the depths of the soul can one liberate the ego that involuntarily or voluntarily discriminates. This extra-rational

approach does not rely on critical reflection but on symbols that are interpreted by the soul.

Having established a basic summary of transformative learning theory, the focus of this project shifts to reviewing the theory as it connects directly to study abroad.

### **Study abroad and Transformative Learning Theory.**

Lyon (2001) focused on 13 women educators (11 white and 2 African-American) who worked overseas and how the experience changed them all. She drew on an interpretive paradigm grounded in Mezirow's transformative learning theory to make meaning out of the words of the participants. Unlike other investigations, Lyon borrowed a theory that could explain and capture phenomena as a set of tested empirical generalizations (Schwandt, 2001). In addition, her project originated from her own experiences as an educator who had worked overseas in Malaysia and Jordan. Her results indicated that the experience had a positive impact on the participants, but she concluded that departure and re-entry played a significant role in the transformations because many were not prepared for the emotional toll either way. Lyon illustrated that cross-cultural adaptation is essential for the participant to thrive in a new and challenging environment. She ascertained that the change would be ongoing because these participants were continuing to seek out new international relationships or other global endeavors. However, as of this date, no follow-up investigation has been published.

### **Experiential Learning Theory**

Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) is specifically defined by "the central role experience plays in the learning process," unlike other theories of learning that

emphasize cognition over affect (Boyatzis & Kolb, 1999, p. 2). Boyatzis & Kolb (1997) additionally contributed four specific phases of learning to ELT: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. In both formal and informal educational settings, individuals acquire new knowledge. For the most part, however, theories of experiential learning view experience as a result of in-and-out of class situations with liberation beginning after the reflective period. Many theorists argued that experience is a part of the educational process and developed or enhanced previously existing frameworks, while others chose to use the theory as a foundation for understanding learning not associated with brick and mortar structures.

Dewey (1934) noted the importance of integrating experience, concepts, observations and actions into learning theories. Dewey acknowledged the connection between formal education and nature as a catalyst in the learning cycle. Through first-hand contact, observation, and logical thought, individuals have created an ever changing and growing environment (Dewey, 1963). Schooling is not the only means by which society, as a whole, reflects its views on the world.

Carl Rogers (1983), on the other hand, differentiated between two types of learning: cognitive and experiential. The former resulted in personal growth or first-hand knowledge from first-hand experience. Both types are direct results of self-initiated learning due to the wants and needs of the learner. Where Dewey saw experience as a stimuli for learning, in many cases based on the needs of society, Rogers perceived experience as personal gain and a person-centered way of being (Rogers, 1983).

A person-centered activity, according to Rogers, is described as a set of values that empowers individuals based on the sharing of these experiences with a classroom.

Knowledge is not stagnant but constantly in motion; if one accepts and utilizes those events in life, learning can be encouraged. Another key factor in Roger's philosophy of teaching lies in the realm of connecting with the whole person and not with the brain alone (Rogers, 1983). Teaching is not meant to be sterile and lifeless, but creative, engaging, and passionate. The instructor who allows the environment to exist freely will promote useful learning.

The differences found in the literature, related to experiential learning, do not imply a controversial theory. With this in mind, Kolb (1991) suggested the importance of experience as, not only the use of the senses in direct contact with the individual as stimuli for learning, but also knowledge as a result of the very basic participation of life wherein people gain knowledge informally from everyday actions or experiences. Rogers and Kolb, though different, understood the importance of the whole body learning experience. As a leading theorist on the subject, Kolb proposed the need to take into consideration the human side of living because daily experiences can foster intellectual growth.

### **Experiential learning and study abroad.**

Ribeiro (2005) studied 7 adult learners out of the 11 who participated in an organized study tour to South Africa. The participants were six women and one man, five Caucasians, one African-American, and one Black (from Canada), all college graduates working in professional areas of teaching. What she found was that immersion in a new society shifted personal beliefs and stereotypes. Through the interviews, Ribeiro uncovered that almost all of the participants felt that had they been abroad longer, their experience would have been deeper and more meaningful.

Furthermore, the language of the country of the sojourn was English, which allowed for easier communication. This aspect of the study contained elements that necessitate further research using traditional college-aged students who lack the experiences of older individuals in a country where English is not the dominant language.

### **Summary**

Theoretical frameworks or models concerning short-term study abroad and the possibility for change are sparse. Therefore, this study considered Mezirow's transformative learning theory as a possible theory to look for language related to perspective transformation. Additionally, I integrated Kolb's theory of experiential learning, and Dirkx's notion of emotions as learning for interpreting the participants' experience abroad.

New experiences and new forms of learning are not always the result of a structured instructional facility but occur when individuals venture out beyond their borders of comfort, for whatever reason (Kolb, 1984).

As the previous research has shown, study abroad is one practice that incorporates broad parameters, mingling with individuals out on the street, eating at cafes, or even sitting to dinner with a host family experience (Wilkinson, 2002). Whether or not sojourners decide to reflect on this activity and transform is debatable. What is at stake is the possibility for change that can break down the walls of ignorance and stereotypes. When American students travelling abroad begin to realize that surface similarities, such as the ubiquitous nature of fast food, obscure a culture radically different from their own, transformation can happen.

Using the lenses of transformative learning theory and experiential learning theory, this study investigated whether or not something or someone can cause a reaction where reflective thought changes the perspective held previously by the participant. The experiences of students abroad are as much a part of the education as is the classroom, test, and lecture. Through the language of participants, this narrative offered insight into the phenomenon of short-term study abroad. The participants who studied abroad experienced a new language where the whole-body experience (Kolb1991) leads to transformation of previously held assumptions about themselves and the world.

### **Empirical studies**

Modern research into study abroad began as early as the 1960s and focused on two interests: nation building and education (Leetsma, 1994). At first, the goal was to provide citizens who would work abroad in various capacities, to have them understand the norms and language of the nations in which they would be employed. By the 1970s and 1980s, attention was primarily shifted to language acquisition with the intent of focusing on outcomes related to time out of the country. However, in recent literature, skills, cross-cultural awareness, assessment of scholarly work, and program types dominate the investigations. Burn (2002), explained that study abroad had become not just about language acquisition but about educating students in world affairs through business and economics in conjunction with language skill, hence the merging of these inquiries. Whereas in the recent past, language acquisition dominated the research on study abroad, currently, globalization captures more attention.

### **Global Education and Cross-Cultural Growth**

Global education has become a mainstream expression at the college level, denoting views on campus that promote such competencies. Governmental agencies and companies, both large and small, want to hire individuals with experience either living or traveling abroad (Engler & Hunt, 2004). Other aspects that will be reviewed in the following section include research associated with globalization/cross-cultural growth (increased knowledge obtained by sharing information with people of a foreign culture), assessment of study abroad programs (value), and length of stay abroad (short, semester or year abroad).

Global education increasingly describes a university campus curriculum that encourages the awareness that occurs through integrated classrooms, language floors in dorms, faculty-lead study tours, and various study abroad opportunities. In essence, students learn about other societies not only out of the country but within college campuses (King & Lindsay, 2004).

In its own way, cross-cultural growth signifies a new base of understanding the habits and customs that are not one's own (Taillefer, 2005). Pressures from both business and government have encouraged many universities to expand their curriculum to include global competencies. As a result, more programs are being developed to help American students acquire cross-cultural skills and learn to be globally-minded (Anyaso, 2007). Cross-cultural experience enhances tolerance and empathy, while self-confidence develops and grows as a result of such activities (Black & Duhon, 2006; Norris & Gillespie, 2005; Dolby, 2004).

Three research studies illuminate the above position that cross-cultural experience enhances tolerance and empathy. Black & Duhon (2006) assessed the impact

of study abroad on student cultural awareness and personal development on American business students who enrolled in a summer course in London. The researchers employed a sample population that was quite small (N 26) for a quantitative study, yet these findings indicate that the participants had enhanced their cross-cultural tolerance and gained self-confidence and independence. The Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI), an instrument used to analyze awareness and personal development, was administered at the beginning and the end of the summer program. A unique feature of the CCAI is that this instrument is most commonly used to assess the ability of someone to live in another culture and the person's ability to adapt effectively to the new customs, utilizing quantitative methodology. One noteworthy result indicated that, upon their return, the sojourners felt that they were more aware of cultural differences and had developed a greater tolerance for cultural differences.

Norris and Gillespie (2005) focused on how experience abroad prepares learners for work in a global society, having had exposure to a foreign way of life, and how this travel added to personal success in an ever-increasing global market place. Norris & Gillespie surveyed 3,723 alumni of the International Education of Students (IES) to ascertain the impact of study abroad on academics, career choices, language abilities, and personal development. They found that such endeavors were pivotal in developing self confidence (96%) in addition to gaining intercultural awareness that influenced their career path (77%). The researchers also noted that 18% of the participants changed their majors from Liberal Arts to International Business. Apart from gaining intercultural awareness and modifying major fields, Norris & Gillespie found that students who studied abroad reported a subsequent trip out of the country.



Researching the impact of study abroad on cross-cultural development Dolby (2004), conducted a qualitative and interpretive inquiry that examined American students from the Midwest who went to Australia. This sample population comprised of 6 male and 20 female participants, who not only improved cross-cultural skills, but also gained a deeper understanding of what it meant to be an American, for some, a surprising product of the time spent abroad. The notion of globalization and the influence of encountering a world where the U. S. was not seen not as a great nation, but rather as a domineering and unwanted influence, caused the majority of participants to reevaluate existing attitudes about the U.S. (Dolby 2004). These experiences stimulated reflections into their views of their own nation that would probably not have occurred on campus (Dolby, 2004). Many students were stunned that the Australians knew more about U.S. foreign policies, politics, and history than they did. Others reacted by being more patriotic than before, because they felt a need to defend and claim their own sense of nationalism. The finding that student experiences abroad can influence self-reflection based on uncomfortable situations illustrates both the importance of and need for this current research into the impact of short-term study abroad and personal growth.

The two previous inquiries (Gillespie, 2005; Dolby, 2004) involved business majors. Interestingly, scholastics were considered by the sojourners as being only a small part of the learning experience, whereas the personal impact was much more crucial to overall personal, professional, and intellectual growth. This self-reflection, according to Dolby (2004), is “embedded in American cultural representations of travel as self-exploration...” (p. 162).

### **Assessment of study abroad programs**

Evaluation of study abroad programs remains a problem because of the difficulty of quantifying outcomes (Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, & Hubbard, 2006; Chieffo & Griffiths 2004; Poole & Davis 2006) in addition to a lack of national standards (Gillespie, 2002). As a result of this inconsistency, many universities and researchers across the world apply their own standards. According to Chieffo & Griffiths (2004), “Professionals in international education have long lamented the lack of a concrete, quantitative foundation of data upon which to base recruitment and program design strategies in order to maximize student learning outcomes” (p. 165). Despite assessment standards that remain inexact, many studies continue to gauge study abroad. In the following reviews, a general consensus emerged that suggests student learning abroad outside of the classroom is difficult to evaluate, yet, anecdotally, students credited outside activities as most valuable (Andersen, et al., 2006; Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004).

Discussions of how credits and grades could be earned abroad tend to rely solely on in-class grades that do not always reflect the amount of learning transpiring (Trooboff, Cressey, & Monty, 2004). Ironically, oral proficiency remains the number one focus of research into study abroad and language learning because ACTFL (American Council of Teachers of Foreign Language) specify it as the fundamental basis for language learners and is the easiest to measure (Carlson, Burn, Useem & Yachimowicz, 1990; DeKeyser, 1999; Freed, 1995).

Students’ perceptions of their own learning while abroad encompass various stages: linguistic gains (from novice to advanced oral proficiency), first-hand cultural

knowledge, and self-confidence. Mendelson (2004) investigated such student opinions, focusing on expectations of the travelers prior to leaving and while abroad. Student assumptions of linguistic gains before departing the U.S. remained constant (Mendelson, 2004). Mendelson's 31 participants were all from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, attending four-to-fourteen week programs in Spain, and his research revealed that the students who stayed the longest were best able to connect their linguistic expectations before departure to their actual progress. The implications of this investigation suggest that student judgments should be based on reality and pre-departure instruction will help students prepare for their own individual advancement.

Apart from perceptions of learning, studies that address assessment in detail are few. Yet among the few that do is a study by Merva (2003), which investigated instructional practices to improve language skills abroad by determining the role of both binary reporting (pass/fail) and the traditional grading scale of 0.00-4.00 (A, B, C, D, and F) in motivation and outcome. The 400 students who participated in her research came from top-tier universities (Merva based this description on the *U.S. News & World Report's* 2000 College Rankings), with classes taught in English by faculty from the credit-granting university. In addition, those students from the top-tier universities demonstrated higher levels of performance in both graded and pass/fail environments. Her conclusions indicated that traditional letter grades were more significant motivators than other evaluations. Although the study found significance in grades and motivation, many areas were omitted. Merva could have contributed more to the literature base if the sample population had included a larger section of participants from non top-tier

universities. Still, the notion that grades will affect student academic performance has policy implications for institutions that offer study abroad.

Trooboff, Cressey, and Monty (2004) built upon and refined Merva's work. They noted that her results were limited and that the program in Rome, operated by John Cabot University, did not echo the experiences of students abroad taking courses at institutions in the host language. Trooboff et al. researched the habits of 551 study abroad participants to find a connection between success and four variables: student GPA prior to going abroad, transcripts of grades from the home university, student motivation assessment, and GPA received abroad at the conclusion of their studies. The researchers concluded that all learners with a high GPA prior to leaving the U.S. maintained or increased their scores. Trooboff et al. also found that motivation is only partially greater if the results were counted in the GPA and/or posted on a transcript, and that such practices can indeed affect overall motivation of some students. Yet, including the grades acquired during the sojourn on an actual transcript does not improve over-all GPAs. Curiously, a segment of the students stated that being abroad was much harder because of additional burdens on their work and that grades did not reflect their overall experience or growth in the language. The authors revealed that the hypothesis that grades mattered was found to be false. One reason for pass/fail evaluations for the courses is the fear that many such efforts lack the same rigor as those taken on campus.

Lengthy excursions out of the country are thought to promote more critical self-reflection, yet the appropriate length of programs has long been a disputed issue on many campuses (Dwyer, 2004a). Interestingly, the research clearly demonstrated that a

short stay abroad has the potential to offer students, not only a new way of living, but also to provide learning opportunities unavailable at the home institution. Dwyer's focus on duration of stay indicated that, both intellectually and spiritually, variations can occur as a consequence of a shorter trip. What is yet to be determined is the depth and permanence of the change. Study abroad participation has increased over the past decade, and many attribute the rise as a direct outcome of more programs being offered for shorter time at more institutions of higher education (McMurtrie, 2007).

### **Length of stay abroad**

While historically, those individuals who studied abroad came from the more affluent segment of the population (Leetsma, 1994); today the trend has shifted to include every sector of the population (McMurtrie, 2007). The IIE (Institute of International Education) suggested that this increase in participation results from "broader participation in short-term programs" (Open Doors, 2005 p. 19). While many faculty members find the inclusion of broader segments of the population rewarding and enriching due to the economics and the time accessibility of shorter programs, others bemoan the loss of the semester or year-long study abroad experience and claim that nothing else will do (Alred & Byram, 2002). The following section will focus on the impact of long and short-term abroad and demonstrate that, despite the dearth of inquiries, such efforts have merit.

Research that focuses on time spent overseas suggested that the longer the better in regards to language acquisition, changes in self-perception, personal development, and maturity (Alred & Byram, 2002; Dwyer, 2004a, Dwyer, 2004b). While most investigators describe that the achievements of a semester or more result in greater

possibilities for personal transformation, other studies search for meaning and change in programs of less time, such as the ground-breaking work of Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, and Hubbard (2006), that explored promising development of cross-cultural sensitivity in four-week classes.

Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, and Hubbard (2006) investigated a four-week program of traditional, college-aged students majoring in business administration at a medium-sized university in the Midwest and hypothesized about the possibilities of intercultural sensitivity growth as an outcome of a short-time abroad. Their research demonstrated how participants, in this case 23 management students who spent a short-time abroad in a cohesive group with no language barriers, interacted with the foreign culture. The sample was quite homogeneous, white students with an average age of 21, although two foreign students were involved in the program but were excluded from the sample due to their experience and exposure to different cultures. The five-week faculty-led course consisted of one week oncampus, followed by two weeks in London, England, and two in Cork, Ireland. Conducted in English, the program contained a series of lectures by a British professor. The course also included excursions to areas in and around England and Ireland. The daily schedule was one similar to that of the home campus with afternoons and evenings left for the students to explore.

Using Hammer & Bennet's (2002) *Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI)* manual for a pre-and post-test to gauge integration, Anderson et al. (2006) contended that short-term study abroad (four-weeks) had improved the cultural sensitivity of the participants. While, indeed, the authors found a positive effect, this pilot study only touches the surface of the subject. The researchers maintained that more analysis was

needed and that a second analysis with a more diverse and larger group would contribute substantially to the literature.

Short-term study is a growing segment of the research base, and practitioners bemoan the lack of material on the subject. Administrators need to know if these programs merit faculty member and administrative support. The following articles pertain primarily to the overwhelming base of long-term study abroad but offer new avenues for further investigation of the length of programs.

In the subsequent inquiry, the focus again is intercultural competency. However, the participants, unlike those of the previous studies, were British, and the program under scrutiny was that of that nation's well funded and promoted Year Abroad, which Alred & Byram (2002) described. The authors determined that long-term learning of intercultural competency increased over time after graduation. Students were interviewed ten years after the year-abroad experience. This first of its kind project analyzed socialization skills and personal change one decade later. The findings suggested that personality types based on *tertiary socialization* (as one is immersed in a different culture three dimensions of socialization are affected: the cognitive, the moral and the behavioral) influenced whether or not an individual would continue seeking intercultural exchanges in either personal or professional venues. Interestingly, Alred & Byram agreed with Cranton (1998), who suggested that "clearly, psychological type influences or perhaps even determines a person's learning preferences" (p. 107). The researchers found that not all results can be generalized, because each individual was affected differently, depending on the amount of

socialization encouraged or encountered. In addition, student tertiary socialization prior to going positively influenced attitudes after a year abroad.

Conventional wisdom that longer stays abroad are more significant for cultural growth and personal development is supported by Dwyer (2004a). Dwyer measured longitudinal correlations between language acquisition, housing choice, duration of study, enrollment in foreign-university courses, and participation in an internship or field of study. She utilized 50 years of data drawn from a pool of 17,000 alumni who matriculated for various lengths of time between the academic years of 1950-51 and 1999-2000. The response rate was 25%, (3723 participant responders), with the largest portion coming from the more current alumni. One wonders if the addresses had not been updated. Regardless, the amount of data collected was immense and very detailed.

Three important findings emerged from the research. Those students who stayed for one full academic year were more likely to enroll in actual university courses (not just language classes), most individuals chose to live with host-families because they thought it would help improve language skills, and many changed majors and pursued a graduate degree in a different field. In addition to these three conclusions, Dwyer found that many participants maintained lasting relationships and friendships with their host-families. Additionally, Dwyer (2004 a) suggested that proper and well-planned intensive shorter length course benefits could exist, but as of yet, this idea has not been investigated.

### **Summary**

The research related to study abroad provided guidance and ideas for my study. Additionally, the theories that will be used for framing this dissertation offer necessary elements to understanding short-term study abroad. While many studies supplied valuable information into the nuances of the academic side of study abroad, it is clear



that many more studies are needed to further the value of such an endeavor. With this in mind, I came into this research with tenacity, utilizing the information gathered from the literature review.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This research explored the experiences of students who participated in short-term study abroad with respect to their learning, more specifically related to changes in their knowledge, skills, or attitudes. Chieffo & Griffiths (2004) state that a growing body of research into study abroad concerns the impact of semester or year-abroad students, while short-term study abroad, which has experienced the most growth in numbers, remains on the margins of the research base. This gap in the literature, particularly regarding changes in knowledge, skills, and attitudes, provided the catalyst for my research. Phenomenological inquiry was my approach. I take heart in the attitude of Van Manen (1990), who aptly states “From a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings” (p. 5). My own interest in transformative learning and in study abroad prompted me to utilize Van Manen’s (1990) notion of phenomenological inquiry that “describes how one orients to lived experience” (p. 4).

This chapter provides an overview of the methodology used to address the researched questions posed in the study. The five major elements of a phenomenological study were addressed in the research: methodological orientation, design, analytical procedures, trustworthiness and credibility, and limitations as suggested by Denzin & Lincoln (2005).

#### **The Research Questions**

A need to know, according to Denzin & Lincoln (2005), is “the critical beginning point” for the qualitative researcher (p.51). My desire to know is the driving force behind this research, to understand the continually increasing numbers of short-term sojourners and the ever-growing body of language institutes world-wide offering these opportunities on the one hand, and the dearth of knowledge concerning the educational import of these opportunities, on the other. The research questions for my study are based on my pilot-study that revealed evidence that short-term study abroad had the potential for altering knowledge, skills and attitudes. These questions are:

1. How do students who engage in short-term study abroad experience these opportunities?
2. What kinds of learning occur for students who engage in short-term study abroad?
3. What features of short-term study abroad contribute most to students learning?
4. What opportunities for deeper sorts of learning (i.e. “transformative” learning) arise?
5. Did participants in recent short-term study abroad encounter situations that resulted in questioning of prior beliefs and worldviews? If so, what types of experiences were they?

### **Methodological Orientation**

Qualitative research has a rich and varied past in the fields of anthropology and sociology because the inquiries are often concerned with the nature and explanation of a phenomenon. A leaning away from numeric data to find importance in situations or experiences of human life that began with the Chicago school (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) with Albion Small (1854-1926) or even as early as the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Creswell, 2004) required a new lens from which to observe these happenings. Although historically a

serious divide developed between positivist and non-positivist researchers in the fields of human science, the 1980s provided a new wave of studies using a non-positivist approach that took root. The early researchers questioned the assertions of quantitative researchers that empirical studies alone could offer cause-and-effect or two-dimensional relationships. That questioning led to a new movement, not only in anthropology, but in other areas of the human sciences that incorporated narrative in research. By understanding the impact of experiences, qualitative inquiry expanded learning. As my study focused on the interpretation of these experiences, a non-positivist approach through narrative assisted me in answering questions about the specific human experience of short-term study abroad.

My research lent itself to using a qualitative framework that permits a view of the individual's constructions of reality because only a rich, descriptive first-hand articulation of the experienced phenomenon of short-term study abroad can provide the data necessary for understanding the changes possible during such a sojourn. Qualitative inquiry, therefore, offers the unique characteristic of multiple meanings and realities of human experiences from which to analyze and interpret data. Creswell (2002) supports this option arguing for a "participatory, collaborative project that joins the researcher and the researched in an ongoing moral dialogue" (p.49) while van Manen (1990) agrees that through dialogue the phenomenological researcher can attempt to understand and make meaning of the world of lived experiences. Following the lead of these scholars, there was value in researching the recollections of the participants, and I employed these accounts as the data for my study.

Ary et al. (2002) express the idea that to better understand a social phenomenon, qualitative research should approach the data by focusing on meanings that the individuals share during the interview process related to what they think and feel of their unique experiences and perceptions. Perceptions, as indicated by Cranton (1998), are constructed according to the individual framework developed throughout one's life journey. In order to gain an understanding of these perceptions, I allowed the information to emerge through conversations with the participants.

Characteristics of qualitative research include a flexible, reflexive, and dynamic process where data is analyzed when it is collected and participants are studied in a non-laboratory environment. This study focused on the participant's perceptions and experiences recalled during interviews about their short-term study abroad. The intent was to capture the participant's perspective through their memories and voices that fits within the interpretivist model. Denzin, et al. (2005) reason that such a design will cultivate the necessary deep and rich data for a qualitative dissertation. Similarly, Van Manen (1990), maintains the notion that "the methodology of phenomenology is such that it posits an approach toward research that aims at being presuppositionless"(p.29). Therefore, the methodological approach of qualitative inquiry was the best option for this research that sought to understand the rising phenomenon of short-term study abroad.

### **Research Design**

The procedures for collecting, analyzing, and reporting my research are specific to constructivist research design to understand, retell, and interpret the experiences of individuals who had participated in short-term abroad programs. As stated by Ruben

&Ruben (1995), “Constructionists expect people to see somewhat different things, examine them through distinct lenses, and come to somewhat different conclusions” (p. 27). From my dialogues with the participants, I sought after what Ruben & Ruben suggest, “the specific and detailed,” and attempted to capture these specifics (p. 28). The interviews enabled me to have the data necessary for such an endeavor.

Questions prepared beforehand for the interviews provided the framework for the dialogue. While constructivist research encompasses a broad spectrum of practices, the approach of this study is from a biographical perspective that, according to Creswell (2002), “... is a form of narrative study in which the researcher writes and records the experience of another person’s life” (p.523). The following section describes the process used for participant selection, data collection, and data analysis.

### **Participant selection**

As suggested by Ary et al. (2002) “qualitative researchers select purposive samples believed to provide maximum insight and understanding of what they are studying” (p.428). Therefore, only individuals who had participated in study abroad for the duration of 8 weeks or less were included in this study. Nineteen participants were interviewed for the research. Sample sizes in qualitative research are typically small, which allows for greater depth of the research (e.g., Ary et al., 2002; Gall, et al., 2003). A majority of the recruitment was made possible by the Office of International Programs. They contacted those students who met the criteria and furnished them my email. As a result, ten participants were identified and contacted. Once contacted via email, I was able to set up appointments to interview these individuals. Four participants got in contact with me personally from flyers I had posted in buildings

around campus or by the snowball effect. The snowball effect refers to obtaining names of other individuals who meet the criteria from those who are already participating (Ary et al. 2002). From this effort, four of the participants were identified while one was, accompanied a participant to an interview.

### **Description of Participants.**

The study collected data from 19 students who had participated in short-term study abroad. These students were abroad for no more than six weeks within the past five years at a Midwestern university with a population of 27,000 students. The participants were primarily undergraduates, although one graduate student was interviewed. Ten females and nine males agreed to participate in the study. The various programs offered at this university allowed for a diverse group of study abroad locations. These sites were Costa Rica, China, England, France, Germany, Italy, Mexico, South Korea, Spain and The Netherlands.

The interviews were conducted at diverse locations on the university campus. The participants chose the place and the time. The interviews were audio-taped, transcribed, and written into individual narratives by me at home. These narratives were then read and reread a number of times in order to find commonalities that could provide patterns and themes, both of which are fundamental to a phenomenological study (Creswell, 2002). These commonalities were coded in separate colors based on the questions posited and four common themes evolved with various sub-themes emerging. To minimize researcher bias, I reviewed the themes with 10 of the 19 participants in person, while the other nine agreed to read the findings that I sent to them via email and then discussed by phone and email.

## **Data Collection**

The role of the researcher in data collection is pivotal to a good quality study because part of conducting high-quality research is maintaining a sense of neutrality without interjecting opinions that can skew the data (e.g., Denzin&Guba, 2000). Therefore, response quality should be preserved by conducting structured interviews that do not lead to interruptions by the researcher. Structured interviews were conducted by me, guided by a set of pre-determined questions that solicited open-ended answers to assist me in maintaining neutrality during the interviews. Very little interviewer effect affects structured interviews, which is why, for qualitative studies, structured interviews are best (e.g. Denzin&Guba, 2000).

## **Interviews**

Two sets of interviews were conducted to acquire the data, one structured open-ended interview followed by a second semi-structured open-ended interview at a later date. The reasoning for these two types of interviews was to allow me to gather as much information as possible because a semi-structured interview provided a gateway into obtaining information pertinent to the study in an informal way. According to Gall et al. (2003), “the semistructured interview involves asking a series of structured questions and then probing more deeply using open-form questions to obtain additional information” (p.240).

Structured open-ended questions were asked during the first meeting between the participant and the researcher. These appointments took place at locations specified by each participant at sites both familiar and comfortable to them. Each interview lasted roughly one hour with one meeting lasting nearly two hours. Focusing on



acquiring information related to the participants sojourn, our interaction consisted of an established set of questions. (See Appendix C). Upon collection of the initial data I realized that I needed more information related to their journeys and clarification of some data collected during the first interview.

A second approved IRB semi-structured interview was again conducted with the participants, at locations specified by them, to gather more information as a result of the analysis of the first set of interview questions. Each of the second interviews followed on a different date. These interviews allowed for member checking and any other follow-up questions needed for clarification. Additionally, preliminary analyses of the data, including some emerging themes, were presented for further comment or confirmation by the participants. During the second interview it was apparent that the participants agreed with what had been revealed thus far. As the second interview was semi-structured as well as informal the participants engaged in conversations about the conclusions being suggested and provided more depth to their answers a depth that my first structured interview did not fully capture as the participants seemed to be more focused to providing more formal and concise responses.

### **Data Analysis**

The interviews were coded to reduce the data into a “compelling, authentic, and meaningful statement” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2001, p. 61). Relationships were identified and connections were made to determine the significance and validity of the data. This coded data was sorted into categories with descriptive labels of no more than two words such as “emotions”, “adventure”, “food”, “return day”, etc. From these initial

categories, sub-categories were formed for the purpose of unraveling the layers of words.

The data analysis provided the discovery of an assortment of themes. After other analyses, four major themes became clear: (a) the primacy of emotions concerning all aspects of study abroad; (b) a transformative experience, associated with independence and self-reliance, and outcome of a perceived maturity and eagerness to continue their life journey; (c) the extent of learning that transpired everyday;(d) the short-term sojourn as the sole possibility for the participants due to costs and time. No computer programs were used to analyze the data. As suggested by Denzin & Lincoln (2001), I, the researcher, sat with the data for hours searching the narratives, looking for the essence of the experiences to uncover information about short-term study abroad.

### **Institutional Review Board**

Required procedures were used to ensure the protection of the rights of the participants. This study was submitted to the University of Oklahoma Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. Upon approval, the guidelines established by the IRB were followed.

### **Trustworthiness and Credibility**

Qualitative research and data validity remain imperative to a good study. Member checking was performed as an important component of qualitative inquiry that involved asking the participants about the accuracy of the information presented during the second interview (Creswell, 2002). Investigator effect in which unintentional behavior of the researcher affects the resulting interpretation may be the primary threat

to this study. Minimizing threats to trustworthiness requires member checking and peer debriefing to ensure that investigator effect does not influence the study.

Member-checking of the data was performed at three different stages: after the initial interview, after the second interview, and upon completion of interpretations in the narrative. As suggested by Creswell (2002), member checking provides an opportunity for “taking a study back to participants and asking them (in writing or in an interview) about the accuracy of the report” (p. 280). As a result of the process of member-checking, I determined that my findings were grounded in the data alone and that the participants deemed the results as credible and accurate.

### **Strengths and Limitations of the Method**

As a participant on three different study abroad educational settings, I bring my own perspective to the process. Peshkin (1988) acknowledges the subject-self of the researcher as an integral part of the validity in qualitative inquiry. My own history with the phenomenon of study abroad and the impact it had on my own personal life, provides valuable experiences that helped me navigate the interviews. Having studied abroad for one short and two year-long periods of time, I have developed a sense for types of experiences one can encounter while abroad. I never shied away from opportunities that took me outside of my comfort zone because I knew that by doing so I would encounter something new. This information I shared in during the interviews. I also conducted a pilot study on short-term study abroad that I believe helps in the validity of such future research

### **Ethical Issues**

All aspects of this study followed behavior that is in agreement with guidelines and ethics of higher education (i.e. researchers and educators). Unethical behavior would not only have skewed the study but would hinder the field. Therefore, this study refrained from unethical behavior.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **FINDINGS & DISCUSSION: THE PRIMACY OF EMOTION**

The purpose of this study was to extend our knowledge of short-term study abroad, including its possible educational significance. Additionally, this research addressed the extent of transformative learning that could occur during a short-term study abroad. This chapter presents the results obtained from a qualitative research design, and data analysis.

This study begins with the following research questions that were used to inquire into the phenomenon of short-term study abroad:

1. How do students who engage in short-term study abroad experience these opportunities?
2. What kinds of learning occur for students who engage in short-term study abroad?
3. What features of short-term study abroad contribute most to students learning?
4. What opportunities for deeper sorts of learning (i.e., “transformative” learning) arise?
5. Did participants in recent short-term study abroad encounter situations that resulted in questioning of prior beliefs and worldviews? If so, what types of experiences were they?

#### **Study Participants**

The study collected data from 19 students who had participated in short-term study abroad (six weeks or less) within the past five years at a 4-year public Midwestern university with a population of 27,000 students that offers Bachelor, Master, and Doctoral degrees. The participants, 10 females and nine males, were primarily

undergraduates, although one first-year graduate student was included in the interview process. All of the participants were Caucasians. Religious affiliation was not part of the research, and their religious denomination was not asked, however during the conversations, one revealed that he was Jewish and two that they were Christians.

The majority of participants grew up in the Midwest, and of those, 12 had no significant travel outside of their state. One was born on the East Coast, had lived in two other states and had extensive travel experience with family. Four of the 19 vacationed out of the U.S. with their families. Only the graduate student had independent (going alone, without friends or family) travel experience. Their ages ranged from 20-25 with the median age of 20.6. Their majors varied across fields and departments, including 15 from the College of Arts & Sciences, two from the College of Business and two undeclared majors. According to *Open Doors* (2008) figures “82% White” and “65% female” is most common; in this study the 19 participants were typical with 100% White and 78% female (p.21).

The most common destination for students who go abroad is Europe, as 10 of the 19 did choose to study in Europe. Spain was the destination of three of the participants, while two had travelled to France and Germany, and one traveler each for England, Italy, and the Netherlands. Another went to Costa Rica and five selected Mexico because of cost and proximity. However, China and South Korea both received one participant, which follows the new trend in study abroad in that more students are deciding to venture out to less frequented sites. During their study abroad experience, all of the participants (100%) attended structured classes that awarded them three to six university course credits. The classes varied in size from 1-20 students and were held

daily for three to four hours. In some cases, Friday was a free day. For most, the classes were comprised of 8-10 students (including other students from the U.S. and abroad). With the exception of the classes in China and South Korea, the others were all taught in the language of the respective native country

### **Themes Emerging from the Research**

The interview process generated four central themes: a) the primacy of emotions; b) the transformative nature of the experience; c) the extent of everyday learning; and d) the viability of the short-term sojourn. The primacy of emotions that was revealed in all aspects of study abroad emerged as the primary theme and will be explored in this chapter. The remaining themes will be developed and discussed in Chapter Five.

#### **Theme 1: The Primacy of Emotions**

Goleman (1995) a leader in the realm of emotional intelligence affirms, “All emotions are, in essence, impulses to act, the instant plans for handling life that evolution has instilled in us” (p.6). For the purpose of this research, emotions were viewed to solicit mental and physical responses to situations. The participants described their responses to external stimuli that had an influence on their learning, self-awareness, and maturity. Interestingly, the literature on study abroad remains remarkably silent on the role of emotions. Yet, students perceived the learning that they associated with the emotional features of studying abroad as significantly more important than the scholarly learning that took place in the classroom. In light of this finding, the following pages will address the emotional impact of short-term study abroad as gleaned from the words and memories of the participants. It will further

explore four sets of opposing and recursive emotions that were associated with the primacy of emotions: anxiety and excitement, shame and resolve, fear and attraction, and hesitation and engagement.

Although each student participated in an academic program that offered a recognized academic content base, these participants indicated that emotional gains were significantly more important to them, in so far as they had acquired a greater understanding of themselves and of others, too. The sojourn produced emotions of anxiety, shame, fear, or hesitation, with ensuing positive feelings of excitement, resolve, attraction, and engagement. The force of opposing emotions, oftentimes experienced in close proximity, made the moments more memorable. Additionally, the nature of the emotions was recursive, that is to say, the similar and opposing emotions repeated themselves as a result of external stimuli. For example, reflecting on getting on the right bus and the overwhelming sense of anxiety of getting it wrong, soon morphed into excitement when this task was accomplished, only to return to anxiety in a similar situation.

In the sections that follow, each of the emotions will be explored including their countervailing qualities of shifting to their opposite. Furthermore, the possibility that the nature of opposing forces generated deeper and more memorable feelings will be discussed.

#### **A) Anxiety Countered with Excitement.**

Studying abroad produced frequent moments of insecurity and/or uncertainty for many of the participants. Most notably, as a result of the unknown that in the case of studying abroad is prevalent. Anxiety is defined as a feeling of insecurity that



anticipates misfortune (Vermetten, E. Charney, D.S., & Bremner, J.D., 2002). Denzin (1984) suggests that anxiety is experienced as a result of the cognitive part of the brain recognizing that nothing to physically fear exists, but the possibility for failure that comes from within.

During the follow-up interview process, when emotions were discussed many of the participants recalled feeling hot, palms sweating, or an accelerated heart rate related to their experience of studying abroad. They recalled feeling a tension in their bodies that even during the interview, made them pause and apparently relive those various moments. The participants explained that their feelings of anxiety were oftentimes a product of needing to do various tasks, such as laundry, asking directions, taking a bus, going to dinner— being unsure of the food, in addition to many more. When asked about the process of planning their sojourns, the participants recalled again the sense of anxiety they experienced because they knew that they were about to enter a world different from their own; and yet the excitement of this possibility calmed the worry.

Few students, prior to departure, were aware of the anxiety that their travel would cause as a result of their lack of first-hand knowledge about their host country. While the university offered meetings to prepare students, these occasions were limited in content, provided only basic information and none was geared to helping students deal with emotional turmoil. Four of the participants stated that if the prior departure meetings had spent more time emphasizing uncertainties rather than cultural sites they would have felt more prepared and at ease.

The students who went to China and South Korea provided various examples of feeling anxious as a result of not being understood and standing outside looking. One

of the most notable cases was that of Matt, a 20 year-old pre-law major from a medium-sized city. The initial anxiety and later excitement he felt about his time in South Korea, a place he chose because it was “not Europe or western,” were intense, in the sense that everything about the country was different from anything he could have imagined. For example, Matt reported anxiety prior to his departure because he knew he was ill-prepared, lacking both the language facility and knowledge of the culture. Although he did use the internet to provide him information about the location, he stated that “it was not until I was actually there that I realized how I needed to learn etiquette, how to bow, when to bow, how long to bow, things like that.” He also commented on the way the people spoke to one another, their eating habits, the smells, and the greetings as moments of anxiety. He was overwhelmed by his lack of information, which he believed prevented him from making a good first impression. At one point, he stated that he even second-guessed his opted-for site to study abroad. In hindsight, Matt wished that the university had done more to prepare and help him with his anxiety by providing classes specific to that culture which is rich in customs very different from the U.S.

Another example of anxiety was witnessed by Wyatt, a 19-year-old philosophy major, who had only been out of the country once to Mexico on a family vacation. Recalling his preparation for China and the feeling of anxiety from not knowing what to expect, he mentioned:

I feel like my worldview is so skewed from reality by only being exposed to American news and American lifestyles. China is going to be so completely different that I won't know how to act properly and apparently being proper is a

big thing there.

Like Matt, he wished that the university had done more to prepare him, especially regarding basic protocols. While anxiety for Wyatt was based on the worry of not being able to communicate or insulting his host family, excitement and wonder soon became the more prominent emotions. For example, one day his class went to the Great Wall of China. He was anxious and excited at the prospect of being the first person he knew that had ever set foot on the Great Wall and thought “what if it’s not as cool as I thought it would be.” But upon arriving and seeing it he reflected, “I would go back and relive the day we went to the Great Wall.” His opportunity to experience this magnificent structure calmed the stress that he felt daily as a result of not being able to communicate effectively.

Excitement was an overwhelming feeling of relief from the anxiety. The students recalled feeling an excitement in so far as they had done something that at first gave them pause, and then the reality of “I did it” inspired a sense of confidence that was to be experienced throughout the sojourn. Additionally, excitement appeared to help students overcome initial anxiety, prompting a desire to explore and see as much as possible. Students were left with profound impressions, as when describing the memories that took them back to special moments. For instance, a recollection of being at the Great Wall of China produced a special once-in-a-lifetime experience. The first step on the Great Wall will always remain a most memorable for this participant as the emotional connection to the activity was overwhelmingly profound. Many of the sights left the participants in a state of excitement in so far as the physical body was absorbing the smells, tastes, sounds, and sights that only being there could provide. Anxiety, in

essence, gave way to a greater sense of excitement because the participants were able to adapt to the change and appreciate the newness of the various experiences and events associated with their host country.

Notably, having overcome their first feelings of anxiety, the individuals were more relaxed and open to seeing and experiencing a new culture. This exhilarating emotion was nearly debilitating. A world that initially prompted unease became one full of excitement and a desire to go out and explore. Students significantly reported a conscious effort to let go of their nervousness and take in all that the new culture could provide. Patsy, a 20-year old Spanish education major studying in Mexico, referred to her anxiety as most extreme when going to meet her host family and viewing her living quarters. She stated that she was worried that they would not like her. Not knowing what it would be like, she was very concerned about the living arrangements because she had never lived with another family and could not imagine what it would be like. Recalling this moment, Patsy stated that “I was so nervous; it is a feeling that had my heart racing in so far as the thought of meeting these people that you are going to live with is really weird.” To her surprise, the house was beautiful, and her room had a great view. Her host family was also very warm, and the food they served according to Patsy was “so much better than our Tex-Mex.” She was so pleased by these meals that she even learned to cook with her host “mom.” Her initial tension prompted her to think of only worst-case scenarios, yet after the first hour with her new family she “fell in love” with them and maintains contact and even hopes to return soon. Other recollections of feeling anxious included finding her way to class the first day. In this respect, Patsy was not the only participant that recalled the anxiety of arriving to class on time. Other

participants acknowledged this very emotion. Like Patsy, the other participants reflected on how great it was to be in an actual classroom, for them the excitement of the new was tangible. They were actually there in class, validating their desire to study abroad.

The anxiety of entering a new and foreign environment had Brent, a 21-year-old political science major; feel insecure about how he would do in an educational environment assumed different from his own. His four-week sojourn to Costa Rica, to study language and the political system of a stable government with unpredictable neighbors, produced an anxiety that made him less adventurous. As a 4.0 student, his mission was to learn as much as possible. After only studying in his room, he realized that the Costa Rican countryside, mountains, beaches, and valleys were rich with information. As he stated, “I am not adventurous, it’s not that I don’t like it, it’s just that I want to study, do well, and be wealthy (or a politician).” His first journey into the mountains genuinely changed his attitude when he went to see the Arenal volcano, which was the first time he had seen anything so incredible. He joked that he took at least 100 pictures of the volcano because it was the most wonderful thing he had ever witnessed. From this point on, he became more daring, even doing a zip-line in the mountains to see wildlife and treetops. His initial anxiety and focus on doing well in class was then dwarfed by his excitement over the open classroom that surrounded him.

Will, a 20-year-old finance major reflected on feeling extremely anxious when he had to find his way around Barajas International Airport in Madrid to get to his connecting flight south. He recalled not wanting to ask others for help because he wanted to do it on his own. Stating “it really was not that big of a deal, getting lost in

an airport,” what mattered to him was doing it himself and making the flight. Reflecting on this one situation he commented “it was basically the first step in this journey and I wanted to do it on my own.” Upon finding his flight and making it on time, he stated feeling the happiness of having made the right decision to do it on his own. Wendy also confirmed this one step of finding a second leg to a flight as a possible point of failure and was very excited to have accomplished this task alone. The overwhelming feeling of excitement that finally they were on their way to their destination was, for many, in their words “too awesome to even express.”

Various types of adventures and experiences provided the participants with unique opportunities where anything could happen. Moreover, they themselves were the focal point, and what they experienced was far more important to them than was the scholarly work done in class. The initial anxiety of being in a foreign landscape gave way to curiosity and excitement about this unfamiliar world. The students felt more relaxed and were more apt to go out and discover new things. The opposing forces of anxiety and excitement provided emotional stimulation to the participants in so far as they were able to accomplish certain tasks and feel good about it. Knowing that they had the power to overcome anxiety many of their dreams came to fruition. In essence, they anxiously anticipated great things, which for many occurred.

Surprisingly, many of the participants declared feeling anxious about everything except school work. This speaks for the lack of concern for doing well in the scholarly field, as recalled by Paul: “school is one thing, but being abroad is a whole other ball game! I mean yeah, we went to class and we wanted to improve, but it was the sheer excitement of experiencing something amazingly different than class that made me

happy.” Unfortunately, for many in education, this lack of concern for academics is what puts into question the value of short-term study abroad. The participants all acknowledged the desire to improve language skills and/or gain greater understanding of other cultures, yet the narratives suggested that the students aspired to encounter and live a different life, if only for a short time. The stress of class work was not the main element of their lives, as it was in the U.S., but rather accomplishing various tasks abroad that gave them the most happiness. The feeling of self-confidence was more stimulating than making good grades on the course work. Anxiety manifested through stress and worrying could be debilitating, yet upon completion of what seemed initially to be a daunting task, the students acknowledged gaining a greater sense of self-worth.

#### **B) Shame Countered with Resolve.**

The feeling of shame countered with resolve evolved and recurred when the participants realized that preconceived notions of their host country were found to be disingenuous prompting the students to reconsider these previously held assumptions. Most importantly, shame was experienced by several participants, who shared that they felt embarrassment at what they originally (pre-departure) thought the world outside of the U.S. would resemble. Reflecting back on their predetermined philosophy of the world, many of the participants acknowledged fostering stereotypes such as “the rude French” or the “sneaky Chinese” prior to living in the host country. Now, after the sojourn, they have altered perspectives and realize that while stereotyping others exists in their home states, people abroad also maintain stereotypes of U.S. citizens, for example “the bossy American” or the “impatient, white tennis-shoe wearing American.” Not only did many of the participants typecast people of their host country, but they

realized that they were also being labeled. The duality of these thoughts and experiences encouraged many to reconsider what they held to be general truths about their host country. The experience abroad provided them with a unique opportunity to reassess and alter previously held beliefs.

Essentially, many of the participants admitted to feeling bothered by their ignorance and vowed to be less judgmental and more open-minded when talking about foreign places. Whereas, the opposing emotion of resolve, in effect, motivated many of the participants to cognitively reflect on previously held beliefs. The combination of these two opposing forces provided learning moments, in so far as the sojourners recognized a need to be more accepting and open of others.

During the interviews some of the participants still felt embarrassed acknowledging feeling “ignorant.” For the most part, all of the participants learned something about taking responsibility for fostering stereotypes and accepted that they were wrong and needed to correct their attitude. Many stated that studying abroad helped them understand that not only had they preconceived notions about foreigners but that those ‘foreigners’ in the host country also had corresponding viewpoints about them. Through conversations and from their shame grew not only a fascination for understanding their new home but also discussions about what others thought of the U.S.

As an instance, Paul stated that he found a new reality in Germany when he overheard a conversation about “cheap and rude Americans.” He said that he felt a desire to let the couple know that Germans were “beer drinking, sauerkraut-eating blonds.” Yet, he realized that this action was counterproductive, as an emotional



response, and decided instead to have his actions speak louder than his words of anger and insult. Situations, in public, like the one Paul experienced were also encountered by many of the other participants. In essence, moments like that which Paul shared created opportunities for the participants to acknowledge their own tendency to label others. The resolve of admonishing, at least for themselves, the habit of stereotyping became a strong movement. Hannah stated:

I only thought of Mexicans as those here working and not in a good way. But now that I have lived there I so love the culture and cannot wait to teach Spanish and share my stories of meeting the nicest people. Ever. I even have a Mexican boyfriend now and my parents love him. They were the worst racists and now because of me they are not so bad.

Prompting these students to learn more about the social nuances many stated that they began by talking more with the locals and visiting new places. From a negative emotion, a positive and bright world opened for these individuals, and they began to feel a need to understand more about their host culture. They were spellbound by what they were seeing, especially in the older cities. Many participants noted that the oldest urban area they had ever experienced was perhaps 100 years old. Everything seemed to capture their attention from the cobblestone streets to the doorknobs. They developed a sense of wonder that they now needed to capture and immortalize in pictures and in journals, and they experienced a new sense of curiosity because they felt more at ease and interested in taking advantage of their time abroad. For example, Tess, a 20-year-old Spanish education major, with some travel experience in Europe during her junior year of high school, thought that Mexico would be polluted and scary.

Upon arrival she realized that her assumption was wrong. Her new home was the mountainous region of San Miguel de Allende. According to Tess, this new and different environment “was absolutely beautiful, and the people were nothing but nice and helpful.” To further illustrate her reasoning for going to this location she stated, “San Miguel de Allende is not a beach town with a bunch of tourists in bikinis running around with beers.” Tess wanted to go somewhere no one she knew had ever been. Additionally, her finances were restricted, and taking four weeks in the summer, away from work, was her only option. Her mission was to work on improving her Spanish because “how better than to be where that’s all they speak.” Her expectations were to improve her language skills. She remembered feeling nervous and scared because her image of Mexico was one of terror, due to the news reports her family had pointed out to her (of drug lords and territory wars):

A man with a sign was waiting for me, thank God. I was so scared that I’d be left and no one would come get me, and this poor little blonde white girl would be stranded in some nasty airport. I had no idea what to expect, and the little I did know was really lame. But that didn’t happen. A really nice man picked me up and explained everything around us

on the way to my new home. I can’t believe I was so ignorant.

This assumption prompted her embarrassment of having negative thoughts concerning a place she knew little about. Thus, almost immediately, Tess came to the realization that her fears and anxieties were ill-founded. Only by changing and welcoming new experiences without preconceived notions would she profit, not only in her language skills, but by becoming a mature individual. With her new attitude, she was excited to

go out and explore because she had awakened her sensibilities to experiencing a new world with fresh eyes. She now began to treat each day as a new adventure and an experience with an eagerness to engage with the culture:

I was fascinated with all the new stuff around me. It was pretty there I had no idea I was so stupid... so much prettier than I thought it would be. I would walk to school taking different ways because there was always something new down a new street, even if I had to turn around and go back because I was lost, it was so fun.

The embarrassment she said she felt at thinking of it as dirty made her realize she had always been too judgmental and now, upon reflection, her words demonstrated a new attitude:

I will never say anything negative about anything ever again without at least having been there. You know people in my small town all say stuff, and I'm like how do you know? You've never been there, and I have.

While Tess began this journey to strengthen her language skills, she ultimately realized that she improved as a person. Her fascination with learning more about Mexico requires her to return, which she hopes to do in the near future. According to Tess, what she acquired during her short-term study abroad journey was not just academic, but also personal.

While Tess was one of the more poignant cases of feeling shame and turning this emotion into a perspective transformation, others also experienced these moments.

For example, Beth stated that her initial thoughts of Paris were that it would be great but the people would be nasty and laugh at her (a friend had told her this). She

recalled her first day walking the streets looking for a café in which to stop and have a croissant. She was so nervous she almost turned and walked out. She was staring at the croissants, and when it was her turn, she decided to wait until others had ordered so she could practice ordering. An older gentleman was also in line. She recalled that he watched her and when it was her turn again and she ordered, that the man said in his broken English “very good.” This moment changed her perspective. What she imagined would happen did not. She also remembers feeling proud of herself and no longer being afraid of ordering or speaking because the people there were not nasty, and they did not laugh at her. She said she felt guilty thinking that they would laugh at her and had made comments about the French in a mockingly ugly manner prior to leaving.

Another example illustrating stereotyping arose during the interview with Wyatt. He indicated that prior to going to China, he and some friends would laugh about the Chinese: “my friends and I would talk Chinese, not for real, but not using the r but the l instead, you know? Like lice, not rice.” Wyatt commented that he, at the time, did not think twice about it, but now he would be offended by friends who acted in that way. The revelation of his own tendency to stereotype transformed from a silly game to a recognition of acknowledged insult. As a result of this disclosure Wyatt stated that he felt shame and guilt for acting in that manner.

The moments of feeling shame provided the participants an opportunity to reconsider their behavior. For the most part, their attitudes prior to their departure were often filled with stereotypical notions. Mexico, for example is not “polluted, dirty, and scary,” and the French are not “mean.” Another similar situation occurred in Italy, where Wendy thought the Italian men would whistle at her. She soon realized that in

Rome cat calls did not happen as previously imagined. She met some Italian males who acted like gentlemen and did not treat her “like a piece of meat.” She also expressed feeling shame about this stereotypical idea of the Italian male. According to Wendy, her change in perspective was liberating. She did not fear walking down the street and feeling “undressed by their eyes.”

This kind of reflection led many to change the way they thought, not only about themselves, but about the world. For these participants, feeling shame resulted in a new outlook on what they perceived, unintelligently, to be a norm. These moments of reflection opened up a new world to these participants and a resolve to change their points of view. Where once they saw stereotypes, they now see a reality that they experienced first-hand.

### **C) Fear Countered with Attraction.**

Fear, unlike anxiety, was a sensation experienced by the participants when they feared bodily harm. The resulting effect was often paralyzing as participants recalled specific situations where things could go “wrong” in a tragic sense. The new environment, including language and cultural differences, added to the feeling of fear because, for many, this sojourn was the first time they had travelled to a foreign country alone. Nevertheless, the attraction to the unknown was the opposing force that propelled the students into continuing with the situation at hand, regardless of the outcome.

The participants acknowledged that as they were able to overcome their fear, they experienced growth in confidence. Additionally, a sense of self-worth greatly encouraged them to make a greater connection with their new environment. By

overcoming their fear, they were able to liberate themselves and benefit from their travels. Emotions were connected to the thrill of the adventure of the unknown that, for some, caused anticipation. Fear transformed into an attraction to experience many features of the new culture.

Of the participants, Wendy, a 20-year-old political science major, referred to feeling fear and attraction on a nonstop basis for the first few days in Italy. She stated that when she was in bed at night she would think about everything she had experienced during the previous day and what new adventures were yet to come. The excitement of the unknown combined with fear of the unknown had her feeling like the pinball. She shared the following reflection:

When I was in bed just there by myself with no TV or anything but my thoughts, it was so weird. I'd go from wow this is cool to oh my God what am I doing and back and forth—but overall I'd say I'd fall asleep looking forward to the next day— ok really at other times I was scared especially if I knew that the class was going somewhere or that we didn't have class and other students would want to go do something new.

Hannah, a 21-year-old Spanish major indicated a different awareness of fear. Although she had previously visited Mexico, this time she was there without her parents. Her description of one adventure—riding horses through a small pueblo—where she honestly feared for her life, made her realize the difference in the way of life and the rules governing behavior can be both scary and exhilarating:

Because of having no rules, uh things got a little dangerous, because you know the guide, the rider, he wasn't really a guide. He followed us but he

would slap our horses really, really hard. And one time my friend's horse got spooked and stepped on glass which scared all the other horses and they all started running. I was horrified...it was so fun because here when I go riding it's like one hour and in a line. This can only happen in another country.

It was the scariest moment, but also the most fun. I loved the freedom.

Experiencing freedom and a different set of rules or guidelines intensified the activity. This independence was recorded by other participants when rules of their homeland did not exist. Thus, the thrust into a world so different caused mixed emotions, those of fear, yet delight at doing something so dangerous, in her mind, that death could be possible.

For Wendy, fear was one of the first emotions that really stuck with her as she recalled her third day abroad. "When I got lost in Rome I was afraid that I would be lost forever in a foreign county, but then I remembered that our hotel was near the Vatican. So, all I had to do was find it, and I could find my hotel." However, what she found to be most beneficial from this experience was "learning how to trust myself and become more independent."

Discovering how to navigate the new land proved to be one of the most rewarding situations for many of the participants. They were now enjoying freedom and independence in a foreign world.

Feeling afraid had Brent wondering if he should go out at night to meet up with some new friends. He questioned whether or not it would be safe, stating, "Some of the other guys from class were going to get together for drinks at a small bar across town. I wanted to go, but quite honestly, I felt a bit afraid. I knew I would be pegged as not a *tica*(Costa Rican), but a foreigner." He commented that he feared being robbed as a

student had been the previous weekend. He reflected that it was not the smartest thing to do, but he went anyway, thinking to himself about the worse-case scenarios and what he would do if attacked. During the interview he laughed and said “I think I overreacted because nothing happened and I did the same route on numerous occasions, always on guard but wound up. I guess I’m lucky that way.” What added to the element of fear of the unknown was the knowledge that family was not there to help and that turning to others in a foreign country was intimidating.

Reluctantly, many participants acknowledged that they did encounter situations that caused them to fear for their safety. Upon further reflection many vocalized that these same fears are experienced at home and thus should not stop them from living abroad. Hannah expressed this recognition most succinctly, “I get afraid at night walking home from class on campus here at home. I mean so really, I would ask myself, what is the difference? I could not let it stop me from doing the things I wanted.”

Triumphing over initial fears, where in the students considered going home (safe and familiar) but instead decided, if only for a moment, to push on, they overcame their immediate problem, and in doing so, they felt they had changed. The attraction to living beyond the borders of home was, for many, a thrill that they did not reject.

#### **D) Recurring hesitation and engagement.**

Hesitation was a sensation experienced by the participants as they decided whether or not to allow themselves to do something new and different. Unlike anxiety and fear, hesitation was less threatening, but still prompted the participants to reflect on



their actions. Engagement, on the other hand, represented surrendering to the emotion and deciding to make the most of the situation.

The hesitation of actually going abroad proved to be the first, and the most common, in a series of vacillations related to the sojourn. The participants articulated how important it was to get their degree and to be employed in a timely fashion, yet they wanted the experience of studying abroad. One of the more significant cases to describe his concern was Phil, a 21-year-old senior international business major. He revealed that his family thought that he should not take a five-week course in Mexico to work on his Spanish, but rather finish his degree in four years, taking two summer classes to graduate on time and get employment. The uncertainty he felt about going was with him every day, until he landed in Mexico and picked up his luggage. He recalled the parting words of his family and girlfriend “have fun and be good” as being unsupportive. Additionally, he stated “they had no idea why I’d want to improve my Spanish. Saying that I’d probably never even need it, and it was a waste of time and money.” He recalled feeling frustrated and having doubts of having made the right decision in studying abroad, as a result of these comments. Furthermore, he asserted many concerns, including the realization that he was about to graduate and had never left the U.S. as reasons for which he continued with his dream of studying abroad. For him, it was “a last chance to fulfill a dream since high school” and thus inspired him to move forward with his decision to study abroad while dismissing the negative language of his family. Unfortunately, the negative comments caused frustration and misery his first few days abroad as reflected in the following statement:

I wasn’t upset with being there, or upset with this opportunity, or sick or home

sick. Like, I want mom and daddy, but I have them. I really did not, so I just had to hang on and try to figure out what I was feeling.

Days later, after going through what he characterized as “crazy emotions,” Phil had met a few Mexicans his age, and a sense of belonging evolved. “I’d play guitar and we talked (he and a friend) about music and we’d sing songs, we’d translate poems.” These types of experiences were the ones that he said “made me so happy I was there.” As a result of his act of defying his parents and disappointing his girlfriend, Phil learned that, while his emotional situation was often uncomfortable in so far as he wanted to please family, he was able to grow and make his own decisions knowing that the hesitation was only his need to make others happy. Taking steps that are not always pleasing to others close to them, in the case of study abroad, resulted in these students enjoying strengthening of character, and a once-in-a-lifetime experience that, for most of the sojourners, was of most importance.

Another significant case of hesitation, due to feelings of obligation, came from Lance, a 19-year-old sophomore from a rural town, whose family did not support him in his goal to study abroad. After taking middle and high school Spanish, he decided to do a double major in humanities and Spanish, not economics as his parents wished. His family was not so enthusiastic about his major choice, because as ranchers, they did not see where this path would lead besides a teaching job. Lance debated going abroad or staying and finishing his degree. The hesitation was further fueled by the reluctance of his family to support him financially. Thus, like others, he chose a short-term program to Spain for four-weeks through his university. He shared his feelings of remorse after writing the check to the university:

I thought to myself, is this really necessary? Am I making a mistake? I can see these works on-line or in books, do I need to make all these people unhappy and spend the money, just so that I can say I've been abroad?

He stated that later that same day he met up with friends who were supportive, and that after a few hours of talking with them, the hesitation turned into excitement. "There was no turning back now because there was no way I was going to not go and give up that money that I earned and not do something for myself." Furthermore, recalling day two of his stay, prior to classes beginning, Lance shared that "I woke up that morning and man, it was like, and OK I got this. Today I am going to quit feeling lonely and go out and find friends." He acknowledged that this act of self-direction surprised him and that he was proud of himself for taking initiative:

I was so shocked to find that in the dorm there were a bunch of other people from all over like New York and Chicago. You name it; there were even people from Switzerland and Israel. I hadn't wanted to leave my room, but I am so glad I did.

Lance recalled that the next few weeks flew by "much too quickly," and when the day arrived to leave Spain he was depressed, something he initially never imagined. He is now back in the U.S., but will return to Madrid this coming summer to teach English and work on his Spanish. He affirmed that he has found a purpose and a place that only the study abroad experience could have given him.

The adventure, the thrill of living, studying, and being abroad, was consistent in each of the interviews. For most, this rite of passage was an integral part of their university experience. The initial hesitation of studying abroad changed to excitement

in so far as they were able to make a decision that was initially tentative, but they were able to turn it into a memorable and significant step in their journey through life.

### **Discussion of Emotions as Central to the Experience**

Not only psychologically, but also physically, emotions play a major role in the strength and depth of the experience. Scientists and scholars have addressed the important connection between physical and psychological reactions to an emotion (Dewey, 1938, Damasio, 2000, Denzin, 1984, Goleman, 1995, Vermetten, et al, 2002).

The significance of experiencing emotional ups and downs affects the human body physically as individuals react to interior feelings and are thus prompted to reflect on the situation. Therefore, feelings of emotion and physical manifestations, such as an increased heart rate, foster self-awareness to the extent that individuals contemplate and adjust to external stimuli. The importance of emotions as a contributing factor to the identification of the self is additionally linked to the human body as a living organism.

Emotions, according to Damasio (2000):

are complicated collections of chemical and neural responses, forming a pattern; all emotions have some kind of regulatory role to play, leading in one way or another to the creation of circumstances advantageous to the organism exhibiting the phenomenon; emotions are *about* the life of an organism, its body to be precise, and their role is to assist the organism in maintaining life. (p. 51)

Throughout their studying abroad, the participants experienced situations that caused physical, emotional, and mental responses, either positively or negatively to complex situations. Many activities can contribute to the experience beginning

with planning and packing, then embarking on the airplane, arriving at the location, meeting the host family, finding their way to class, going to the first class, meeting other students, meeting their instructors, buying supplies, getting meals, and going on excursions. These situations required the students to adapt to new conditions and, in doing so, experience a recursive succession of emotions, from anxiety to excitement, hesitation and engagement, fear and attraction, and shame and resolve. The first night, in a new bed in a new country, with foreign host families proved to be the most emotionally saturated moment for a majority of the participants. While emotions did play a role prior to departure, it became apparent to many of the participants that the real journey with an overload of emotions began their first night away from home.

Csikszentmihalyi (2002) observed, "Life is not a continuous flow," but rather a series of stops where individuals go back and search their self-identity to find reason (2002). For many of the students, the very nature of studying abroad with moments of suspension and exhilaration required them to pause and reflect. In order to understand and cope with the uncertainties that they had or hoped to experience during their sojourn, nighttime proved to be the moment when many introspections about the previous day occurred. Through the narratives of the introspections of the participants, a realization that they were ill-equipped to deal with many of the ups and downs that developed during their short stays abroad were uncovered and reflected upon. The experiences of the previous day were often the source of contemplation to help them grapple with uncomfortable or foreign situations. While not every experience has the value to cause reflection (Dirkx, 2001), many produced a connection between emotions and learning in so far as the participants needed to find a solution to problems or

uncertainties. As a result of the introspections, many of the participants suggested that they felt they had learned from the experience.

In a recent article by Aby (2011) emotions and experiential learning are connected, noting that positive emotions were seen by individuals as promoting personal growth and learning. In accordance with the thoughts of the participants, through their unique experiences abroad they felt that they had matured and grown intellectually. The participants reported to experiencing an increase in their maturity level, albeit an imprecise one, as a direct result of living and studying abroad. They acknowledged that as a result of being abroad and experiencing a matrix of emotions, their level of self-confidence arose.

According to the participants of this research study, their study abroad experience was filled with unfamiliar situations that required them to find ways to overcome negative emotions and find solutions to problems. Anxiety and excitement proved to be the two most prevalent recursive opposing emotions experienced among the participants, with seemingly sudden shifts from one to the other.

### **The Significance of the Primacy of Emotions**

The emotional impact of studying abroad proved to be the most significant finding by virtue of the effect of emotions, both psychologically and physically, on the sojourners. The participants acknowledged the stress of the sojourn prompting them to feel a range of emotions during the stay abroad. As short-term abroad, is indeed short, the emotions were deemed by many of the participants to be more intense as there was little time to understand and cope with the concerns that were presented.

Studies on emotions and learning demonstrate that positive and negative outcomes arise as a result of feelings (Abe, 2011; Boden&Berenbaum, 2011; Brown & Brown, 2011; Dirkx, 2001). Dirkx, for instance, maintains that “meaning-making” pertains to the “imaginative and extrarational” discourse between emotions and sociocultural contexts because these moments when positive, foster learning (p.64). Furthermore, Abe argues that positive emotions contribute to successful experiential learning, while negative emotions hinder learning. The participants of this study referred to negative emotions as catalysts to reflect and change, in essence learning to cope with uncertainties. While it may appear to be counterintuitive, the participants observed changes in their behaviors as a result of negative emotions that resulted in an eagerness to learn and correct errors. Moreover, the manner in which one reacts to emotions, as a result of external stimuli, can promote or inhibit learning (Abe, 2011; Denzin, 1984; Goleman, 1995). Essentially, the human being physically reacts to situations by blushing and being unable to speak or think clearly. Goleman indicates that during these moments “an emotional hijacking” occurs stemming from a “neural takeover” where one reacts without control (p.14).

The participants of this study recalled physically reacting to situations (external stimuli, i.e. people staring) and having an emotional response such as fear, shame, anxiety, or hesitation. They recalled recognizing moments when they knew they would again be experiencing an emotion felt earlier, and, as a result, now having a more conscious understanding of how to cope with or to better enjoy these experiences. This repetitive aspect of their feelings, from negative to more positive, appeared to produce

an awareness on their part that added to the value of the experience and provided a means of appreciating the way that certain events can generate certain feelings.

Addressing negative emotions, it should be noted that very few studies exist that attend to emotions at all, yet one study by Lyon (2001) reviewed in Chapter Three did mention them as a side note, more specifically as an observation of 13 women educators who worked for short periods in Malaysia and Jordan. Lyon observed the women educators' surprise at the emotional toll of their going and returning. Unfortunately, Lyon did not comment on specific situations that caused emotional reaction or on any investigation of these feelings. Additionally, nothing was mentioned concerning any change in the nature of these emotions from positive to negative, with respect to their intensity. In light of this absence of knowledge on the emotional toll of studying abroad, the findings of my study enlarge our understanding concerning the power and function of emotions in short-term study abroad.

### **Recursiveness of emotions and its impact.**

Recursive emotions are those that repeat themselves, expand indefinitely, and loop back from positive to negative back to positive. This movement and interplay of opposite emotions, as noted above occurred throughout the sojourn. The opposing forces of these repetitive feelings—this shift from negative to positive and then back to negative—appeared to attune these sojourners and create in them an awareness of their particular situation, often times precipitating a reassessment of previously held beliefs, and even calling into question cultural norms. These intentional reflections, on the part of the sojourners, appeared to provide them with a manner in which to cope with the many complex events that they were encountering.



Mood shifts added to the emotional intensity of the trip, and as sojourners noted these mood shifts and attended to them, past meaning schemes were consciously replaced with new ones. The daily trials and tribulations of living in a foreign country and learning to accept that life was not going to be “easy” as it had been at home proved to be challenging for many. For example, for the first week of class, Tess expressed feeling anxious every morning about her abilities with the language, in addition to the tensions of walking alone to class across town, while at the same time looking forward to improving her skills and experiencing something new. She stated that it took her one week to come to terms with this anxiety and find a way to feel confident in her capacity to communicate intelligently with others, as well as walk to class alone. While the anxiety never truly subsided, a new sense of confidence from learning to identify the shifting and recursive nature of her emotions enabled her to process them and identify the triggers that caused her to feel uncomfortable. Moreover, she stated that she learned to adjust to her insecurities.

For many of the students, the feelings they experienced required them, on multiple occasions, to pause and reflect and, as such, deal with the questions that were raised as to what the world around them was about. To illustrate, Lance, who for the first time was traveling outside of the U.S., experienced many emotions that he believed altered who he was and what he wanted. He expressed his initial confusion about his path in life, yet after his short-term abroad, he stated that he now has a clearer vision of what he wants to do in the future. Lance also mentioned that, had he not experienced a continuous series of emotions from anxiety to excitement, hesitation and surprise that prompted him to dig deeper into his being, he does not think he would have matured, as

he believes he has. He explained that, with the sojourn away from the familiar, and with his need to understand what he was feeling and why, he felt a new level of maturity. He described that, on many occasions, his physical body, in addition to his mind, felt exhausted due to these recursive and complex feelings. Others, such as Wendy, Hannah, Wyatt, and Phil, stated that at night they often felt physically and emotionally drained. Their bodies and minds were fatigued, yet they all expressed their desire for the new day and the chance to experience, again, a new set of uncertainties or challenges.

***The power of anxiety.***

Anxiety, according to the *Encyclopedia of the Human Brain*, is “the apprehensive anticipation of future danger or misfortune accompanied by a feeling of dysphoria or somatic symptoms of tension, when there is no true threat” (p.159). This notion is further clarified by Denzin (1984) who posits “in contrast to fear, (anxiety) arises from within the subject. There is nothing immediately threatening him except his own anxiety” (p.228).

For the participants, anxiety was the most commonly felt and expressed negative emotion. This result is not surprising, as one would easily relate to the complexities of going abroad to a new country with the hopes of encountering new adventures daunting and titillating. Yet, the negative emotion of anxiety caused the most unease because of insecurities about language skills and communication abilities, and not necessarily as being related to encountering the unknown. Nevertheless, anxiety associated with the unknown, while not as intense as that of the language barrier, provided possibilities for overcoming demanding situations that resulted in new-found pride.

Other aspects of studying abroad that created moments of anxiety including pre-departure anxiety cannot be adequately relieved. However, much of the pressure of adjusting to a new home can be ameliorated by more instruction on habits and customs that will be encountered and ways of dealing with uncertainties. As a result of these stress-ridden experiences in a different culture, Wyatt and Matt acknowledged reflecting on their previously held beliefs and as a result, gained a new perspective on these peoples and their cultures. No longer did they see them through “television goggles,” but now having experienced their culture and way of life have an appreciation of the differences. Although their transformation was not as deep as that suggested by Mezirow, these two individuals underwent a significant reevaluation of previously held beliefs as a product of their sojourn.

Mezirow (1991) suggests three types of reflections on experience: content reflection, that which requires the individual to ponder the experience, process reflection where the individual considers how certain situations were handled, and premise reflection that which involves probing into socially held assumptions as the most transformative (Mezirow, 1991). Wyatt and Matt noted on several occasions the value of their experience in forming a new perspective on Eastern cultures. To examine further their new perspectives, both indicated having had many dialogues upon returning with friends at home, where they were given an opportunity to assess critically their experience and articulate how they felt different.

Additionally, this research study observed a noteworthy feature of studying in non-western countries—that more students are deciding to experience a culture that is distinctly different from their own. The two males who went to China and South

Korea, both expressed how important going somewhere completely different from anything they knew was, even though the anxiety was more intense because of these differences.

Interestingly, six of the nine males commented that they were worried about not being able to communicate or be understood and the anxiety this dilemma could pose. In contrast, the female participants did not mention anxiety of encountering any type of communication problem. This preliminary finding of gender variation suggests the need for further research into male/female differences and the possible implications for pre-departure instruction.

Patsy's feelings of anxiety stemmed from the stress of not knowing with whom she was going to live, or what her living situation would be like, are also indicative of what many of the students experienced. While she was the most vocal about her anxiety, others such as Beth, Lance, Hannah, and Wyatt also mentioned the worry of living circumstances. Patsy, on the other hand, went into great detail about her insecurities related to her living quarters and the family that housed her, in addition to many other anxiety plagued experiences. According to Levitt (1967) this type of constant anxiety is tied to a personality where "An individual with high predisposition to anxiety is one who is more easily threatened than his fellows." (p.150)

The varying degrees of anxiety and the situations that evoked this emotion were found to be many. Furthermore, anxiety remains commonly found in all human beings, and as such was experienced similarly by many of travelers. Yet, the aspiration to overcome the momentary pauses with a desired outcome of excitement proved to be most beneficial.

The feeling of excitement, on the other hand, served as encouragement to accomplish certain tasks. All of the participants expressed feelings of excitement as an opposing force of anxiety in so far as they deliberated over the situation with a positive framework. According to Goleman (1995):

In making plans or decisions people in good moods have a perceptual bias that leads them to be more expansive and positive in their thinking. This is partly because memory is state-specific, so that while in a good mood we remember more positive events as we think over the pros and cons of a course of action while feeling pleasant, memory biases our weighing of evidence in a positive direction, making us more likely to do something slightly adventurous or risky, for example. (p.85)

During the interview process the participants recalled with a joy in their eyes many tales of their adventures. Excitement provided a balanced and a positive opportunity to offset the anxiety that certain tense situations produced. In the interplay of these two emotions the participants were able to find a balance between two seemingly opposing forces to gain a better understanding of themselves and provide themselves with an altered way of viewing their world. Through their moments of excitement, various participants acknowledged a realization that through their actions a new perspective had developed.

Anxiety and attraction, two opposing forces, were held to be the most influential in making the sojourn a success. The physical and the emotional manifestations of these two emotions provided the participants with moments to reflect and consider growth in self-confidence as a fundamental part of studying abroad.

### ***Transformative power of shame.***

Mezirow's concept of transformative learning, according to which the learning takes place when an experience leads to opening up one's frame of reference and discard habits of mind after critical reflection can be witnessed in the stories of a few of the participants. While the depth of transformation may be limited, the participants themselves revealed having felt shame for making stereotypical comments and thinking unintelligently about other cultures.

Miller (2006) suggests that the emotion of shame is an "inner, critical voice that judges a person's actions as wrong, inferior, or worthless" (p.2). For a few of the participants, the negative feeling of shame brought about a resolve to change their attitudes and enlighten others who tend to rely on stereotypes. The alienating quality of shame forced a few of the participants to reflect upon what they not only thought of themselves, but also about the world around them. For many, recognizing their mistake of rushing to judgment allowed them to uncover other areas in their lives where shame was affecting how they conducted themselves.

The difficulties of entering a new culture were daunting yet thrilling for many of the participants. Many felt shame about fostering stereotypes about where they were going. Several of the participants stated that they thought Italian males were misogynist, or that Parisians were hateful. Experiencing the culture first-hand persuaded them of their error. All five participants, who went to Mexico, stated that they chose this location because of cost and proximity. For many, the images of Mexico were of being on the beach in either Cancun or Acapulco. But none of them chose to study in those known locations but rather other, more interior sites

that, according to some, “would not be as pretty as on the coast.” Yet, upon arriving, they expressed experiencing shame due to having maintained a negative and judgmental idea of where they would be residing during their sojourn. A fascination for the beauty of Mexico, the country and the people evolved from this feeling of shame. For many others the experience was similar: a new perspective had emerged.

Resolve, on the other hand, was succinctly connected to the interior battle experienced from feeling guilty about ignorance. Karpiak (2000) asserts “the most important life changes begin internally” (p. 41). Making meaning of the shame they were feeling, the participants explained that they knew that “needed to change their thinking” and be more accepting of others as others were of them. Furthermore, many stated that it took this experience abroad to place them in a world where they were the outsider wanting to fit in. Moreover, “taking the perspectives of others—is the mechanism by which transformation occurs” (Mezirow, 1978, p. 104). While a total transformation of the self may not have been experienced as described by Mezirow, the participants of this study clearly indicated that they had gained a new perspective to which “unexamined cultural assumptions may be reflections of economic, political, social, religious, occupational or educational systems” (p. 104) were now being examined.

The experience of shame and the positive opposing force of resolve created an opportunity for the participants to question prior beliefs in an environment different than their own. Cranton, (1998) stated, “It is only when I have experiences in another community or with a different group of individuals who hold different perspectives that I might become critical of my previous beliefs and begin the process of transformation”

(p. 190). The process of transformation began for many during the sojourn where they experienced life as the other.

### *Conquering fear.*

Fear, unlike other emotions, tends to elicit physical responses such as shortness of breath, a rapid heartbeat, and increased perspiration in so far as the physical body reacts to this emotion, as it has for millennia, to protect life (Vermetten, et al., 2002). The physical force of feeling fear and reacting to the external stimuli are important to human survival. The cognitive and the physical often react simultaneously as fight-or-flight. None of the participants of this study revealed any specific harm to their physical self, yet many recalled situations that had them fear for their lives, most often while out in public, and most often at night.

Fear stemmed from an unknown situation that the participants felt could cause them bodily harm of some type. This feeling, according to Denzin (1984), “is a dominant negative emotion... that cuts to the heart of the subject and leaves him open, empty and without defense” (p.221). As a result, those participants who felt fear recalled exactly what was occurring around them. They were aware of their surroundings, and once they acknowledged their fear and were able to control the tension and find a solution, their physical body reacted encouragingly. From this perseverance, the participants found a new vision of themselves, one that they felt proud of and one that changed their perspective. The amount of gratification from acknowledging the possibility of failure and yet not giving in to fear showed these young adults that the many options that living presents, are choices to be made with consequences either positive or negative.



Experiencing fear provided many of the participants with memories that will be forever a part of their study abroad experience. For example, Wendy recalled during the interview that the day she was lost in Rome she felt hotter than usual. She mentioned that it was, she assumed, similar to a hot-flash. That momentary sense of panic caused her physical body to notice what her mind had already thought. This recollection based on the physical discomfort is indicative of the adverse reactions that can occur when one is fearful. Additionally, this recollection remains a reminder of that specific moment in time. The negative emotion of fear rooted in past experiences can dominate a person's feeling of worth in so far as it threatens the subject (Denzin, 1984).

Hannah's fearful experience of riding horses in Mexico, is not unlike some that can be experienced in the U.S., however her logical and rational thoughts of getting physically hurt were captured in her memory. Levitt (1967) suggests that with fear "there is a kernel of reality..., but the fear is greatly exaggerated in proportion to the actual fearsome aspect of the stimulus" (p.9). The exaggeration of the fear for Hannah was the element that most excited her. The emotional response to an out-of-control horse is not indicative of rules governing Mexico, but the insecurities due to a lack of knowledge on these rules by Hannah exasperated an otherwise common occurrence.

Attraction, as an opposing reaction to fear, manifested itself when the participants chose to indulge in an activity that could cause them harm. Fortunately, no harm was reported. The participants noted a desire to subject themselves to unnerving situations for the reason that an element of fear existed that also attracted them to such circumstances. This aspect of behaving in a fashion that can have dire circumstances, such as Brent fearing being robbed, was overshadowed by his desire to overcome the

fear and partake in the get-together with new friends in a new place. The attraction and pull of a daring adventure was more important to his mind than the possibility of being robbed. He was unwilling to let the fear inhibit an activity that attracted him.

Attraction and the positive emotion that it solicits drew many of the participants to do things they would normally not do.

Fear and attraction as opposing forces became, for many of the participants, a normal situation. The desire to go outside of one's comfort zone to experience something different was much more powerful than the fear itself. The participants mentioned earlier accepted fear as a part of the unknown; regardless, they allowed the positive feeling of attraction take them beyond their comfort boundaries.

### ***Overcoming hesitation.***

Uncertainties and decisions often end in a hesitation to act, as many of the participants noted. Reservations about where they were going to go, how great the cost, time away from home, in addition to feeling reluctance on the behalf of family to assist in the endeavor brought about many of the hesitations experienced by the sojourners.

The notion of hesitation became clear when numerous participants stated that they initially wanted to go abroad, but had reservations when the time to sign and pay the tuition fee arrived. Yet, upon reflection, they all stated that even though they hesitated, once they committed, they were excited and ready to begin a new phase of their lives. Although the participants did suggest that the emotion was most noteworthy at the moment of tuition fee, for many the sensation was ever-present during their sojourn. For example, hesitation also surfaced strongly on the plane ride to their destination when the participants had no choice, other than to get off the plane at their

destination and return home. While some admitted to feeling nervousness as the plane arrived, none of the participants gave in to this condition in so far as the opportunity to explore a new world was more powerful. Interestingly, while for many the caution was an internal emotion, for others the weariness was a result of pressure by family and/or significant others.

### **SUMMARY**

Emotions have the power to dampen or stimulate the senses that in turn, influences how experiences are evaluated by the individual. This research demonstrated that negative emotions can be debilitating, therefore, prompting the participants to reconsider their actions. Positive emotions, on the other hand, served as an opposing force, stimulating the individual to continue with an endeavor. The human body reacts to external or internal stimuli differently. As noted, anxiety proved to have the most impact on the sojourners due to frequency and intensity, while excitement of overcoming the stress and allowing the individual to experience fully something new proved most rewarding to the self-confidence level of that participant. Thus, acknowledging that emotions influence study abroad participants and help the individual cope with their new lives abroad can have a positive impact on the journey.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: REMAINING 4 THEMES

The purpose of this research was to redress the lack of knowledge related to short-term study abroad, particularly concerning the possibility for intellectual and educational growth associated with this kind of educational program. While the primacy of emotions emerged as an integral outcome of the learning process while studying abroad, and has been addressed in the previous chapter. This chapter presents the remaining themes: (2) a perspective transformative and a new sense of self; (3) the extent of everyday learning; and; (4) short-term sojourn as the only feasible manner to study abroad.

#### **Theme Two: A Perspective Transformation and a New Sense of Self.**

The most striking feature of the study abroad journey for these participants was the amount of change they saw in themselves. On this point, most of the participants stated that as a result of this experience, they are now more trusting of their decisions and feel more capable of surviving on their own. As such, two sub-themes evolved—concept of self and concept of others; these will be discussed in the following paragraphs. Perspective transformation, for the purposes of this research, refers to a shift in perspective or point of view that arises from critical reflection of previously held assumptions (Cranton, 1998; Mezirow, 1991).

#### **Concept of self.**

The notion of the self, according to Denzin (1984)“is that structure of experience that I call mine” (p.51) and refers to the feelings, actions, and body of an individual. For the purposes of this research, the concept of self concerns personal

reflections about themselves (the participants) as expressed through their own words. For the most part, the participants acknowledged a change in their demeanor, character, attitude, and identity as a result of studying abroad. The following paragraphs will illustrate the aforementioned concept of self, and the changes experienced by the participants.

### **Independence.**

A new-found sense of independence provided many of the participants with a desire to explore and “conquer” their new world. The independence experienced by these individuals was deemed, by them, to be profound in that it led to their taking initiative and direction for themselves. For most, these moments abroad were the first time they had to rely solely on themselves and not on family or friends. They expressed satisfaction for accomplishing a goal that only they, alone, could. In other words, while they were abroad and found themselves lost, they discovered something more important: self-reliance and independence from others.

Some of the participants began to see themselves in a different light. They no longer felt like children. Hannah stated, “I was seriously on my own. I had to do things by myself with no one to rely on; it sucked at first, but then got better and I was really pretty happy that I could count on myself.” Lance also reflected on finding out how independent he had become: “Living abroad is hard. I hated it at first, but then I really got to like it because I felt independent and grown up. For the first time I felt like my life was in my own hands.”

Other situations that had the participants redefine their self-concept and feel a sense of true independence was articulated by Finley. She shared one pivotal experience about landing in Spain and needing to take a taxi:

I was terrified (laughs) it was the scariest thing ever. I had quite the experience because when I got there it was Sunday and it looked like they had a bank and I asked if I could change my money and they said we don't have anything here and in Madrid I had to run across the airport to get to my flight to Santiago so I did not have time to change my money there so I'm in Santiago and all I have are American dollars and all these people are speaking Spanish. I was very proud of myself! (laughs). I was very proud of myself I did do a very good job anyway I went downstairs and asked a taxi guy in my best Spanish if he would take dollars and he said sure. So I was not stuck in the airport. I made it happen!

A number of participants recalled experiencing moments of "I did it," and as a result felt more self-assured which, in turn, was instrumental in their being able to capitalize on the sojourn by gaining both in knowledge about the culture and faith in themselves.

Tess said it best:

You know planning and packing for a vacation is way different because usually you're going with people you know. To go study is NOT a vacation although you do think about the fun you could have. It is a weird feeling. You are on your own and you have to make it work and live with people who are different.

On a similar note, Holly, a 21-year-old English major, studying in London for four weeks during the summer, admitted to acknowledging that she was not an “adventurous person” and preferred things to be “planned and very orderly.” As such, she assumed that studying English literature in England would be structured and safe. The British way, according to Holly, “would fit my habits,” and knowing that she would be able to communicate in English gave her an added sense of autonomy. This departure from her need to always depend on others or her need for structure at home resulted in a new and adventurous feeling. Recalling her first night in London, she articulated:

I went downstairs, out the door, and found this great little place for tea. I then decided I would go see a show. A live show and there was a theater just down the street, so I went. I’d never done anything like that... I was alone and am usually very planned, but not this night. It was so spontaneous that I had to laugh at myself.

She shared other moments of joy when she found herself doing things she never would have done were she at home. The time she spent abroad helped her to not only understand a little better the British way of life, but she learned that she also had the ability to act spontaneously.

During the interview, Holly (in a reflective posture) commented:

I was just reliving that day-- seeing those buildings, hearing people speak British, English. Wow... It was awesome! I will never forget it. I am really quite proud of myself and I have a newer appreciation for London having actually

lived there and eaten the food, which was not as bad as everyone makes it out to be.

This opportunity to see a different part of the world and, not just enjoy the experience, but also step outside of one's comfort zone and take ownership of the time, was important to many. For the first time they were alone in a foreign environment and the independence experienced was deemed by many to be "liberating." As Holly noted, "I knew I only had so much time, and if I wanted to make this journey special I had to take risks. Something I do not do at home." From these "risks," Holly discovered that she could be alone and survive quite well in a new and foreign environment, while learning to change some established habits and custom. She recalled, "when I returned home and told my parents that I would go out alone walking the streets of London, with no purpose other than to see, smell, and feel the streets, they were shocked." The change in her self-perception gave Holly a new sense of independence from her own constraints. She became more, in her words, "spontaneous" while in London and admitted that now that she is back in her home state, she takes on a few more adventurous activities.

Another participant who learned to be more independent and self-reliant was Patsy, a Spanish education major. She had some travel experience outside of the U.S., but never alone. She went to Guadalajara, Mexico to attend a month long course. She stated that the trip had a considerable effect on heightening her self-concept. Whereas once she was shy and inclined to rely on others, now she knows that she can stand on her own two feet:



I'm kind of a shy person, but I'm not as much anymore. I talk to people... I'm more open. Going to Mexico changed me more emotionally you know when you experience a new culture it's hard to explain, but it changes you completely. I wanted to do something for myself and this was the perfect opportunity because I was alone, but not really alone. There were other students from the U.S. there and the teachers were also very helpful.

Expanding on her new self-concept Patsy reflected for a moment, then continued:

I do not know really, it is just I did something by myself at age 19 in a foreign country. So I guess I'm more sure of myself because I know I will not freak-out, at least on the outside (laughs). I am different. I know that.

For many of the participants the sojourn provided an opportunity to experience learning in a new environment and gaining a greater sense of independence. Studying abroad, in essence, opened up a world to the participants where they were solely in charge of taking responsibility for surviving and from this unique endeavor their self-concept experienced a change.

### **New point of view.**

Adjusting a point of view to fit a new meaning scheme based on a lived experience was one of many significant changes brought about by studying abroad. Not only did the sojourn have many of the participants question their points of view, but it also afforded them an opportunity to deliberate about their previously held notions about a given culture. For example, Wyatt stated that he stood "in awe" of the Great Wall of China. Stating that as he stood upon the Wall, he thought about what it represented to the Chinese, something he had never considered before:

It is unbelievable. You cannot imagine this thing and the size and what it meant. You see the Wall in movies or on TV, but you do not think about it. It is huge. I bet those Mongolians were afraid. I had an idea, but then you stand on the wall, you look around, and you know that what you thought was so wrong. Seriously, how could you not? I felt like I was beginning to understand the Chinese a little better, but really I think I was just opening up and trying to make sense of all that I had been experiencing. Trying to fit in or at least appreciate their difference.

This lesson could easily have gone unlearned, yet with a simple stop and think moment; Wyatt processed the iconic importance of the Great Wall stating that “I know more now.” A new viewpoint had opened up in his mind and in his heart. This aspect of both the emotional and the intellectual self-talk demonstrated an aspect of transformative learning. Additionally, during the return trip to his apartment in China Wyatt stated:

I could not quit talking about that thing. It was unbelievable. The tour guide continued to tell us more and more and about the Mongols and all that. I seriously dozed for a minute and imagined myself there at that time. Crazy. And then to do something right afterward fun (but kind of lame) like zip-lining. It was unreal the whole day. That whole week I talked about that day, and I met some guys who had never been. Can you imagine? They were young, probably 17 and were not interested. How sad is that! I had to fill them in on some of the history- it felt pretty cool *me* telling *them* about it.

While the level and manner of transformative learning in these participants differed as much as the individuals themselves, most reported feeling like “a changed person.” The various differences in depth of learning appeared to be related not only to personality type, but also to the culture in which the participants were raised. For example, some participants stated that they realized that their previous lives “back home” from smaller towns required them to reassess their current environment through different lenses, lenses of the outsider. Furthermore, the nine participants from small towns accredited stronger changes in their points of view about different cultures to being from a small town. For instance, Brent articulated, “In my town there were maybe four or five families of Hispanics and a few African-Americans. Here, I want to go to Costa Rica and my friends are asking me why I would want to go there. Their attitudes were like mine, only I had to break free of that.” Others such as Beth who had grown up in a mid-sized city stated:

I know Paris is not full of Parisians and I love the idea of maybe hanging out with people from other countries. In my city there are a couple of neighborhoods that are super different than mine like the Vietnamese area (I love that food), or the Mexican (love that food more), and I’m not sure what else, but it is no big deal to me or my friends. We really like going out, exploring, and especially eating different stuff.

While many of the participants noticed a difference in themselves in shifting and adjusting previously held points of view, this change to a new realization was not always conveyed for the reason that they could not find the words that translated their

experience. For example, Megan reflecting on her time abroad recalled first arriving home:

I spent a couple of days telling stories and I do think my life changed a little from learning about a different perspective... I'm not sure in what way. I do know that I am more confident in my decisions and I feel like I have grown as a person. I am more independent... I also pay more attention to the way other people live when I watch foreign films, which I never did before. I like to compare Dutch, American, and whatever culture I'm watching.

Articulating the manner in which she emotionally, socially, or educationally altered previous beliefs appeared to be quite troublesome. Her admission that she only went for one month so as to not be without her boyfriend during the summer, did not diminish her excitement for what she did experience. As our interview continued she wanted to share all of her outings, always noting or commenting that "I miss everything about the Netherlands, especially riding bikes, the weather, eating at outdoor cafes, and the Dutch people." The differences in lifestyle were what mostly impacted her time abroad: "If I could have moved there I would have. The collective cultural attitude, lack of marketing, good fresh food, art, and romantic cities were all a plus for me." Megan began to notice differences between her way of life and the Dutch way of life. From these comparisons, she stated that she preferred the Dutch. She stated that she is riding her bike more and trying to eat fresher food to keep a little of the Dutch experience alive and to remind her of her new found independence.

As a result of their time studying abroad, a number of the participants realized a change in themselves, one that could only have happened because of their desire to take

a leap of faith to commit and study abroad. These participants were excited and satisfied with what they had accomplished. While the initial reasons for going abroad varied with each individual, in the end, the outcomes suggested some degree of enlightenment, as the majority of the participants stated that they had altered some of their attitudes and points of view. Unlike many of their friends or family, they appreciated that they had taken a risk in deciding to venture out and do something that only they had control over and were proud that they did.

### **Concept of others.**

As Sartre (1956) states, “Others, the other that is to say to me that it is not me” (p. lvii) mimics the thoughts of the sojourners of this study when asked to relate to being amid a new culture. These participants acknowledged having ideas of the other, as different, in some cases negatively inferior. In part, originally, badly informed perspectives about the country, or lack of knowledge about the cultures, values, and customs of the host country, contributed to an initial disinclination to assimilate into the host country. Yet, this very reluctance prompted many to reevaluate cultural perspectives upon realizing how ill-informed they were. Many took measures to understand and assimilate into their new home culture. Customs are not standard across borders, thus the participants had to learn to live differently in order to appreciate their new surroundings. For many, the shopping experience, as one instance, was completely different from what they were familiar with at home. Pam shared her need to make adjustments:

Going to a grocery store in Paris is different. You have to pay for bags and to order steak or shrimp you go to a counter, to order and the people always cut in

line and I cannot speak so I panic, it sucks. At home I hop into Wal-Mart pick up my stuff and head home. Now I have to think about it and plan it because I also have to carry it home. The Carrefour (like our Homeland) was eight blocks away. Although I did like picking up bread and other stuff everyday on my way home from wherever. It is so much easier than getting in the car to go get bread.

According to a couple of the participants, who studied in Europe, living in more ecologically sensible environments, where 50-gallon hot-water tanks are not used, but rather small instant heaters that run on propane, took some adjustments and a change in attitude. Most of these machines required the participants to learn to turn the heating element on and off in order to conserve energy. Finley, who was in Northern Spain, recalled the first time she went to take a shower:

I had my towel, went to the bathroom, turned on the water, waited for it to heat up and waited and waited and waited (laughs). It never did and I am standing there naked thinking oh my God they take cold showers. So I get dressed go into the living room and ask one of my new flat mates from Germany (who thank God spoke English) how to get hot water. Of course, she laughs then walks into the kitchen and shows me. I remember thinking, 'dang that is a good idea.'

For a number of the participants, part of their daily living was initially a new learning experience to which they had to adapt. For some, a realization that they wasted natural resources, such as water had them reconsider their life-styles. An introspection of their lives "back home" prompted many to adjust and amend their prior attitude

toward the environment upon returning. They had to learn to be more conscious of not wasting as they were used to doing in the U.S.

Perceived cultural differences were also noted in public displays of affection, most strikingly between males. It is not uncommon for male friends to walk arm-in-arm in some cultures, a behavior viewed as odd by various participants, as this is not common practice at home. Lance, who was studying in Spain remembered, "It was my first day in Madrid and these two old men were walking arm-in-arm down the street with two old ladies doing the same right behind them. At first I thought they were gay, but then I realized that they were not and that those two old ladies were their wives; they were just doing what they do." Lance then compared the prudishness of the U.S. to the physical displays of affection often present in other countries. "In my town, two men would NEVER do that." He had heard about this aspect, but was still uncomfortable upon seeing the men go arm-in-arm. Eventually, he was able to recognize this activity as a part of the culture and found it to be fascinating because this would never happen in his home town, and yet it is a common occurrence in Spain. Lance confirmed he had tried this new custom with a friend from class, while in Spain, and found it to be pleasant stating "It's kind of cool to have the freedom and not worry about people automatically thinking you're gay! You're just doing what they do."

While many experienced a transformation of judgment, in that they started to appreciate the differences between the cultures, others found it difficult to articulate exactly how they had changed, but declared that indeed they did think differently, especially about other ways of life, now that they had traveled and lived abroad. Several, such as Wendy, Brent, Finley, Wyatt, Matt, and Lance explained that their

understanding of the world was bigger and that the way they looked at common things at home had now changed as a result of their time abroad. For instance, Finley stated she started recycling and was more aware of the water she wasted, Wyatt commented on how much gets thrown away in both food and material and had decided to be less wasteful, while Brent decided to be more open to trying new food and expanding his world of friends. What appeared to be standard among the participants was the openness to different perspectives.

Most of the participants entered the sojourn with what they thought was an open mind that would allow in new and foreign features. Yet a number of the participants still held to old points of view until certain situations arose that had them question prior beliefs. Paul recalled getting on a bus in Mexico and watching some couples being very affectionate, more so than in the U.S. The amount of affection shared between the couple had him notice a difference in cultural norms. He was to witness this activity on many occasions, and as a result started to feel it was a positive aspect of the culture. Tess, on the other hand, was extremely fearful of getting on a bus because there were so many people. She had never ridden on a bus in her home state, and the thought paralyzed her for three days. She could not understand why there were not more cars and why the people on the bus did not smile. Additionally, she assumed that only poor people rode the bus. Tess stated that a change in perspective occurred after engaging in a conversation with a 30-something female. Through their conversation, Tess realized that this lady was not poor, but rather upper-middle-class, and rode the bus because it was easy and cost-effective. This conversation provided Tess with new knowledge that had her question her reluctance to ride a bus and reassess her prior assumptions about



users of public transportation. These two individuals, Matt and Tess found that utilizing public transportation (something they did not do at home) they were exposed to a different way of life. This difference was noted and reflected upon, thereby a new point of view evolved. Others similarly had altered points of view as a result of modes of transportation.

The common modes of transportation used abroad caused many of the participants to reconsider their established beliefs about the need for cars. Holly's experience of being in a foreign city and not needing a car to get from point A to point B was "incredible." This notion of walking or using public transportation made her stop and think about herself at home. She commented that often instead of walking to class, which was only eight blocks away, she would drive. Now that she has returned, she not only walks to campus, but has bought a bicycle and rides to work. Holly reflected further on being previously indifferent to the notion of pollution, but after her trip to England she has been finding ways to have a smaller carbon footprint.

The cultural awareness that developed as a result of time abroad was deemed valuable by the participants because these experiences provided a new way of looking at the world around them. Furthermore, with their new global vision, a number of the participants stated to feeling more a part of the global community, and many have taken personal strides to be more ecologically minded.

## **Discussion**

### **A Perspective Transformation and a New Sense of Self**

The discussion on altered perspectives and a new sense of self will be discussed in the following paragraphs beginning with a review of perspective

transformation then followed by a discussion of the various phases of transformative learning encountered by the participants during their sojourn. Additionally, this research utilized other notions of transformative learning like that of Cranton, (1998a, 1991b), Cranton & Roy, (2003) Dirkx (2000),and Taylor (2005) while keeping roots in Dewey (1938).

According to Mezirow (1991):

Perspective transformation is the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative perspective; and finally, making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings. (p. 167).

The students who participated in this study shared that they had gained a new sense of self and a broader worldview as a result of studying abroad because at various points throughout the sojourn they were confronted with situations or predicaments that prompted them to reconsider a previously held belief. As demonstrated, conversations, visits to monuments, or public situations provided a stimulus where a conscious effort was made to reorganize or reconsider previous beliefs not only about the host country, but about themselves.

This shift in self-identity and perspective of others accords with the concept of transformative learning as “a process by which previously uncritically assimilated assumption, beliefs, values, and perspectives are questioned and thereby become more open, permeable, and better validated” (Cranton, 2006, p. 2). Additionally, Mezirow

(1978) notes the importance of “perspective taking” that works as “a mechanism by which transformation occurs” (p.104). The act of considering and evaluating those assumptions that underlie beliefs suggests an opportunity for change. Furthermore, various participants expressed having taken the perspective as the “other” for the first time, and began to understand how different life was from this perspective. As illustrated earlier, the participants of this study professed to having experiences that had them question their prior beliefs. Tess, for one, underwent a change of perspective of others, while Finley experienced a change in gaining self-reliance and a greater sense of self-worth. Furthermore, through a process of reflection, Holly and Wyatt discovered a different side of themselves, one that was more open and independent. Moreover, questioning cultural contrasts can lead to adjusting attitudes as the individual takes into consideration other ways of viewing those contrasting differences. Cranton & Roy (2003) posit:

This questioning, or critical self-reflection, may not be linear or sequential, but it is essentially a rational process of seeing that our previous views no longer fit—they are too narrow, too limiting; they do not explain the new experience (p.88).

Learning to read and using a metro or bus map, engaging in dialogues with host families about culture, going to a museum for the first time, reading a foreign newspaper, and many other experiences that result in reflections can be forms of transformative learning. Many of the participants acquired a new perspective by accomplishing certain tasks that were viewed as intimidating. While these moments did not necessarily foster a major change of perspective, they did, however, provide the participants with opportunities for reflection and learning.

According to Mezirow (1991), transformative learning begins with “a disorienting dilemma” (p. 168). This implies experiencing a new incident that does not fit into a pre-existing meaning structure that then causes the individual to question prior beliefs. As described earlier, various participants experienced moments where they found themselves in a situation that required them to think about and reflect on what they originally thought not only about themselves, but about others. Finley, for instance, had to find a solution to her problem, and she did. Likewise, Patsy, Pam, and Lance experienced situations that provoked them to undergo a modified perception by adapting to a new culture, allowing differences of norms, and accepting these differences.

While dilemmas are considered the starting points for transformative learning, experiences void of actual dilemmas, can also promote transformative learning by prompting an individual to consciously think and reflect about a preconceived notion and thereby altering a point of view. Dewey (1938) posits the potential for change as the result of an important experience, not any experience, but a deep and memorable one, noting: “Everything depends upon the *quality* of the experience” (p.16). For many of the participants, such as Wyatt, experiencing, first-hand the Great Wall of China, or Finley needing hot water provided learning moments about not only themselves, but about different ways of life. These opportunities for learning were not part of a curriculum, but rather, a part of studying abroad. Again, Dewey confirmed this result of U.S. education when he made the following statement about the educational system: “How many came to associate books with dull drudgery” (p.17). Studying abroad, for

the most part, provided a means to learning where the knowledge in books was not the central focal point.

A significant area that provoked many participants to reconsider established points of view grew from the emotional connection to the situation. Dirkx (2001) states dissimilarity to Mezirow's notion of transformative learning by including the importance of understanding the emotional undertones of experiences. Likewise, Taylor (2008) notes "there are a variety of alternative conceptions of transformative learning theory that refer to similar ideas and address factors often overlooked in the dominant theory of transformation (Mezirow's), such as the role of spirituality, positionality, emancipatory learning, and neurobiology" (p. 7). A need to refocus and understand a new attitude, letting go of old notions and anxiety, like that of Tess, suggest a perspective change. Not only did she experience emotional change, but also a new sense of freedom from prior misconceptions and an opportunity to immerse herself in a new culture. Megan had a personal connection to Holland, and after being there for four weeks, her emotional bond to the "Dutch way of life" fostered a reconstituted perception of how she wants to live her life.

Whereas a number of the participants chose to look at their new world with an open mind from the beginning of their journey, others, like Tess, were still bound by previous beliefs and misconceptions until the second week. Mezirow (1991) states, "we allow our meaning system to diminish our awareness of how things really are in order to avoid anxiety, creating a zone of blocked attention and self-deception" (p. 5). Tess and Pam learned to self-regulate and respect others, while Wyatt, who previously had only basic understanding of the Chinese culture, came away from his sojourn with a

greater depth of understanding, and a desire to continue his learning of all things Chinese. His initial fears and anxiety about not being able to understand this culture only temporarily created a wall, and after his four-week sojourn, he acquired a new attitude to accomplish his goals.

The concept of Mezirow's transformative learning theory, that learning takes place when an experience leads us to open our frame of reference, discard habits of mind, see alternatives, and thereby act differently in the world because of critical reflection, became apparent, but in varying degrees, in this research. Oftentimes, emotional reactions, compounded the event as it was felt and experienced, physically and psychologically. Most notably, these quandaries led the participants to plan a course of action and try on a new role. Keeping in line with the ten phases of transformation, as suggested by Mezirow (1991), this research demonstrated that these participants not only reflected on, but acted on and changed their behavior and some aspect of their perspective (note, that a change in worldview generally comes after a life-threatening event, if ever) as a direct result of their time abroad. Changes that occurred from living in a foreign country, such as respect and empathy for foreigners, were found to be most significant, as many of the participants expressed surprise at how they acted prior to studying abroad and being home again.

Additionally, a new, more competent and self-confident individual appeared to emerge from the experience of studying abroad. The individuals interviewed reported that they returned from their sojourns somehow different. While the notion of transformation in degrees and practice may not characterize all of the participants, for

the majority, their time abroad was full of unfamiliarity and excitement that led them to form a new point of view.

All of the participants expressed this growth and new found pride in their self-perception. Applying and incorporating these cherished experiences follows Mezirow's (1991) notion of the "reintegration...on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective." Once back at home in the U.S., the participants articulated a need to be more empathetic towards foreigners, something that they had thought about in the past, but seldom, if ever, acted upon. While all actions and reflections did not merit transformative learning as such, the participants in this study encountered "disorienting dilemmas" that provoked and encouraged them to modify previously held beliefs by way of reflecting on what it was they thought and why. Furthermore, a facet of transformative learning could be observed in their new independent thinking. During the interviews, the participants revealed experiencing greater autonomy, not only in their learning, but also in their reinforced desire to use the study abroad experience as a gateway to obtaining their goals in life.

### **Theme 3: The Educational Value of Everyday Learning**

Three predominant venues of everyday learning occurred for the participants of this study, most notably in the following manners: experiential learning where learning was viewed as a process without formal assessment (Kolb & Kolb, 2005), improvement of language skills where students acquired greater oral proficiency and oral comprehension skills, and enlightening dialogues with friends, moments where new information was acquired through conversations.

The participants stated that they went abroad to participate in scholarly programs organized by their university to earn college credit toward their respective degrees. Yet “ah hah” moments of learning occurred more often when they were away from the classroom and out in the community. These instances of additional learning were not directly related to their in-class performance nor to formal assessment; however, according to the participants, these occasions were considered more valuable.

### **Experiential learning.**

Studying abroad provided circumstances for learning that developed from doing something new and different in a foreign location. Experiential learning, unlike traditional learning that is based on more traditional, cognitive thought, is learning that is a combination of “experience, perception, cognition, and behavior” where ideas are formed from an experience; it is a process of learning and relearning by doing (Kolb, p. 20, 1984).

A number of participants stated that the daily routine of the home country became a memory, while their new environment provided a setting for reinvention. The mundane, such as taking out the trash, became a new adventure for some of the participants, who for the first time in their lives had to find the recycle bins in the street and separate their trash. Others experienced first-hand the more sophisticated features of the culture by visiting museums, cathedrals, and historic sites and engaging in conversation with the locals. These latter venues became one of the most frequent examples of experiential learning for the participants. Others visited these locations out of curiosity to see and experience first-hand great works of art and architecture.



As an example, Lance, a double major in humanities and Spanish, commented on an educational moment when he went to the Reina Sofia museum in Madrid, and remarked, “I saw *Guernica* (A painting by Picasso depicting the tragedy of the German and Italian bombing and annihilation of the Spanish town of Guernica, 1937). You can see it in books and on the web, but seeing it in person, it’s like wow!” For him, the experience of seeing a masterpiece, in person, was deeply rewarding. The magnitude and the shades of color in this painting were mesmerizing. He also mentioned that on one occasion as he was talking to a Spaniard, he brought up the topic of the painting. From this casual conversation he had learned more about it than he could have through reading a book because this person’s emotional connection to the painting made the actual experience of seeing it far more meaningful. While Lance could not articulate all of his thoughts in Spanish, he was able to feel the symbolic nature of the painting by watching his friend talk about it. Others, too, shared stories of meeting people and listening to them talk about their country. These informal conversations where the individuals were engaged and curious often resulted in moments of learning.

This first-hand experience was found to be the most meaningful because many of the participants thought they knew more than they did, such as Wyatt on the Great Wall of China:

You know it’s big, but until you’re there, you really have no idea. I knew the wall was big, and I knew it was important. But not until I was there and saw with my own eyes did I realize the impact this wall must have had. So, I bought a book about the wall and learned more than I really needed to.

The use of the phrase “needed to” goes to the heart of the transformative learning experience involved. Accustomed to learning as little as possible in his on-campus courses, Wyatt had articulated that he wanted to learn more than what was required of him, and, thus, took one small step toward becoming a self-directed learner.

Beth, a 20-year-old undeclared major who had spent four weeks in Paris, set up her interview and brought with her, a friend named Pam, also undeclared, who had traveled with her. They described their initial plan to have their parents pay for them to go to Europe, primarily to study in Paris. They wanted to go to Paris because they thought that it would be “cool.” By their own admission, they did not spend much time in class in Paris because what they were looking for was an adventure and not an education. Instead, they went to museums for the first time in their lives and experienced new food and wine. Additionally, instead of dreading high-school assigned fiction as they had years before, they found joy in reading novels and sitting at cafes. Both happily admitted to enjoying literature and found that when they “hooked up” with other students from other parts of the world, they were able to talk about the arts in general. They began to appreciate not only literature, but sculpture, painting, and architecture. Beth stated:

Where we live, architecture does not really exist...it is like okay, so that is a pretty building, but when you go to Paris, you know what a pretty building looks like. I mean really, there are a ton of them, at every corner. Then you see the Eiffel tower and you read that Eiffel had a vision. Then life starts making sense because I was never a good student.

Pam, while intrigued with the architecture, found more pleasure in reading Balzac, Proust, Moliere, and Zola. She said:

I always liked reading, and I might change my major to English, but when I was sitting at a café in Paris reading one of these authors, I felt special and smart. I pictured them writing and then to know that at the cafes the artists and the writers and poets would get together there was a romantic feeling. Once we met Adrian and his friends, it was so cool. We would talk music and movies and art. I mean no guys in the states, unless they are gay, have any idea about this stuff.

A curiosity for gaining knowledge led them to inform themselves in order to adjust and learn from their new and interesting environment. In the end, these two individuals, as a result of their time abroad, became avid students of their newly-discovered interests. While the initial plan was to spend time in Paris, the result was an experience that not only enhanced their knowledge about French literature, art, and culture, but also provided situations where they grew as learners. They utilized their surroundings as a venue for learning and the people in the streets and cafes as teachers.

### **Language acquisition.**

Sixteen of the 19 participants chose to study abroad in order to improve their second language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing). The notion of total immersion in a foreign country motivated 14 of the participants to go to non-English speaking countries where they could work on their language abilities, primarily the Spanish language. Three of the participants were Spanish language education majors and deemed the sojourn imperative to their careers. Therefore, the various situations

that occurred for these individuals outside of the structured classroom were considered to have helped enhance proficiency in their target language, which merits attention.

Brandy, who studied in Germany, discussed the learning she experienced on an almost daily basis with an older female attendant at a tourist shop as the highlight of her trip. She frequented this locale for post-cards and other memorabilia:

She was friendly and wouldn't speak quickly. She would stop and say, "do you understand?" And then let me try to muddle along in my poor German. She would help me when I needed it. This made me feel good. Other places and people were not so kind! I learned more from her than I did in class.

Brandy understood and was grateful that the lady wanted to help her improve her German. The one-on-one experience of using the language in a non-academic situation allowed Brandy not to be stressed about being judged and to retain important grammar and pronunciation, while improving her language proficiency.

Language acquisition skills increased for Patsy, a Spanish education major, who sought to capitalize on her four-week sojourn. She recalled one specific learning moment going to a restaurant near her school in Mexico, and meeting a waiter who, at first, intimidated her, but by her second visit, helped her with her language:

The next time, I went and tried to ask what the dish was and what it had in it, and I pulled out my dictionary. He knew enough English to help me, then he explained other things... Then, the next time he taught me more about how they make the food, and now I can work my way through a recipe in Spanish and know what I'm doing. They do not teach you how to read a menu and understand it, let alone cook or read recipes in class.

She also shared that some friends, upon her return to the U.S., came over to cook and to learn the names of ingredients, something they had never considered doing. What she attributed to this breakthrough was having lived in an unfamiliar place and the desire to capitalize on all that it offered, especially the great Mexican food.

Many of the participants utilized their surroundings to broaden their horizons, questioning what they knew before and taking every minute and every situation as a moment to learn. With this new knowledge, they returned home eager to share their experiences with family and friends. While some information came from books or simply by talking to the people, much of this new learning was derived from walking around, observing, and comparing what they were seeing to what they knew before. Actively exploring their new environments led to adjustments of previous held beliefs that, in turn, added to their educational sojourn abroad. These individuals learned something that they felt was valuable, and most importantly, many were eager to share these new bits of information with others at home and abroad.

Students who study abroad experience language learning through various scenarios. For example, meeting students from other parts of the world, or even other states, provided the participants with unique opportunities to engage in conversations that they would otherwise not have, using language skills to navigate shopping or ask for directions, handling foreign currency, different time zones, or simply eating in a restaurant provided experiences that fostered change in the participants knowledge base.

#### **Enlightening dialogues with new friends.**

Some of the more intense moments for learning came from active conversations with new friends, some foreign and others U.S. citizens. According to a number of the

participants, the dialogues that were held in restaurants, bars, parks, or at “home” provided many meaningful insights into a culture that they deemed interesting. Neither a set scholarly curriculum nor texts were involved, but rather, a situation that surfaced, which allowed for an open exchange of knowledge.

Engaging in random dialogues with new friends added to the experience of many of the participants. As an example, Phil, who had traveled to Mexico to study Spanish, was thrilled about learning new things about his host country. He recalled one significant learning moment that made him realize how little he actually knew.

I was in the estado de Puebla, but I was still in Mexico. Like, they have states like we have states. Like, we have the state of Oklahoma. I didn't know that there were states like that in Mexico, and I am 21-years-old. And I sound like an idiot, I guess. But there are tons of people who don't know that Puebla is a state, and Mexico, D.F. is Distrito Federal which is the capital, like our Washington, D.C.

Phil learned something from this encounter abroad. Not only was the information important to understanding Mexico but also to demonstrating to him that if you get to know people and talk to them, you can profit educationally and emotionally from the situation. His reaction to being unfamiliar with something that he found pertinent to understanding Mexico created an opportunity to experience meaningful learning. Dialogues encountered out among other individuals clearly appeared to be more powerful for the participants who were open to learning something new, in contrast to the more lax attitudes they admitted to taking into the classroom. Beth stated:

Like I said earlier, I hated reading in high school. I thought it was a complete waste of my time, then I get to college, and again, I have these lame “required” courses that do not interest me, and if I make a C, I am good. I never understood why I needed to know things that I would not use in my life.

Instead of a jaded mind-set, students sensed an opportunity and an eagerness to learn. The excitement to experience something totally new, relevant, and different made these experiences much more significant. Phil recalled that from his conversations: “I feel like I know a lot more about the world, even if I only got to experience one other country.” Without the study abroad opportunity, he would not know this. According to many of the participants, a new and exciting path opened. Lance, Pam, and Hanna affirmed their desires to keep traveling and learning.

To further illustrate, Hannah met two other American females studying medicine. She spoke with them, for many hours, about their lives “back in the States.” They all realized how different, yet similar, the university experience was not only in the U.S., but also abroad. The variance in language and the conscious realization that they were “somewhere else” away from their friends, family, and familiar atmosphere made their conversations, according to Hannah, “more interesting.” She continued:

Had we been back home, we would never have had the kind of conversations we had here. Because we wouldn’t be friends and on top of that we are in a restaurant/ bar in Mexico, not talking about other friends, work, or that kind of stuff. It was like we had this adult conversation about things that matter to us and the world. I am a country girl from a small town and my new friends were from a big city on the coast. Seriously, what do I have in common with them?

Nothing. But now we do have something in common and we keep in touch on Facebook.

For most, these experiences were the type of education they had set out to accomplish while getting college credit. Most importantly, for many it was learning to become independent and self-reliant. The simple joy of living in a foreign world was the most rewarding experience. The participants constantly shared tidbits of information discovered while abroad from simple observances as they watched people on the street greet one another. These opportunities were not wasted, but rather curiously examined and noted.

## **Discussion**

### **Educational Value of Everyday Learning**

Three primary venues for everyday learning emerged from the data as experienced by the sojourners of this research: experiential learning (i.e. learning as a process, not as a product to be assessed), language skills, and enlightening dialogues with friends. The following paragraphs will attempt to illustrate how these scenarios enhanced learning and assisted the participants with gaining knowledge.

While two to six weeks abroad may not be considered by some to be of value, the results of this study would suggest otherwise. The findings of the study indicate that for these participants everyday learning happened both in and out of class. For the most part, they appeared to be poised for learning, understanding that what they were experiencing was a once in a lifetime opportunity, and wanting to utilize every minute of every day to take advantage of the occasion. The participants acknowledged that they acquired new knowledge from the experience of their living classroom, due in part to



what Dewey (1938) affirms as “continuity’ and “interaction.” That is to say, the events experienced were connected to past occurrences with foreigners or foreign situations, as well as future desires and dreams.

As demonstrated, the participants acknowledged gaining new and valuable information in varying manners, such as Brandy conversing with the German woman and improving her speaking and listening skills, or Beth, who learned to enjoy reading and understand the social and cultural implications of literature, in addition to Phil who learned about the states of Mexico. These learning scenarios were a result of the experience of being abroad; as such Kolb (1984) maintains the notion that experiential learning emphasizes “the central role that experience plays in the learning process” (p.20). Furthermore, Beth, Hannah, and Patsy recalled similar experiences where they had acquired new information by being open and willing to participate in an experience with others.

According to Dewey (1960), “Experience,..., is primarily what is undergone in connection with activities whose import lies in their objective consequences—their bearings upon future experiences” (p.33). In accordance with Dewey’s observation, many of the participants stated using their time abroad in future endeavors. Furthermore, it seemed that the memory of what they experienced and learned from studying abroad will remain a part of their lives. Moreover, many confirmed a desire to carry these experiences with them into their futures. Additionally, following the sojourn five changed majors to maintain a connection with a new passion for traveling and experiencing new cultures, yet others stated a need to incorporate their experiences into their curriculum vitae for hopes of influencing their future career goals.

Short-term study abroad was a stepping-stone in the participants' university careers that taught them that they could not only expand their knowledge, but also grow personally as a result of living and studying in a foreign environment. Kolb (1984) posits learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience" (p.41). This connection between environment and learning is additionally supported by Kolb and Kolb (2005), who stated "learning results from the synergetic transactions between the person and the environment" (p.194). The desire to encounter environments that were conducive to learning, while providing experiences unique to the location, were identified, by many, as a fundamental aspect of their learning. As demonstrated, Brent, who for the first time in his life had travelled outside of the U.S., acquired a greater respect for nature and its influences on the Costa Rican culture while Lance encountered the meaning of a cultural icon, in Spain.

Dewey (1960) states "growing as developing, not only physically but intellectually and morally, is one exemplification of the principle of continuity" (p.28). Holly, like Tess, had never been out of the U.S. alone. She stated that, prior to her trip to London, she needed things to be planned and organized. Yet, during her sojourn she was able to relax and enjoy her new environment without her habitual need for uniformity. Her experience aroused, for the first time, a curiosity and a purpose to overcome old habits. The learning that transpired from her sojourn was not only cognitive but emotional. A new sense of autonomy for learning was most prevalent as she made decisions to experience London without charting her every move and accounting for every minute. This process of becoming more spontaneous was laden

with emotional meaning, due in part to her conscious desire to change her way of life. Kolb & Kolb (2005) suggest that “learning requires resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world” (p. 194). Furthermore, Dirks (1991) maintains the importance of connecting emotions to learning and as a result gaining a modified perspective of oneself. This notion of learning was exemplified in the connection Lance experienced with *Guernica*, the painting by Picasso.

The learning that transpired as a result of studying abroad was as varied as the participants were in personalities, however every experience does not necessitate a learning moment, nor did every outing produce great knowledge (Dewey, 1938, Cranton & Roy, 2003; Dirks, 2001; Kolb, 1984; Merriam, 2004). Dewey further (1938) asserts “not all experience educates” (p.13). What did occur, however, were multiple informal situations that created learning moments, where the participants reflected on an experience and thus changed their thinking.

#### **Theme 4: A short but important sojourn.**

Two to four weeks abroad may, at first impression, seem insufficient in so far as achieving greater language skills, yet the data that emerged suggests that shorter sojourns provided learning opportunities in addition to offering occasions for those with restricted finances or time constraints to have an opportunity to study abroad. In addition to money and time constraints, two other factors for opting to partake in a short-term sojourn emerged: personal attachment to loved ones, and an intense immersion in the language.

As noted earlier, while year-abroad programs have suffered a steady decline short-term sojourns are increasing in numbers of participants. According to many of the

participants, studying abroad was a far-away dream when they were high-school students. The dream became reality when they realized that, while they could choose not opt for a semester or year, they could choose to study for a shorter period of two-to-six weeks.

**Lack of financial resources.**

The trend of short stays abroad has steadily grown over the past ten years (Open Doors, 2008). Where once well-off families sent their children overseas, and many still do, now the middle-class and even lower-class students make the dream their reality by sacrificing time or finances to go. Financially, time abroad can be immensely expensive for traditional college students and their families (Ferstervand, T.A., &Tillery, K.R., 2001). So it was for many of the participants of this study, who stated that they had to work while at home to have spending money, or pay for cars and technology (cell phones, internet, etc.) thus, the necessity for saving money in order to go abroad was daunting. Similarly, various participants explained that their parents or scholarships provided tuition and housing while they were responsible for all other expenses while abroad. Accordingly, those who experienced financial worries knew how much money they could spend; and they stayed, for the most part, within their economic constraints except two who indicated that they had incurred extra debt on credit cards.

None of the participants indicated that they thought they were “well-off.” Rather, two said they came from lower-class families, twelve from middle-class families, and four from upper-middle class homes. For example, Megan communicated

“I have to work most of the time, so that limited my options to only going for one month.” Additionally, one month in Germany was all Paul could afford:

When you wrap it all up, it’s pretty reasonable. I had to pay for books, tuition, fees, room and board, and quite a bit of travel for around \$2500, for really an excellent instruction and if it’s worth a semester, say 6 credit hours will cost you about \$800 or more. Plus, you’re going to have to eat for a month and pay rent. So, you are already at around a couple thousand right here. So, to me it was reasonable, if you think about it.

Finley, a Spanish education major, spent two weeks in the north of Spain in Santiago de Compostela. A friend of hers had studied there the year before and had shared her experience, which made Finley realize that she could also afford two weeks. Finley, unlike her friend, was married and could not convince her new husband that she should go:

My husband was not very supportive. I just made up my mind that I wanted to go and that was it. That was just it because we did not have the money to pay for it. To be quite honest, half of it is still sitting on my credit card.

Throughout the interviews, a number of participants related that they would have enjoyed more time abroad, but could not financially afford the luxury of not working. Brandy, similar to Paul, went to Germany, to experience not only “medieval-like cities” very different from her home state, but to encounter constant exposure to the German language. Her time abroad was also one month. Initially she had planned to join a study tour of two weeks to Germany, but the tour had fallen through due to a lack of participation, thus she decided that she would just go for herself. “It was \$1800.00

dollars and the tour was almost three grand. I just watched what I ate and did as well as having really cheap housing! I had to share a bathroom with three other students.”

Even for shorter lengths many of the participants realized that sacrifices had to be made to meet their goal. While money was the major factor for shorter stays abroad, some participants stated additional explanations for their decision to stay less than a semester or year abroad.

### **Other factors that determined time abroad.**

Two additional factors, apart from financial restraints, that inhibited the amount of time the participants spent abroad included missing loved ones and believing that one month of immersion, in the target language and culture, was sufficient. The purpose of studying abroad was viewed, by many, as an opportunity to get course credits in addition to saying they studied abroad without spending a semester or more away from others.

For Megan, the idea of leaving her boyfriend was frustrating and depressing. Given that she had always wanted to study abroad, her parents and grandparents had been saving money for many years to send her abroad to The Netherlands. Her parents made it clear that this was the year that she would be going, if she so desired. Torn between letting an opportunity pass by and leaving her boyfriend, she decided that a four-week course during the summer would be better than a semester abroad. As a psychology major, she stated that she did not necessarily need the extra credits to graduate or the language credit (although all of the classes would be in English); she only wanted the experience of studying abroad. Additionally, her grandparents had lived there, and they very happy that she chose Utrecht as her destination.

She stated that her first few days in Utrecht were exciting and challenging, but as the days went by, she began feeling homesick. She recalled one specific day where she spent many hours crying because she missed her home and her boyfriend:

I was just so lonely. I was happy to be there, but I really wanted my boyfriend because we could have had such a great time and I think that's why I really cried. I knew that if he had been there it would have been fantastic- not that it wasn't but really it would have been much better.

During the interview Megan acknowledged some regrets for not capitalizing on her financed opportunity to study abroad:

I spent way too much time with him video chatting on-line while other people went out and did things. What is so sad is that I looked forward to seeing him more than I did anything else, and I lost out on a lot of fun stuff.

Unfortunately, Megan realized that she did not make the most of her sojourn because she was too concerned with her life and her boyfriend back in the U.S. While she did gain a new perspective of herself, she noted that she made a regrettable mistake by not doing more and by not staying a semester. She further commented that she plans to return and do all of the things she did not do: "but only if my parents can help me pay for it."

Unlike Megan, Hannah, was of the mind that the time did not matter as much as how she perceived her own experiences abroad:

After two weeks it was like I had always been here. It did not matter. A routine is a routine and it can be anywhere. Two weeks or six weeks was not going to be

that big of a difference I mean to me, at least. But I did keep a count of the days left and I knew I had to make the most of everyday.

She defended her reasoning by commenting on how much of her learning arose from changing her daily routine, finding new routes to class or to the store, talking to as many people as possible and searching out new opportunities for adventure when she was not in class. She also acknowledged that she habitually stayed out of the house for extended periods of time, walking around or stopping in new places in order to talk to different people. Hannah knew that her time was limited, a decision she alone had made, and therefore she wanted to make the most out of her short stay. Interestingly, as a result of this acknowledged brevity of time abroad, she mentioned feeling a sense of urgency in so far as she realized that, “this may not ever happen again and soon I will have to go home, so I had to make the most of each day.” She recognized not wanting to miss out on any adventure and therefore did as much as she could, especially the last few days of her sojourn. Upon reflection, Hannah wished she had not returned so early, but has no regrets and hopes to return for a longer stay in the future.

The outcome of the sojourn for these two females was different. One was content with her short time abroad and the other regretted making the decision to study abroad for such a short period because of the repercussions on her relationship with her boyfriend. Like Hannah, others were of the mind that the length of time abroad was not the most important factor, but rather it was immersing themselves in the language and the culture.



**One month immersion is equal to 16 weeks in class.**

Three participants stated that their reason for going abroad was to improve language skills. Unlike taking a language class at their home university, they thought that studying abroad and being exposed to the language in every way, talking, listening, and reading, would enhance their language skills. Thus, four weeks was viewed as offering as much exposure to the target language as a 16-week class at their home university.

Paul, for example, went to Germany to work on his language skills, stated, “a month of immersion is easily equal to a semester of study in your native country and there really is no substitute for being immersed in the culture, in my opinion.” This sentiment was equally shared among five other participants who went to improve their language skills. While the notion of immersion as equal to class time confirmed one reason for the shorter stays, they also expressed a reluctance to commit to the financial aspect of a semester abroad.

For another participant, Curt, a married father of one, the idea of building his knowledge and use of the language by attending a four week class in Mexico would be beneficial to his career as a Latin American history scholar. While the credits were not of great importance, he did want to improve his language skills, and felt that a four-week immersion course would suit his needs. The responsibility of being a father in graduate school made the decision of not going for one semester less problematic for him and his family. Financially, one month abroad was also the most feasible from an economical and time perspective.

Unlike previous generations of students who could go abroad for longer periods, this current generation has work, family, and financial obligations that do not permit the extended stays. While many of the participants commented that they would have enjoyed more time abroad, others stated that regardless of the financial aspect, it was the experience of being abroad that mattered and not the length of time. Thus, a two-to-four week sojourn sufficiently met their needs.

While a number of participants acknowledged that more time abroad would have provided more opportunities, they were content with what they had accomplished during their brief stays. For them, the environment in-and-out of class provided and promoted new learning opportunities on a daily basis. Moreover, they were not with family or close friends on a vacation, but rather alone in an environment where they had to learn to live within a new and foreign culture.

## **Discussion**

### **A short but important sojourn.**

Historically, students who have studied abroad tended to go during their entire junior year or for a semester. Yet, the current trend indicates that most students can no longer financially afford such an endeavor. The participants of this research demonstrated that while a number were unable to study abroad for the traditional period others were of the mind-set that a month-long immersion in the culture would sufficiently meet their needs both educationally and personally. For this reason, short-term study abroad was viewed by a number of the participants as a feasible option for fulfilling a life-long dream of studying abroad.

Restraints for staying abroad for one semester or one academic year challenge the 21<sup>st</sup> Century university student, who often works full-time to pay tuition and/or other expenses, is married with children, or relying upon a spouse to pay the bill, as suggested by the cases of Finley, Paul, and Curt.

Brandy chose to enroll in a study tour that did not make, and as a result found another option for experiencing Germany, a month long program that not only offered her in class opportunities to improve language skills, but that was also a financially feasible program. Hannah, on the other hand, was convinced that four weeks abroad were all that she needed to accomplish her goal, while Megan did not utilize her brief time abroad in a positive manner, preferring instead to keep connected to her boyfriend.

The various reasons that surfaced during the interview process for choosing time abroad demonstrates that a number of students have alternative reasons for choosing to stay abroad for shorter periods. The most common, lack of financial resources, suggests that the student population realizes the cost involved to studying abroad, in so far as they must have money for tuition, airfare, housing, food, and daily expenses. As many were dependent on others and unable to work while abroad, two-to-four-weeks was the only option to experiencing studying abroad.

### **Summary**

The diverse themes that emerged from the data suggest that short-term study abroad was both intellectually and emotionally profitable. For a number of the participants, understanding and coping with their inner feelings was central to the capitalizing on their experience of studying abroad. As a result of the sojourn, they were able to take away valuable and memorable experiences that have had an impact on

their character. Additionally, these experiences proved to have transformative qualities that allowed the participants to reflect and acknowledge how the sojourn affected them intellectually, emotionally, and socially.

While for some the emotional gain was more profound than the academic gain, others commented positively about the amount of learning that occurred while they were out of class, believing that, intellectually, they were more stimulated to do well when they were not in class. In essence, short-term study abroad provided valuable opportunities for enrichment, academically and emotionally, for a generation of students who value the experience more than the amount of time spent abroad.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS REVISITED

This study sought to redress the lack of current knowledge concerning short-term study abroad, including its possible educational significance with a variety of potential results. A phenomenological inquiry provided the framework utilized to examine short-term study abroad. Furthermore, the following research questions concerning students who participate in short-term study abroad programs guided the process of the study. Analysis of the data revealed answers to these questions, but more importantly, it went further by generating an understanding of the significant role of emotions in learning. Notwithstanding, the starting point for this research centered on the following set of questions:

**1. How do students who engage in short-term study abroad experience these opportunities?**

The features most noteworthy to engaging in short-term study abroad were found to be (a) growing emotionally, and (b) feeling a sense of urgency. The emotional complexities of having a brief stay, where there is typically insufficient or very little time to address or deal with these emotions, was discovered to be most compelling finding. Additionally, the participants acknowledged that because their stay abroad was limited, they could not waste time, but instead, they felt a need to engage actively with the new environment. The experience of a short-term sojourn, unlike that of a semester or year abroad, was more intense in so far as the participants realized the importance of capitalizing on every experience possible.

As noted in Chapter Four, an unexpected factor emerged from the data, the primacy of emotions. Essentially, these emotions generated powerful feelings that caused many of the participants to question their prior beliefs and to reassess previous attitudes and points of view. The primacy of emotions as an integral part of the learning process has been supported by various theories and theorists (Dewey, 1938; Denzin, 1984; Dirkx, 2001; Goleman, 1995; Mezirow, 1997). Interestingly, the literature on study abroad only slightly mentions the importance of understanding and coping with emotional turmoil most often related to a year abroad. Yet, according to the participants a sense of urgency and a need to make the experience as valuable as possible was a factor in daily decision making. As a result of this conscious awareness of the transitory nature of the stay, many stated a preference not to study for class, but rather go out and explore. Additionally, the participants recalled a tension between a need to do homework and a desire to partake in extracurricular activities. The craving to go out and experience a new world proved to be more essential and emotionally stimulating to a number of the participants.

While anxiety, fear, shame, and hesitation were significant emotional components of the short-term sojourn, the opposing forces of excitement, engagement, resolve, and attraction manifested greater influence, due, in part, to recognition of the brevity of their time abroad. The emotional experiences and responses to external stimuli are much more memorable and can lead to growth and learning, so far as the individual recognizes and adjusts to new feelings (Goleman, 1995). Dirkx (2001) is of the same opinion that the importance of emotions and feelings in learning experiences can either “impede or motivate learning” (p.63). As suggested in this study, the

participants acknowledged the importance of their emotional state in connection with their learning, which for many was a result of extracurricular activities away from class and an acknowledged time constraint.

Excursions in a controlled environment that were provided by many of the schools were, for a number of students, controlled and planned gateways for exploring something new. Others, not wanting the constraints of a structured program preferred to put together their own outings. For them, time spent on the bus in this structured environment was deemed to be insignificant and futile, being, in their view, similar to sitting in class, but with better views. For many the purpose of the sojourn was to experience independence, and the structured outings represented more of the same. Thus, the participants found it necessary and enjoyable to do research and prepare itineraries for exploration based on what they wanted to see or do.

Growing emotional and feeling a sense of urgency was results of the different experiences for the short-term sojourner. Unlike students who go abroad for a semester or an academic year, the data suggests that the compounding effects of brevity of time in conjunction with emotional dilemmas can provide learning scenarios for both the emotional and educational elements of study abroad.

## **2. What kinds of learning occur for students who engage in short-term study abroad?**

The types of learning that occurred for the participants of this research are instrumental, communicative, and emancipatory. Self-directed and experiential are also facets of the learning that transpired for the participants. Furthermore, the kind of learning that took place was found to be continuous, in that the students noted learning

in and out of class. Yet, for the most part, the participants claimed to have acquired more knowledge away from class by conversing with locals or with other students from around the world and visiting cultural sites.

Instrumental learning involved improving language skills. The participants learned by speaking with others in meaningful conversations. For a number of the participants, a major goal of the sojourn was to enhance language skills. Going abroad to a country that speaks a language other than English provided the participants with daily interaction and immersions that they believed helped them improve their language skills. The ways in which they were able to improve skills consisted primarily of problem solving, such as getting lost and needing to use the language to find one's way home, ordering food in a restaurant, doing laundry, or trying to sort out a bus route and schedule. Another area of instrumental learning occurred for those who began to use different computer software to maintain contact with family or friends in the U.S.

Communicative learning was the most common type of learning among the participants of this research. This type of learning created two different avenues of knowledge: understand the spoken language, and the ability to decipher the meaning. This type of learning took place between the participant and others. Primarily, communicative learning required the participants to gain a greater appreciation and awareness of idiomatic expressions. Expressions such as "she's pulling your leg" are not universal, and as such each culture has their own. When idiomatic expressions are not known, understanding the meaning of part of a conversation or dialogue can be disadvantageous and confusing.



Emancipatory learning entailed an awareness of one's ignorance and a decision to change. This type of learning is more psychological and required the student to want to learn to grow and have goals. Self-knowledge and change are integral parts of emancipatory learning. Journaling and reflecting on a specific event prompted many to think about themselves in relation to their new world.

Self-directed learning was manifested by a desire to learn. The various avenues that promoted self-directed learning are: going to the library, surfing the internet, making new friends, and engaging in conversations. The students of this study engaged in self-directed learning at various stages of the sojourn, from planning their trip from home and using the internet or other resources to assist them in gaining knowledge, to exploring a museum and buying a visitors' guide of the museum to add to their knowledge. Other instances include students' entering tourist information kiosks to gather pamphlets and other material that could help them during their stay. Aside from the practical pamphlets or brochures, the participants asked teachers, host-family members, or new friends for advice on what to see and do.

Experiential learning was encountered through daily interactions. The participants maintained that the experience abroad was a combination of many types of learning. Furthermore, the situations that they experienced could not all be replicated in their home state. The very nature of living abroad, and surviving where English was not always understood, required the participants to be active in their pursuit of knowledge. The following figure provides a summarizing look at the kinds of learning that take place during a short-term sojourn.

Figure 1:

<i>Kinds of Learning</i>	<i>Studying abroad</i>
Instrumental	Studying grammar and vocabulary. Reading signs, maps, and metro plans. Using technology to connect with family.
Communicative	Practicing grammar. Speaking with locals. Ordering food. Asking for directions or help in any given situation.
Emancipatory	Reflecting Writing in a journal. Visiting cultural sites, alone. Finding answers to questions. Describing their adventure to friends and family back home

The primary feature that resulted in offering opportunities for learning was time away from the classroom and immersed in the culture. Furthermore, according to the participants, time in class was considered easy, with little to no homework assigned, thus allowing them to use their time away from class to explore. This extracurricular activity provided venues for working on language skills, without the risk of making a bad grade or failing, thereby eliminating some aspects of stress. Particularly important was the interaction with the locals in that it proved to be more conducive to improving skills and gaining new knowledge as the students were treated as individuals engaged with a language and culture that interested them and as opposed to students whose learning must be demonstrated on an exam.

### **3. What features of short-term study abroad contribute most to students learning?**

Two features contributed most to student learning: emotions and brevity of time. These two areas influenced all aspects of the sojourn. Additionally, a majority of the participants stated that this self-initiated journey was enhanced by the emotional aspect because the learning that they experienced was both educational and personal.

The emotional factor of studying abroad contributed to the students gaining a greater understanding of themselves. Furthermore the recursiveness of opposing emotions provided opportunities to reflect and act upon preconceived ideas about themselves and their previous beliefs about others.

The constant reminder of the brevity of time along with the emotional intensity that this reality held prompted many of the participants to be active rather than passive in the learning process. The realization that each day was an opportunity that should not be wasted encouraged greater participation in extracurricular events. While many structured excursions were offered, for many, these were not conducive to finding out what they, as individuals, could do for themselves. What was most surprising was how they enjoyed most talking about superfluous memories like zip-lining, dancing in a club, drinking new liquor, or eating something bizarre rather than talking about what they had been taught prior to or during the excursion.

The most significant aspect of the short-term sojourn is the need to do as much as possible. The participants wanted to do as much as they could any way they could and take as many photos as possible to share with friends and family. The learning that, according to the participants, they were scored upon did not reflect all the new knowledge they felt that they had acquired. This is most significant because university administration has no method for quantitatively assigning a grade to experiences.

#### **4. What opportunities for deeper sorts of learning (i.e., “transformative” learning) arise?**

Opportunities for learning were many yet, those that provided a more meaningful or deeper kind of learning, as in transformative, were few. That is to say,

transformative learning is a multifaceted process where learners transform a frame of reference, which are the assumptions used by an individual to understand their lives (Mezirow, 2001). Changing or modifying a frame of reference is life-changing, and may only happen once in a lifetime. The frame of reference, on the other hand, is made up of habits of mind, which are more durable (i.e. ethnocentrism) and point of view (feelings or judgment about the habit of mind) which are articulated and often change as there is a need to solve a problem. To clarify, how we carry out our habits of mind becomes our expressed point of view. The process of transformative learning, as stated, involves various steps that lead to a final intense change. A “disorienting dilemma” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 168) is the initial step in the process where an experience causes an examination of previously held beliefs, followed by a deep examination of feelings where a person can either reflect and eventually change or not.

For these students, transformative learning took the form of an alteration about their assumptions of what the world around them meant by questioning and challenging previous points of views and attitudes. A number of the participants declared a desire to act differently as a result of their sojourn abroad. Furthermore, Mezirow (1991) notes the importance of adapting to situations that require a change of attitude to grow. Others such as Dirkx (2001) place imagination, intuition, and emotion as central to the process of transformative learning. He expands the notion of actively surveying a situation or problem that does not fit with prior beliefs and making modifications in order to value and learn from the experience as embedded in a more holistic form of learning.

The opportunities for deeper sorts of learning were identified most often as serious in-depth conversations with new friends or locals, whereby the participant recalled a desire and need to think about their prior assumptions. The topics of these conversations were various. As a result, the changes most commonly noted among the participants were a modified view of assumptions about their given host country and its people. Additionally, acquiring a new attitude about what it meant to be a U.S. citizen abroad, and attempting to accept and understand differences by reflecting on prior judgments and unquestioned assumptions. Cranton & Roy (2003) contend “Transforming a habit of mind involves separating one’s own beliefs from the beliefs of others...” (p.95) The distinction between living at home with familiar people and habits and going abroad to study among foreigners with different ways of life provided an opportunity for a number of the participants to step back and reflect on all that they had previously thought about others. This happened as a direct result of studying abroad, albeit for a short time.

The opportunities for deeper learning occurred most often in an out-of-class context between the participant and an individual native to the country. For many of the participants, this was a first-time opportunity to have a dialogue with someone from a different culture while being the foreigner. From this questioning, a dilemma could arise while trying to understand why one thinks the way they do, leading to questioning previously held beliefs, causing one to not only self-examine, but critically assess assumptions that can lead to exploring options and formulating a plan of action to transform a meaning perspective as has been detailed by Mezirow (1991).

Furthermore, the conversations were often driven by an occurrence that the individual experienced in a specific place. Every participant experienced some type of situation that provided them with a new perspective, be it on the importance of the Wall in China or the desire to use bicycles in the Netherlands. Again, not all of the situations or conversations inherently created transformative moments, yet they illuminated areas in which student were less knowledgeable and captivated their minds, causing them to inquire more. Where once these images of far-away places were mysterious, now these images are felt and understood at a level far beyond that of the classroom discussion.

**5. Did participants in recent short-term study abroad encounter situations that resulted in a questioning of prior beliefs and worldviews? If so, what types of experiences were they?**

The opportunities to encounter situations that necessitated a reflection were numerous and often intense. For the most part, they were either first-hand experiences, such as seeing the Arenal Volcano or the Great Wall of China, actively engaging in conversations with locals, classmates from other countries or with others from the U.S., or engaging in activities as mundane as washing clothes. While not all of these experiences may be classified as transformative, many situations provided moments of reflection on and examination of previously held habits of mind that resulted in a different point of view.

One of the more intriguing avenues for looking at the world through a different lens was found in going to locations and experiencing them first hand. Imagining the manner of life for those who lived in medieval castles, traveling through the jungle, and pondering on the builders of the Great Wall of China are all scenarios created by an

internal curiosity which provided the participants with opportunities to question what they thought they knew.

Live conversations proved to supply the participants with the strongest memories. These conversations were often informal, yet what was most intriguing to the participants was how these conversations started by a question raised by the participant, where they took initiative and engaged others.

Although most of the participants experienced moments of engagement with locals, not all experienced transformation as a result of their conversations. Many simply broadened their perspective without necessarily changing any previously held belief, which confirms what has been suggested in the literature (Mezirow, 1991).

### **The significance of the study**

Three significant areas of consideration evolved from the research. These include: the impact of emotions on nearly all facets of short-term study abroad; the participants valued their short-term abroad and expressed an appreciation of the opportunity, albeit brief; and a recognition that the learning that transpired during the sojourn arose primarily from experiences that occurred outside of the classroom.

Emotions were found to influence daily life both negatively and positively. Damasio (2000), Dirkx (1991), and Goleman (1995) maintain the position that emotions have an impact both intellectually and psychologically on one's cognitive ability. The importance of emotions to learning and growth is further supported by research into other fields, yet study abroad research is void of emotional implications. Interestingly, the participants spoke often about their adventures, always relating an emotion to connect the moment in time to their body. As demonstrated earlier, the emotional

connection to the physical body solicits reactions that make the moment meaningful and memorable. This finding would suggest that more research on study abroad needs to focus on the emotional impact of the sojourn on the participant.

This research also suggests that participants of short-term study abroad recognized short term study abroad as a valued university experience. According to a number of the participants, the actual amount of time abroad was less important than the act of going abroad. While more time would have been beneficial, the shorter time period did not diminish the educational or psychological value of experiences they encountered. What appeared to be more important to a number of the participants was as stated by Lance, “to be able to say you went and studied abroad.” From the many interviews it appeared that these individuals were more interested in doing something “cool”, such as being abroad, than the actual act of studying while abroad. There was little mention of the information presented during class time, while the extracurricular activities maintained a singular constant throughout the numerous interviews. To clarify, a majority of the participants enrolled in study abroad for the experience, not for the educational value of classes, but for a singular opportunity to experience another way of living, to fulfill a dream and to say “I studied abroad.”

The learning that transpired during the sojourn featured personal and intellectual growth. New knowledge was acquired daily, and in many ways, the individuals not only learned new grammar or vocabulary, or a specific historical reference about the new culture, but also they learned about themselves. The various ways of learning, as discussed earlier, demonstrates some of the ways that the sojourners experienced learning, an important factor of studying abroad. The participants experienced



situations that made the journey unique for them and something very different from that of their friends or family. This facet of study abroad allowed them to feel special. One could conclude that going abroad to study becomes a bragging rite, a “look what I did that you did not.” As Dewey (1960) so aptly understood:

For life is no uniform of uninterrupted march or flow. It is a thing of histories, each with its own plot, its own inception, and movement toward its close, each having its own particular rhythmic movement; each with its own unrepeated quality pervading it throughout (p.151).

The students who participated in this study created a unique history by going abroad, each for their own reason, be it to say they went, experience a new way of life, or improve language skills.

### **Limitations of the study**

The nature of this research lends itself to some inherent limitations. According to Creswell (2002) “Limitations are potential weaknesses or problems with the study that are identified by the researcher” (p.253). Therefore, I, the researcher, have identified that due to my prior experiences with studying abroad; I pose a limitation in the form of researcher bias. Other limitations include: the participants are representative of the norm (according to the IIE) which may not be generalized to other populations; the number of participants (19) is small a larger number and a more diverse population may provide other results; accuracy of memory could pose a problem; the information gained may not contribute to the literature; and the possibility that another researcher may not encounter the same outcomes.

One of the more significant limitations of this research was researcher bias. As I have participated in three study abroad programs, I hold a positive perspective on the merits of studying abroad. Nevertheless, the questions utilized during the interview process provided the participants with direct open-ended questions inhibiting my personal perspective to influence the answers. Yet, it must be acknowledged that my bias could have unconsciously carried over into the data analysis. Nevertheless, steps were taken to diminish this limitation such as suggested by Creswell (2002): member checking and triangulation. Furthermore, a recommendation to diminish researcher bias would entail a researcher with no prior involvement with study abroad carry out the investigation.

The participants of this research were acquired through purposeful sampling. Furthermore, the sample was comprised of individuals who are considered the typical study abroad participants. Creswell (2002) asserts the notion that in qualitative research “the intent is not to generalize to a population, but to develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon” (p.193). Therefore, the participants of this study embodied those typical of the study abroad population. Nonetheless, a more diverse population could provide other points of view or descriptions. During the selection process, attempting to identify and solicit involvement from the less common study abroad participant (i.e. Hispanic, Asian, or African-American) could potentially provide other results.

Nineteen students agreed to participate in this study. As is the case in many qualitative studies, the number of participants varies, yet larger numbers could possibly supply additional data, but “the overall ability of the researcher to provide an in-depth

picture diminishes with the addition of each new individual” (Creswell, 2002, p.197). Therefore, other researchers may want to either limit or increase the number of participants to obtain the information they need.

Accuracy of memory can be limiting in that some negative experiences could have been downplayed while positive memories took on a more pivotal role in the sojourn. Additionally, some of the participants could have focused on the positive memories, avoiding negative ones, and therefore, creating a biased interview. This facet of the qualitative inquiry is difficult to manage as individuals often recall instances that they deemed important, even though other instances were not remembered. Therefore, member checking can help establish accuracy to some extent.

### **Implications of the study**

The most noteworthy implication of this inquiry pertains to the emotional impact of studying abroad. The research on emotions and study abroad is limited, yet this factor was a prevailing influence on learning and adjusting to a new environment. Additionally, the challenge of promoting short-term study abroad, for those who consider it financially restrictive, should be addressed at the institutional level. The national trend of short-term study abroad comprising 55% of students studying abroad exemplifies the need for more research into the scholarly and globally-minded university system.

Various participants recalled feeling overwhelmed emotionally, which caused distress during their first few days abroad, and mentioned relief at knowing they would not be away for too long. These uncertainties, according to the participants, needed to have been addressed prior to departure. In addition to feelings of inadequacy in the

emotional realm, many participants noted that, due to the language and cultural barriers, they often missed signs of protocol and found themselves confused, especially in the Asian culture.

Furthermore, providing future study abroad participants with examples of how to address familial or love-linked negativity can help them overcome some hesitation, and it may even increase the number of students who study abroad. Oftentimes, the fear and the needs of others permeated the emotional being of some of the participants and almost discouraged them from studying abroad. Fortunately, these individuals were able to overcome the negative and undertake a journey that provided them with opportunities to become more autonomous. Now, these individuals are surer of themselves and of their decisions. They also realize that their life journey is one of choice and that they need to weight the odds and make the decisions for themselves. This sense of independence is a result of studying abroad. As part of their new sense of self, nine of the 19 changed majors because they wanted to continue in a field that related to international experience (i.e. International Business, TESOL- Teaching English as a Second Language, History, and Foreign Language Education) and use their study abroad experience as an entry into a new, worldlier domain.

The possibility of spending 6-12 months abroad without working is, for many students, impossible. Therefore, new programs are rapidly being delivered to offer shorter stays abroad for this growing population of university students. These new programs are reconstructed from existing courses to fill the gap and provide a venue for this new population. Unfortunately, little has been done to account for the quicker assimilation time needed for these students who embark on a short-term experience.

Thus, emotionally they are not prepared to handle situations that arise, due in part to the lack of guidance on behalf of their home university. While two to four weeks abroad may appear, at first glance, to be nothing more than a vacation, this research revealed short-term study abroad promoted not only academic, but also psychological growth. This finding would suggest that more needs to be done in order to promote and encourage greater numbers of students to go abroad.

While short-term study abroad has opened a new door for those who want to engage in international study, it remains problematic given that the briefness of time to adjust is restrictive. Furthermore, the research on short-term study abroad does not provide insight into adjusting for the short and intense sojourn. The participants of this study acknowledged a need for better guidance, as they were often insecure and unsure as to how to behave or respond to various circumstances.

The current literature on short-term study abroad addresses primarily assessment of programs or language skills, with no attention given to the role of emotions or maturation. These two important aspects of the study abroad experience have been neglected, especially in short-term study abroad research, due to the previously held assumption that it was a two, four, or six week vacation. Unfortunately, the participants of this study encountered situations that required them to adapt in order to survive and experienced a sense of panic as they were without friends or family to support and guide them. Oftentimes, their only recourse was to make a phone call home to family for encouragement. In order to overcome their insecurities, the participants mentioned various ways in which they had to make an effort to control their emotional anxieties.

### **Implications for students.**

As a result of this study, one significant area for helping students learn while abroad emerged from the data: dealing with emotions. Encountering new situations that can be perceived as either intimidating or threatening can cause home-sickness and requires knowledge to help overcome these occurrences. Additionally, students should have the tools necessary to deal with uncomfortable situations that may arise. The students of this study mentioned on numerous occasions the absence of preparation needed to cope with emotional uncertainties. This absence of preparation suggests that administrators and faculty employed in the capacity of facilitating or guiding students who study abroad need to factor in these possibilities so that the sojourners are provided with a technique or process to overcome hardships.

Students need to be prepared for the recursive nature of emotions in their daily lives while abroad and provided with tools to deal with uncertainties. Many dream of their trip as a fantasy where many great things are going to be experienced, yet in reality, along with the excitement of adventure, emotional turmoil exists. As demonstrated in this study, negative and positive emotions surfaced as opposites and randomly reoccurred as if in a continuous loop.

Anxiety was the predominant feeling among the participants, as they worried about the unknown, and often created chaos or insecurities that hindered learning. For many students who study abroad, this may be their first trip, where they are not only alone, but also out of the U.S., and where a language other than English is spoken. It will be necessary to adjust to new ways of living, and with this comes anxieties that could diminish the possibility for growth. Therefore, required pre-departure classes

could help students cope with anxiety by providing basic scenarios and methods for overcoming anxiety.

Fear is one of the most debilitating of all emotions because it can prohibit individuals from participating in the sojourn experience. For this reason, students need guidance in ways of dealing with fear while abroad. Parents of students also experience fear because their child is going to a place that the adult often knows nothing about, and they may also benefit from some preparation. Additionally, with current technological advances, students can now SKYPE their families, which can alleviate fear or discomfort on behalf of the parents.

Hesitation was most commonly experienced prior to departure. For some participants, it was a direct result of the lack of support from family or friends. For others, it was a question of money or time. While many of the participants acknowledged a hesitation to commit, their reasoning was often a result of the influence of others. Their own hesitation was not the contributing factor. Rather, they felt a sense of guilt for wanting to go. Unfortunately, many who suggest that studying abroad is not a worthwhile endeavor negatively influence the decisions of others. While the statistics demonstrate that 98% of high-school seniors want to study abroad, only small percentage actually does. Thus, it is imperative to foster a community on campus to offer support and guidance to incoming freshman who would consider studying abroad.

Preparing students prior to departure to keep journals or blogs can provide a way to let others experience their journey, albeit from a distance. Half of the students from this research stated that they maintained a journal while abroad. Two stated that after

the second day, they did not write again in their journal until the trip home. Others mentioned wanting to write, but often times, forgetting to do so.

The main reflections noted in this study came about during four critical stages: the night before departure, during the plane ride there, after the first week (most often at night), and on the plane ride home. The plane ride home appeared to offer the greatest opportunity for reflection, as the participants expressed their desire to go home, but more importantly, what they were going to tell their friends about what they did and how the journey changed them.

### **Implications for administration.**

As a result of this research various suggestions emerged from the data that may assist in promoting and offering better programs for the short-term sojourner. There are four areas of which administrators should be cognizant and which should be considered while promoting study abroad: Pre-departure meetings and their value (as perceived by the participants); assessment of learning, emotional guidance and/or education; and finally, better knowledge of the host-program.

Pre-departure meetings need to address more than the basic information that can be acquired on the Internet. Additionally, the meetings were scheduled but not required. Thus many participants did not attend, and those that did admitted wishing they had skipped the meetings. The information provided did not address areas that the participants deemed valuable.

Assessment measures of students studying abroad remain based on grades obtained in class. While the intention is valid, not all learning can be so easily measured. For instance, this study cannot demonstrate on a linear or binary scale the



amount of learning that occurred, yet a component of learning, what Merriam et al. (2007) describe as “ a change in behavior” (p. 276), can be evaluated and corroborated. The participants expressed, on numerous occasions, the degree to which they felt they had learned from their study abroad experience, yet little credit was given to their effort in view of the fact that there was no measurement or assessment for personal growth and maturity. As such, new measurements, in addition to class grades, should be developed and implemented.

Not only is it imperative to address the roll of emotions, but programs that help the students adapt to their new environments need to be fostered since, in many cases, the students land in the airport and are on their own. This aspect of study abroad needs addressing if the desire of university administration is to increase the number of students who study abroad.

Other areas which necessitate research include better knowledge of the host institution and its instructors. Half of the participants commented on the unprofessionalism of their foreign classrooms. Most noticed that they were being taught by the equivalents of U.S. university adjuncts. Unfortunately, a number of participants deciding to enroll in a study abroad course stated that they were under the impression that they would be attending a regular class with local students and were disappointed with the quality of faculty. For the most part, the classes were language courses, and the student population in these classes was also foreign, not local.

Pre-departure meetings that include not only general information, but also personal guidance can help foster greater awareness of the impact emotions can have on an individual. Additionally, administrators need to evaluate the programs and the

faculty at foreign universities. Many U.S. universities provide an abundance of international study abroad programs. Unfortunately, these programs are not evaluated on a constant basis due to funding, and thus, from one year to another, many changes can occur that may negatively impact the experience abroad.

### **Future research**

While there is a prolific amount of research that demonstrates the importance of study abroad, further studies are needed to keep up with the trend of more students participating in short-term study, while providing guidance to universities. The emotional impact of study abroad was found to be the most noteworthy result of the research. As it was, a literature review of other research that addressed this issue generated very little recognition of this feature, and if it was acknowledged, it was mentioned most often as a side note. More studies need to look at the toll of emotions in students who study abroad.

Additionally, students who participate in studying abroad need a venue to share their experiences and talk about the way they feel they have changed or grown as a result of their experience and the university can provide this setting. Another area of interest was the difference between the female and male participants. The adjectives used to describe emotions offer an insight into the differences between the sexes. This was most observable with the females employing the term “fear” while the male population did not use this word.

### **Conclusion**

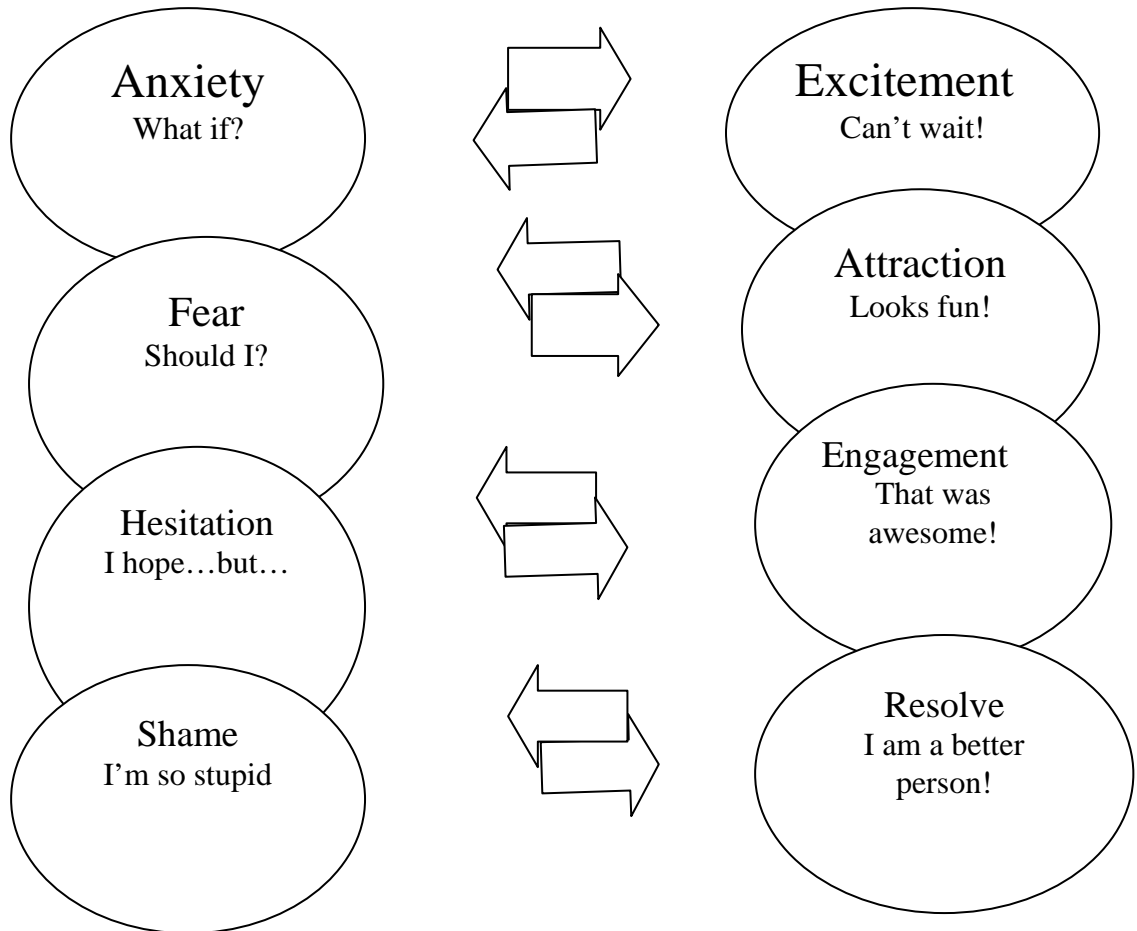
This study sought to redress the lack of current knowledge concerning short-term study abroad, including its possible educational significance with a variety of

potential results. As the data emerged and were examined, it became apparent that short-term study abroad contains important educational moments, similar to longer sojourns. Yet, the irrefutable influence of emotions on learning was certain to have been fundamental to the experience. Therefore, students who engage in short-term study abroad programs receive more than university credit; they obtain a greater sense of self worth. Furthermore, this research demonstrates the influence of emotions on every facet of the sojourn not only on educational achievement, but more importantly, on the individual who partakes in the adventure of studying abroad. While not every facet of study abroad provided transformative learning moments, the experiences provided opportunities for a perspective transformation that benefits society in general. To clarify, the students of this research returned home with empathy towards those who are considered the “other”, as they, themselves were the “other” while abroad.

APPENDIX A

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Previous travel outside of the US</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Major</b>	<b>Location</b>
<i>Females</i>				
Beth	No	20	Undeclared	France
Brandy	No	21	Humanities	Germany
Finley	No	21	Spanish Education	Spain
Hannah	Yes	20	Spanish	Mexico
Holly	No	21	English	England
Megan	Yes	22	Psychology	Holland
Pam	No	20	Undeclared	France
Patsy	Yes	19	Spanish Education	Mexico
Tess	Yes	20	Spanish Education	Mexico
Wendy	Yes	20	Political Science	Italy
<i>Males</i>				
Alex	No	20	Communication	Mexico
Brent	No	21	Political Science	Costa Rica
Curt	Yes	26	History	Mexico
Lance	No	19	Humanities & Spanish	Spain
Matt	No	20	Pre-law	S. Korea
Paul	No	20	German	Germany
Phil	No	21	International Business	Mexico
Will	No	20	Finance	Spain
Wyatt	Yes	20	Philosophy	China

APPENDIX B



## APPENDIX C

### Interview Questions

#### Planning

1. What made you decide to study abroad?
2. Did you have a choice for length of stay? What influenced your decision on your time abroad?
3. Where did you study abroad? Did you have a choice? Then why that specific location?
4. Did your family and friends support your decision? If not, what did they say or think about your decision?

#### The Journey Day One

5. Did you go alone or with friends?
6. Tell me about stepping off the plane?
7. Were you able to navigate your way into town? Did you take a cab, a bus, the subway, or was someone there to pick you up? How did you feel? Scared? Apprehensive? Nervous? Excited?
8. Do you remember any sights, smells, or sounds? Tell me about them.
9. Do you remember your first meal? Did you eat alone or with others? What did you eat? Drink?
10. What did you do your first day abroad?
11. What was it like for you to deal with a new currency?

#### Learning Aspects

12. When you went to class tell me about your experience. Did you meet people right away or did it take time? What kind of people did you spend time with? Do you still keep in touch with them?
13. What was the class environment? Was class conducted as it is done in your home university?
14. As time went by, say after the first few days, how were you feeling? Happy? Proud? Special? Scared? Do you remember any singular incident that made you question your sojourn?
15. Did you feel that you were prepared before you left your home country? What would have helped you assimilate into the new culture?
16. If you could go back and relive one day- what day would it be? Why? What made it special? Do you think that this event changed you in any way?

#### Departure and Return Home

17. When you were leaving, say the day before, do you remember what you were feeling? Did you want to leave or would you have liked to stay longer? If you could have stayed longer would you have? For how much longer? Why?
18. The day you packed and headed to the airport did you feel that you accomplished what you wanted to accomplish?
19. How was your first day home? Do you remember feeling any certain way? Was your family eager to hear your stories? Your friends? Did you feel like you changed in any way? Please explain.

20. Would you go back? Why? What do you miss?
21. Tell me anything you want about your experience abroad.
22. As we progress through this interview do you feel like you are reliving some of your time abroad? How does this make you feel? Do you remember other incidents that you haven't spoken about? Do you want to share?
23. Is there anything else that you'd like to say?

APPENDIX D

**2002/03 - 2008/09**

**DURATION OF U.S. STUDY ABROAD, 2002/03 - 2008/09**

**PERCENT OF U.S. STUDY ABROAD STUDENTS**

<b>Duration of Study</b>	<b>2002/03</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>	<b>2008/09</b>
Summer Term	32.7	37.0	37.2	37.2	38.7	38.1	35.8
One Semester	40.3	38.1	37.5	36.9	36.3	35.5	37.3
8 Weeks or Less During Academic Year	9.4	8.9	8.0	9.5	9.8	11.0	11.7
January Term	5.6	5.7	6.0	5.4	6.8	7.2	7.0
Academic Year	6.7	6.0	6.0	5.3	4.3	4.1	4.1
One Quarter	3.8	3.3	3.3	3.3	3.4	3.4	3.3
Two Quarters	0.4	0.5	1.3	0.9	0.5	0.6	0.5
Calendar Year	0.5	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1
Other	0.6	0.3	0.5	1.3	0.1	0.0	0.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>174,629</b>	<b>191,321</b>	<b>205,983</b>	<b>223,534</b>	<b>241,791</b>	<b>262,416</b>	<b>260,327</b>

Source: Institute of International Education. (2010). "Duration of U.S. Study Abroad," *Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange*. Retrieved from <http://www.iie.org/opendoors>Institute of International Education: *Opendoors* 2010.



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